

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN,
YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Effective May 25, 2023

Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park, Michigan (FUMC)

Preamble

Christians are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus. All persons are created by God. God intends all persons to have worth and dignity in their relationships. We are a connected body, and when one part of this body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God intended.

The scriptures witness to a God who brings about justice, mercy and grace. This policy is an act of hospitality to those who may be at risk due to their age, size, and mental and/or physical capacities.

The innocence of children is what best enables them to seek out God with fearless enthusiasm. That innocence is also what leaves them most vulnerable to abuse, bullying or neglect. Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected.¹ Often abuse occurs in settings where children, youth or vulnerable adults should have been able to feel safe -- homes, schools, camps, and sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.²

Although the practice of abuse, bullying and neglect, or the making of false accusations is not to be condoned, we will continue to acknowledge that God's grace is available to all. All persons are valued as human beings in God's image.

The purpose of this policy is to protect all who come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse, and to limit the extent of legal liability of the First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park. Therefore, this policy, prompted by the 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, is designed to minimize the risk of abuse, bullying and/or neglect to children, youth, and vulnerable adults at FUMC events.

¹ Joy Thornburg Melton, SAFE SANCTUARIES: REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE IN THE CHURCH (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998). Available through www.discipleshipresources.org and www.cokesbury.com. Rev. Melton is a deacon in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is both a Christian educator and an attorney.

² Ibid.

Section I. Care Provider Authorization and Re-Authorization

A. Implementation

1. The appropriate administrative team shall implement this policy and develop procedures to that end.
2. FUMC may use discretion to require additional screening including a personal interview.

B. Minimum Requirements

1. All care providers shall:
 - a. Be at least 16 years of age. Upon turning 18 years of age, applicant must re-apply for authorization as an adult.
 - b. Care providers must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth receiving care.
 - c. Be active at FUMC for at least 6 months at the time of application.
 - d. Complete the Authorization Application for all local church events, programs and activities. All applicants under the age of 18 must also have their parent's signature on the application.
 - e. Provide no fewer than three (3) written references (non-familial, not of the same household).
 - f. Submit written permission and pertinent information for background checks of criminal and Registered Adult Sex Offender records to be pursued when possible with local, county, state and/or federal law enforcement agencies at the discretion of the local church.

C. Qualifications

1. No one shall serve as a care provider if she/he is known to have been previously convicted of, or pled guilty or no contest to, any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving abuse of any kind, or any act or conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. This includes but is not limited to, crimes involving pedophilic behavior (molestation of a pre-adolescent child), incest, rape, assaults involving vulnerable adults, children or youth, murder, kidnapping, pornography, and the physical abuse of a vulnerable adult, child, or youth. This also includes financial abuse of a vulnerable adult. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago the crime occurred.
2. Applications will not be accepted from anyone who has acknowledged or admitted that she/he has participated as a perpetrator in any previous act of sexual abuse of a vulnerable adult, child or youth. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago or whether a civil or criminal verdict was rendered.
3. If we determine that the person is unsuitable to serve, the application shall be denied and the applicant shall be notified. We reserve the right to not accept any person for volunteer or paid service. If at any time, before or after authorization, the applicant is found to be unsuitable, we have the authority to review and revoke participation.

D. Confidentiality and Document Access

1. All documents and information obtained on all care providers shall remain confidential except as noted below.
 - a. All consents by parents or guardians will be accessible to leadership in the local church for use in promoting the health, welfare, and safety of participants at local church related functions and events.
 - b. All documents and information obtained during the screening process may be disclosed when there is a duty to inform and/or it is reasonably necessary in the context of any criminal or civil litigation involving the care provider of the local church.

E. Records Retention

1. All records will be stored in the church office for a period not less than 3 years.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

Section II. Training and Education

A. Training & Application Process

1. FUMC shall be responsible for training applicants.
2. FUMC shall be responsible for the approval process of all applicants including obtaining background checks on all care provider applicants.
3. Training materials and other resources are available from Michigan Conference staff.
4. Care Providers shall complete the training and education for authorization and must be renewed every 3 years.

Section III: Guidelines

A. Supervision

1. Proper supervision is necessary to avoid creating the opportunity for abuse, bullying or neglect, and false accusations of abuse, bullying or neglect to occur.
2. Proper supervision includes providing care providers with Protection Policy training.
3. Supervision during the care provider's performance of their responsibilities shall give special attention to high-risk settings such as nurseries, restrooms, and overnights.
4. Other adults not directly involved with an event: devotional leaders, event speakers, musicians, or other specialists providing services such as food or entertainment may be present, but may not be alone with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
5. Parents, legal guardians, and special needs care givers may be present with their children or care recipient, but may not be alone with other children, youth or vulnerable adults unless they are qualified as a care giver.

B. General Rules

1. Adequate staffing
 - a. All local church functions, activities, and events involving children, youth and vulnerable adults shall be staffed to meet the standards of this Policy.
 - b. The portion of the function, activity or event, which involves Care Providers, shall be cancelled when staffing required by this Policy is not provided.
 - c. All Care Providers under the age of 18 shall be at least five years older than those receiving care. Care Providers under 18 years of age shall comprise no more than 50% of the staff for an event, activity, or function.
 - d. Ratios of staff to children shall be in compliance with the rules and regulations of the State of Michigan (below are the guidelines from www.michigan.gov/michildcare).

Staff-to-child ratio and group size

Birth to 12 months 1:3

13–30 months 1:4

31–35 months 1:5

3 yr olds 1:7

4 and 5 yr olds 1:8

6-10 yr olds 1:9

10-12yr olds 1:10

13-18 yr olds 1: 12

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

2. Two Care Provider Rule

- a. At least two authorized Care Providers, one of which must be an adult, shall be present at each function, activity, or event involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- b. The two-care provider rule in the preceding paragraph may be waived at the discretion of the event director or Care Provider in the following situations.
 - i. The authorized Care Provider is an adult and there are at least three children over 13 years of age present.
 - ii. One adult Care Provider remains while the other Care Provider temporarily leaves the area or room for a medical, family, or other reasonable necessity, i.e., escorting a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to the rest room.
 - iii. One adult Care Provider remains when the other Care Provider must leave for an unexpected medical, family, or other reasonable necessity.
 - iv. A Care Provider is taking a child, youth or vulnerable adult to or from a function, activity, or event. The waiver must be completed for each child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
 - v. An authorized Care Provider temporarily remains with a child, youth or vulnerable adult while waiting for others to arrive or while the child, youth or vulnerable adult is waiting to leave a function, activity, or event, providing there is another adult or older child present.

3. Sleeping Accommodations. Sleeping areas, restrooms, and changing areas shall be separated by gender, and supervised by the same gender.

4. Participants will be released only to those indicated on a release form signed by the parent or guardian.

C. Additional Considerations

1. Doors

- a. Doors are never to be locked and are to remain open unless equipped with windows.

2. Counseling/Private Conversation

- a. Any one on one conversation should take place in a room with an open door. Sessions should be held when other adults are nearby and aware of the session.

3. Restrooms

- a. Children should be escorted to the restroom and an adult should wait outside. If a child requires assistance in the restroom, the two adult rule applies, making every effort to balance privacy with accountability.

4. Photo/Video

- a. Photo/Video release forms are required before posting, publishing or disseminating media or material that includes children, youth or vulnerable adults.

5. Transportation

- a. All drivers must have and show proof of a valid driver's license and auto insurance and be a minimum of 21 years of age.
- b. All drivers must be screened to ensure they are safe to drive others. Drivers may be denied authority to drive others for church events if there are red flags on records.
- c. If driving a church vehicle, Trustee guidelines should be followed.
- d. The two-adult rule applies to vehicles and travel.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

(Transportation, con't)

- e. All children and youth must provide a signed permission slip/liability form with emergency information. These are to be kept with the event director at all times during the event.

D. Event Director Responsibilities

1. Ensure a safe and appropriate location that is conducive to the health and welfare of the participants.
2. Provide adequate supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
3. Implement these policies and related procedures, including reporting and documentation of alleged incidents.
4. Establish and communicate to all staff expectations and procedures for the event, for instance, procedures regarding medications, medical situations (universal precautions) and emergencies and how they will be handled during the event.
5. Establish a sign-in and sign-out procedure of participants.
6. Establish a procedure to obtain copies of permission slips, release forms, medical permission and other necessary paperwork in compliance with applicable laws and regulations of the State of Michigan and other requirements of the local church.

Section IV: Policy For Reporting Suspected Abuse, Bullying Or Neglect Involving Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults

A. Persons Required to Report

1. All Care Providers who have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall report all known and suspected cases of abuse or neglect which (a) occur on the local church premises; (b) occur at a church function, activity or event, or; (c) are disclosed during a church function, activity or event. All other persons may report known and suspected cases of abuse or neglect in accordance with this Policy and the laws of the State of Michigan. This Policy supports mandatory reporting in compliance with the State of Michigan.
2. If any child, youth, or vulnerable adult arrives at an event with signs of abuse or neglect, the event director shall immediately implement this Policy's reporting procedures in compliance with state law.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

(Section IV, continued)

3. The reporting requirements in this Policy are the minimum requirements. This Policy does not preclude anyone from reporting a known or suspected case of abuse or neglect to others for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Unless such protection requires otherwise, however, confidentiality of the information reported or received shall be respected to protect the rights and interest of the victim, the alleged perpetrator and their families.
4. Under Michigan law, anyone reporting in good faith a known or suspected case of abuse or neglect, to Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services is immune from civil or criminal liability which might otherwise be incurred thereby.

B. Required Reporting Process

1. The Care Provider shall immediately report the known or suspected abuse or neglect to the event director.
2. For the protection of all parties, if the suspected or alleged perpetrator is in/on the premises, he or she is to be isolated from the program and have no contact with the children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
3. As soon as possible and in all cases within 24 hours, the suspecting care giver shall telephone an oral report to Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services to the Centralized Intake TOLL FREE number for the State of Michigan (855-444-3911). This oral report shall be made in conjunction with the person who made the observations or received the disclosure. The following information is typically required in the oral report:
 - a. Name, age and gender of the alleged victim and other family members
 - b. Address, phone number and/or direction to the alleged victim's home
 - c. Parent's place(s) of employment (if known)
 - d. Name and address of alleged perpetrator
 - e. Description of the suspected abuse
 - f. Current condition of the alleged victim
4. Within 72 hours, the care giver who observed or received the disclosure, shall submit a completed State of Michigan "Report of Known or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect" to Children's Protective Services, or its equivalent to Adult Protective Services in accordance with the directions given at the time of the oral report. The event director may be a resource for completing this form.
5. The event director and the entire staff of the function, event, activity or program shall cooperate with Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services.
6. Following contact with local Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services, the event director shall inform:
 - a. The Pastor
 - b. Relevant church leadership
 - c. District Superintendent and Bishop
7. Notification of a parent or legal guardian of the alleged victim of abuse or neglect shall be determined by Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services. The event director shall follow the parent's or legal guardian's wishes regarding the continued participation of the involved child, youth or vulnerable adult, unless otherwise instructed by Children's Protective Services or Adult Protective Services.
8. Matters of known or suspected abuse or neglect are to be kept confidential, except as required by law, to assist appropriate agencies in their investigations, or as disclosed to local church representatives with a need to know such information consistent with the requirements of the law. The incident is not to otherwise be discussed with persons other than those involved in the reporting.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

- C. Reporting When The Alleged Perpetrator Is The Care Provider, Event Director, or Clergy
 1. If there is a report of alleged abuse or neglect by a care person or adult at a FUMC event, the procedures in Section IV.B shall be followed.
 2. If the suspected or alleged perpetrator is on the premises, he or she is to be isolated from the program and have no contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- D. Reporting When The Alleged Perpetrator Is Another Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult
 1. If the suspected or alleged perpetrator is on premises he or she is to be isolated from the program and have no contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults.
 2. The event director shall follow the procedures outlined in Section IV. B.
 3. Unless instructed otherwise by CPS, APS, or the local enforcement agency, the event director may confidentially inform the contact person for the facilities hosting the event and the parents or guardians of involved parties.
- E. Reporting All Other Suspected Cases of Abuse, Bullying or Neglect
 1. In all other cases of suspected abuse, bullying or neglect, the event director and the Pastor shall be immediately notified, and the reporting procedures referenced in Section IV.B shall be implemented.
- F. Section 380.1310b of The State of Michigan Law Addressing Bullying in Schools. Bullying is not a mandated reportable offense. However, it is behavior that must be reported to protect participants, care receivers, care givers and church ministries. Reporting procedures follow:
 1. The event director will be notified of alleged bullying incidents.
 2. The event director will determine what, if any, follow up steps are to be taken. Consultation with the pastor or leadership team is recommended.
 3. Together the event director, in consultation with relevant staff shall determine what notification, if any, is appropriate to give to the parent or legal guardian, or the victim and the perpetrator or others.
 4. The event director will submit a written report of the incident to the Pastor. It may be determined that the District Superintendent should be informed.

Section V. Follow-Up After Reports of Known or Suspected Abuse, Bullying Or Neglect

- A. General Goals and Objectives
 1. After reporting procedures have been completed, the following goals and objectives as prioritized below shall be addressed:
 - a. Protection for the alleged victim and other children, youth, and vulnerable adults from any continued exposure to abuse, bullying or neglect.
 - b. Care for the spiritual, emotional and physical well-being of the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
 - c. Respect and preservation of the legal rights of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
 - d. Safeguarding the privacy of all parties involved.
 - e. Care for the spiritual and emotional well-being of the local church
 - f. Protection of the legal and financial interests of the local church.
- B. Investigation
 1. In accordance with the laws of the State of Michigan, local church staff (paid and volunteer) shall not conduct any investigation of reports or accusations of abuse or neglect.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

(B. Investigation, continued)

2. The local church shall cooperate in any proper investigations by the Children's Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, law enforcement agency, liability insurer and the parties involved.
3. The local church may obtain the advice of an attorney who represents the local church.

C. Additional Response Requirements

1. FUMC will work with our insurance company, our attorney and our District Superintendent to determine further steps.
2. If the media is involved, the Michigan Conference Director of Communications should be contacted.

D. Response to The Victim(s) And The Accused

FUMC recommends that appropriate sensitive care be expressed to the victim, and the accused, as well as their families. Although the practices of abuse, bullying, neglect, or the making of false accusations are not to be condoned, we will continue to acknowledge that God's grace is available to all.

VI. Revisions

- A. This policy shall be reviewed regularly by our local church leadership. Edits may be made to any part of this policy at any time to be in compliance with applicable Michigan laws or changed circumstances. Such edits shall be included in annual reports.

Conclusion

As Christians, we are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus. All persons are created by God. God intends all persons to have worth and dignity in their relationships. We are a connected body, and when one part of this body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God intended.

While the vast majority of those who work with our programs are of the highest moral and spiritual character and are deeply committed to the needs of those to whom they minister, the reality is that the potential for abuse, bullying or neglect is present.

We understand that those with clear backgrounds and records might find this process burdensome or offensive. Yet if we are to take seriously our responsibility for children, youth and vulnerable adults, all applications for workers and volunteers must be treated in the same manner. This policy is an act of hospitality to those who may be at risk due to their age, size, and mental and/or physical capacities. We thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we endeavor to make our programs safe and secure for all who participate.

Definitions of Terms

1. **Abuse:** Abuse means harm or threatened harm to an individual's health, financial or welfare through physical abuse, bullying, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, maltreatment, and/or sexual harassment. For the purposes of this policy, 'hazing' is considered a form of abuse.
2. **Adult:** means a person at least 18 years of age.
3. **Applicant:** a person who is applying to be an authorized care provider.
4. **Appropriate:** conduct that one could reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by the general public.
5. **Bullying:** Intentional behavior that is meant to hurt and dominate another person or group of persons. It is characterized by an imbalance of power between the individual who bullies and the target. Bullying can be physical, verbal, emotional, social, spiritual, or sexual. Cyberbullying is the use of technology for the same purpose. This includes, and is not limited to, the following:
 - a. Substantially interfering with their opportunities, benefits, or programs involving the local church.
 - b. Adversely affecting their ability to participate in or to benefit from the programs or activities of the local church by placing the individual in reasonable fear of harm or causing substantial emotional distress.
 - c. Having an actual and substantial detrimental effect on their physical, emotional, or financial health.
 - d. Causing substantial disruption in, or interference with, the orderly operation of the programs or activities of the local church.
6. **Care Provider:** anyone (including employees, volunteers, lay and clergy) charged with the supervising of children, youth, and vulnerable adults during a local church related function, event or activity. An authorized Care Provider has completed the local church requirements.
7. **DHS:** means the Department of Health and Human Services in the state of Michigan which guards the safety and welfare of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
8. **Event Director:** refers to the person (staff or volunteer) overseeing all personnel and programming at a local church related function, event, or activity.
9. **Event Site:** the location of a function, event, or activity, on or off local church property.
10. **Leader:** anyone responsible for overseeing a specific activity during a function or event
11. **Neglect:** failure to act as a reasonably prudent person would do in the same or similar circumstance. It can include
 - a. Failing to prevent an act of abuse or omission of an act that would ensure the health, welfare, and safety of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
 - b. Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care and protection from abuse.
 - c. Placing a child, youth, or vulnerable adult at an unreasonable risk to the health or welfare of that vulnerable adult, child or youth by failure of the parent, legal guardian or any other person responsible for the health or welfare of a child, youth, and vulnerable adult to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so, and has or should have knowledge of the risk (see State of Michigan Compiled Laws Act # 238, Public Acts of 1975, 22 Sections 722.622.2d).
12. **Parent or Guardian:** means any parent, step-parent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian who has the general responsibility for the health, education or welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

First United Methodist Church of Hazel Park Protection Policy

13. **Participants:** Participants are children, youth, or vulnerable adults, as well as all others, who are registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by or under the auspices of the local church.
14. **Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is any non-accidental act or failure to act that results in bodily harm. Physical abuse may result from punishment to a person that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition.
15. **Protection Policy Committee:** Committee is the group elected by the local church to oversee the implementation of the local church Protection Policy
16. **Sexual Abuse:** any conduct of a sexual nature which violates or attempts to violate the free choice and consent of another person, and includes any criminal sexual act defined by any federal, state, or municipal law, which includes but is not limited to rape, sexual molestation, sexual battery, aggravated sexual battery, lewd and lascivious behavior, enticement of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, aggravated indecent solicitation of a child, exhibiting sexually explicit material, or indecent liberties with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
17. **Sexual Misconduct:** the intentional touch of the intimate parts or the clothing covering the immediate area of the intimate parts of a child, youth or vulnerable adult.
18. **Sexual Exploitation:** means allowing, permitting or encouraging children, youth, or vulnerable adults to engage in prostitution or in the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer generated images or any other form of depicting a child, youth, or vulnerable adult engaged in actual suggestive sexual conduct (see Michigan Compiled Laws Act # 238, Public Acts of 1975, Section 722.322.2 (1)).
19. **Sexual Explicit Material:** means any printed, electronic or computer generated matter, picture, sculpture or sound recording which can reasonably be construed as being produced for the purpose of stimulating sexual excitement, arousal or gratification.
20. **Sexual Harassment:** Sexual harassment is any sexually related behavior that is unwelcome, offensive, or which fails to respect the rights of others. Sexual harassment includes any unwelcome advance, a request for a sexual favor, and any other verbal, nonverbal, or physical contact of a nature that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment.
21. **Shall, Should, May:** were carefully chosen terms used in this Policy, giving recognition to their different meanings. "Shall" is to be considered as mandatory, "may" is to be considered permissive, and "should" is to be considered a term of strong encouragement.
22. **Volunteer:** any person receiving no salary or wages for providing any services, care, guidance, assistance or supervision for any children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a local church related function, event or activity.
23. **Vulnerable Adult:** an individual who because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently.