



# Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Of the First United Methodist Church of Blairstown

This is the Safe Sanctuaries Policy of First United Methodist Church of Blairstown. As a United Methodist community of faith, we are committed to the General Rules of the first Methodist Societies: to do no harm, to do good, and to attend upon all the ordinances of God. We recognize that our responsibility to the people in our community, especially the most vulnerable among us, is a sacred gift, and we endeavor to treat the safety and upkeep of children, youth and vulnerable people as such. The below policy has been developed by our community of faith in conjunction with the standards set by the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference. All constituents of the church will be informed of this policy, and will be held to its standards.

## 1 Definitions related to Safe Sanctuaries Policies & Procedures:

**1.1. Child:** Any person age twelve (12) or younger

**1.2. Youth:** Any person not a “child” and under age eighteen (18).

**1.3. Adult:** Any person who has reached the age of eighteen (18) and has finished high school. *(This to say that—for the purposes of this Safe Sanctuaries policy—a person who reaches the age of eighteen (18) who is still in K-12 education shall be considered a youth and not shall not be considered a “screened adult”)*

**1.4. Vulnerable person:** A person whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse, or neglect is significantly impaired through social, physical, or mental disability or illness.

**1.5. Paid staff person:** A person paid by the church, overseen by the staff/pastor parish relations committee (SPRC), and screened according to the church’s Safe Sanctuary policy and any additional required personnel screening.

**1.6. Unscreened adult:** An adult who has not been screened.

**1.7. Screened adult:** A volunteer who has gone through the screening process involving a criminal background check, reference check, interview, and risk reduction training. These people may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in the church for at least six months.

**1.8. Roamer:** A trained & screened adult who meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy and moves throughout the facility to provide additional oversight and supervision during activities.

**1.9. Ministry supervisor:** A screened individual—staff or volunteer—responsible for a particular ministry with oversight of the leaders in that ministry.

**1.10. Physical abuse:** Violent, non-accidental contact that results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.

**1.11. Sexual abuse:** Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth/any other vulnerable person, whether at the church, at home, or in any other setting. The abuser may be an adult or another minor.

**1.12. Emotional abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

**1.13.. Neglect:** When a person with responsibility for a child, youth, or other vulnerable person fails to care for that individual's physical and/or emotional needs.

## 2 Facts about Abuse

**It Can Happen Anywhere:** The child victim is never responsible for causing the abuse and is never to be blamed. The child victim is never capable of consenting to abusive behavior. Child sexual abuse is ALWAYS wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

**Knowing the Statistics:** Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Estimates state that 1 out of 7 boys are sexually abused, but the number may be higher because of a reluctance to report occurrences.

**In New Jersey:** According to Prevent Child Abuse-New Jersey (<https://www.preventchildabusenj.org/what-we-do/programs/enough-abuse-campaign/>): "...**1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys will fall victim to child sexual abuse before the age of 18.** State data reports that **80% of child sexual abuse cases are never reported to authorities.**"

**The Church at Risk:** The risk for churches is especially high because we're seen as "trusting organizations" and we've been "notoriously INACTIVE when it comes to screening volunteers and/or employees who work with kids." Churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact with children.

**Indicators of Child Abuse:** Children showing anxiety about coming to church or being left in a class or program, or reluctance to participate when he/she had previously been enthusiastic may be an indicator of abusive behaviors. Abused children may have fears of specific individuals experiencing nightmares or showing hostility.

**Abusers, Who Are They?:** Less than 20% are strangers - 93% of victims know their abuser. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs, and schools.

**How Does Abuse Happen?** Children are vulnerable, and the abuser is powerful; without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children or our workers with children. Strategies must be supported by the entire congregation and, applied to each worker involved in children's ministries. We need to think carefully about the safety of any- adult/one--child situation. Look for

group situations where possible. Set an example by personally avoiding one-adult/one-child situations with children other than your own. There should never be a situation in ministry where one adult is left alone with one child.

### **Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse:**

Of foremost importance is the child, youth or vulnerable adult who has been harmed; he or she must be cared for. The harm that is done to the child/youth/vulnerable adult is entirely life-altering, and every step should be taken to care for the victim, including but not limited to providing support and resources for the continued care and wellbeing of the child/youth/vulnerable adult.

Many victims are created, including the person harmed, that person's family, the congregation, and often the family of the abuser. The congregation's wounds may continue well beyond litigation - that does not provide healing among the members. Litigation can go on for two or more years. Financial consequences are somewhere around \$750,000 if innocent/at least \$1-2 million if proven guilty. No congregation can afford, financially, ethically, or morally, to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of child sexual abuse.

**GNJ Insurance:** All churches are covered because the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference has a policy, and there is an expectation that every church and its programs, is implementing some type of policies and procedures. As is true with most situations, the extent of coverage varies, depending on what the local church has done to proactively prevent abuse from happening.

**Minimizing Opportunity for Abuse:** Eliminating one-adult/one-child situations, will dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse. Expect programs to perform careful screening and background checks on all persons working with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Youth-serving organizations outside of the local church should have policies in place for dealing with suspicious situations and reports of abuse. Furthermore, these organizations should regularly train their staff to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

## 2.1 Statistics for Warren County, New Jersey in 2022

The following data are from (<https://njchilddata.rutgers.edu/portal>)

- The state received and investigated **65,670 reports of neglect or abuse** through Child Welfare Services and the Child Protection and Permanency abuse hotline. **1,056 (2%) of those reports were in Warren County**
- Some of these reports involved multiple children; **90,950 children were referred to CP&P** for abuse/neglect investigations. **1,627 (2%) of those children were in Warren County**
- **CP&P served 30,996 children in NJ. 604 (2%) of those children were in Warren County.**
- **2,888 children were victims of child abuse/neglect in NJ.** That is a rate of 1.5/1000 children. **43 children were victims of child abuse/neglect in Warren County.** That is a rate of 2.1/1000 children, **a 40% higher rate than the state average.** (These numbers of course do not include unreported cases of child abuse/neglect)

## 3 Selection and Screening of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers:

### 3.1. Responsibility for Screening

The pastor in charge or his/her designee and the staff parish relations committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing, and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training, and supervising non-appointive church staff (§ 258.12 Book of Discipline, 2016). The pastor will utilize Ministry Safe for background checks and screenings as well as training for staff and volunteers.

### 3.2. Screening and Training Requirements

All adults who volunteer or serve in ministries for children, youth, and other vulnerable people, as well as each church-paid staff person, including clergy, will be screened and trained using Ministry Safe.

### 3.3 Screening Procedures

**3.3.1.** Each person being considered to volunteer with/come into contact with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out a volunteer application. Anyone interested in volunteering with youth, children, or vulnerable persons must be a regular attending constituent of the congregation for at least six months.

**3.3.2.** Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, a designated paid staff member or person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant and review the written volunteer application.

**3.3.3. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants:** Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. A person's experience with abuse and the recovery process may be pertinent to the individual's suitability as a youth, children's or other vulnerable people's ministry worker. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, he/she may have the interview conducted by a pastor. When evaluating candidates, the following factors will be considered if an applicant is a survivor of child abuse:

- A.** whether the applicant has previously committed an act of child abuse or molestation (anyone who has maltreated children may not serve in ministry with children, youth, or other vulnerable people);
- B.** the extent of professional counseling the applicant has received;
- C.** the opinion of references, especially professional counselors who have served the applicant;
- D.** the opinion of leaders in other churches or youth organizations in which the applicant has been involved; how closely the church is able to supervise and monitor the position for which the applicant is applying

**3.3.4.** The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the screening form and any additional people as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the screening form.

**3.3.5.** The reference forms, volunteer application, and any notes from the interview will be retained in a designated confidential place even after termination or completion of services for a minimum of twenty (20) years. Background checks are not to be deleted from Ministry Safe.

**3.3.6.** Each person applying to work or volunteer with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people shall authorize the church to conduct a criminal background check through Ministry Safe.

**3.3.7.** In addition to a background check, each person applying to work or volunteer with children/youth/vulnerable adults will undergo an online Sexual Abuse Awareness Training through Ministry Safe

**3.3.8.** The costs for these reports and training shall be borne by the First United Methodist Church of Blirstown.

## 3.4 Approval

After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to approve or not approve the applicant as a paid staff member/screened adult volunteer who will work with youth, children, and/or other vulnerable people.

## 3.5 Denial

Where it has been determined that an applicant should not be approved, those people involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The pastor in charge or her/his designee should review Ministry Safe training on 'adverse decisions' and inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.

## 3.6 Records

It is important that all records (except for the background checks and training reports which are to be kept online in Ministry Safe) be kept in a locked cabinet in office of the pastor in charge. There should be a system in place that offers those who need these records appropriate access and a safe place to be stored to assure confidentiality. These documents should be kept for a minimum of twenty (20) years.

## 3.7 Known Offenders

If a known offender wants to participate in ministries within the church, please contact the District Superintendent for resources.

## 3.8 Safe Sanctuaries Training

The pastor in charge or his/her designee and the staff parish relations committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled annual training focused on foundational and current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Attendance at this training shall be required prior to involvement in affected areas of ministry by all paid staff members, screened and unscreened adults, and youth helpers who work consistently with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people.

## 3.9 Background Checks and Training from Outside Organizations

Persons wishing to work or volunteer with children/youth/vulnerable adults who have recent background checks or sexual abuse awareness outside of the Ministry Safe system (e.g. school teachers) must still undergo training and screening through ministry safe so that this information can be kept on file by the church.

## 4 General Supervision

### 4.1. The Two-Person Rule

All activities involving children, youth, and other vulnerable people shall be supervised by no fewer than two screened adults, ideally not of the same household. If it is not possible to have at least two screened adults in each room where an activity is taking place, a designated roamer (who must also be a screened adult) may cycle between rooms to provide supervision.

Activities may be carried out in the fellowship hall to fulfill this requirement. (e.g. If there are two Sunday School classes being led for different age groups, but only two screened adults available, thus no available roamer, both classes may be held in a common room to fulfill the two-person rule)

### 4.2. Doors

Any room designated for children/youth activities should have a door with a window. Half doors should be considered for toddlers to second-grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom. Windows should remain free from obstruction. If there are no windows in the door, the door shall remain open.

### 4.3. Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church will be permitted to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

### 4.4 Supervision of Classroom Activities:

#### 4.4.1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade:

Two screened adults will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. For this age group, two screened adults in the classroom are the minimum; one screened adult in the room and one roamer do not satisfy the two-person rule.

#### 4.4.2. Grades 3–5

Two screened adults will be present for all classroom activities; one may be a roamer. Where two adults are not available in the classroom, the classroom doors are to remain open, and a designated roamer should visit the classroom regularly.

**Bathrooms:** Children in this grade range should be escorted to bathrooms by a screened adult in groups, such that while one child uses the bathroom, more than one child waits with the screened adult in the hallway.

Children are to use the bathroom one at a time. No adult should enter a bathroom with a child except for a parent/guardian or an authorized caregiver (e.g. A child with certain disabilities may have a hired caregiver). If there are not enough children to fulfill this requirement, the screened adult leading the class or designated roamer should take care to see that the child enters and exits the bathroom safely then returns to class.

#### 4.4.3. Grades 6–12

Two screened adults will be present for all classroom activities; one may be a roamer. Where two adults are not available in the classroom, the classroom doors are to remain open, and a designated roamer should visit the classroom regularly. Children/youth are to use the bathrooms one at a time. No adult should enter a bathroom with a child/youth except for a parent/guardian or an authorized caregiver (e.g. A child/youth with certain disabilities may have a hired caregiver).

**Bathrooms:** When a child/youth leaves the classroom to use the bathroom, the screened adult leading the class or a designated roamer should take care to ensure that the child/youth enters and exits the bathroom safely and returns to their class.

#### 4.4.4. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure:

Adults responsible for children who are infants through toddlers should sign their children in and indicate the names of authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out. Adults responsible for children aged 2 through second grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday school and other children's activities.

Non-authorized adults shall not be allowed to pick up children. Older siblings, parents, and other adults may be authorized to pick up children when they are identified on a child's care and information records. This record of authorized adults with pick-up privileges should be updated annually.

### 4.5 Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities:

At least two unrelated, screened adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Any meetings held in an individual's home will be supervised by at least two screened adults, with two adults present who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual's home must be pre-approved by the parent/guardian of the child's/youth's/vulnerable person.

### 4.6 Counseling of Youth, Children, and Other Vulnerable People:

In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate paid church staff person may meet individually for a one-on-one conversation with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member and with written permission of a parent or guardian. During any one-on-one conversation with children, youth, or other vulnerable people, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall that gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place.

## 4.7 Notes about General Supervision:

### 4.7.1 On spiritual counseling

At the initial meeting, the adult should first determine if he/she is qualified to address the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should always be considered.

### 4.7.2 On licensed professional counselors

This section is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child, youth, or other vulnerable people.

### 4.7.3. Late Pick-Ups

Following group events, it may occur that a child's/youth's/or other vulnerable person's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. Two screened leaders should be scheduled to be present until all participants have been picked up. In some circumstances, a child/youth/other vulnerable people may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. When this occurs, the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being as well as his/her own. Example—Have the parents on the phone with you until they arrive.

## 5 Building Compliance Requirements:

The Safe Sanctuaries policy applies to all church-operated programs for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These programs must be clearly differentiated from those that are non-church operated. The following are basic assumptions made as they relate to both church and non-church-operated children, youth, and vulnerable adult programs:

1. All buildings in which such programs are housed shall have any necessary "certificates of occupancy."
2. All groups conducting such programs shall have the necessary certificates of insurance for both liability and workers' compensation. They shall be displayed as required by law.
3. All such programs shall conform to Federal and State wage and tax laws for employees.
4. Any group using the church building should have its own protection policy for children, youth, and young adults.

## 6 Transportation

### 6.1 General Rules

Transporting children, youth, and other vulnerable people is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This policy includes both requirements and guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations and the guidelines. It is expected that the requirements will always be followed.



## 6.2 Requirements for Transportation:

**6.2.1 Additional screening:** Drivers must be screened adults with a Motor Vehicle background-specific check in addition to their background check and Ministry Safe Training.

**6.2.2 Age requirements:** When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in a private vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's parent/guardian, a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 25 years old.

**6.2.3 Church-owned vehicles** When a child/youth/other vulnerable person is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 25 years of age; an exception is made when the driver is a paid staff member who is at least 18 years of age and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found to be satisfactory by the pastor in charge or his/her designee. (This is subject to other church policies, state law, and insurance regulations.)

**6.2.4 Licensing:** Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. A copy of the driver's license shall be kept on file in the church office.

**6.2.5 Safety:** Drivers must require that passengers wear seat belts; the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.

**6.2.6 Routes:** Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.

**6.2.7 Use of cell phones:** Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers. Any use should be hands-free and in accordance with state law. Drivers shall not text/message while driving.

**6.2.8 Longer trips:** When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.

**6.2.9 Approved drivers:** Persons who regularly drive church-owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.

**6.2.10 Motor Vehicle Record Search:** To be listed on the "approved driver list," a motor vehicle record search must have been conducted, and the pastor in charge or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory.

**6.2.11 Drivers** will read and sign an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix Section).

## 6.3 Guidelines for Transportation:

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult and more than one youth.
2. Drivers should receive training for any church-owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.

## 7 Overnights, Trips, Retreats, Ect.

Trip and retreat settings can call for different child/youth/other vulnerable people protection requirements, depending on the circumstances. What follows are the requirements and guidelines of this policy. The requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the guidelines should be implemented as needed. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both requirements and guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

## 7.1 Requirements for Overnights, Trips, Retreats

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats, and other events where the children, youth, and /or other vulnerable people gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at coed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the children/youth/other vulnerable people who are present.
3. A permission form will be generated for any overnight, trip, or retreat activity. This form must be signed by the child/youth/vulnerable adult's legal guardian and must include permission for emergency medical care.
4. The person in charge of youth/children/other vulnerable people for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission forms, including permission for emergency medical care. (See our appendix section)

## 7.2 Sleeping Arrangements in Hotel-Style Settings:

Rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth/other vulnerable people (where applicable) should be assigned with at least two participants per room except where specific situations dictate a different arrangement.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's rooms.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night. This should be done by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms are open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

## 8 Internet and Telecommunications

Use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

1. The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
2. If a child, youth, or other vulnerable person initiates a connection, that individual's parent or guardian as well as the volunteer or staff member's supervisor shall be notified.
3. If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or other vulnerable people that seems questionable, the leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately. (Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.)
4. Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites only with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
5. All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, Facetime, Discord, Instagram and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.) We recommend using caution and understanding platforms before using them, and we do not recommend apps like Snapchat or anything that deletes messages.
6. All online activities should use the official church account, not a personal account.

7. Communication about online meetings must be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
8. Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
9. Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
10. All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

## 9 Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:

Under Title 9 of the New Jersey Statutes, *all* persons are mandated by law to report child abuse, including sexual abuse, if they have reason to believe it is occurring. All persons are protected by law from civil and criminal liability for making such a report and also from retaliation in employment for making such a report in good faith.

Any person who knowingly fails to report child abuse is guilty of a disorderly persons offense which may carry a penalty of up to six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$1000.

Any person who knowingly fails to report child sexual abuse is guilty of a crime of the fourth degree which may carry a penalty of up to eighteen month imprisonment and/or a fine of up to \$10,000.

See NJ Statutes Title 9 Children–Juvenile and Domestic Relations Courts accessible at <https://nj.gov/state/dos-statutes.shtml>

### 9.1 Procedures

#### 9.1.1 Reporting to Local Authorities

*In New Jersey, any person having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse or acts of abuse should immediately report this information to the State Central Registry (SCR). If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as **1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)**. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.*

*SCR screeners are trained caseworkers who know how to respond to reports of child abuse/neglect. Whenever possible, a caller should provide all of the following information:*

**Who:** *The child and parent/caregiver's name, age and address and the name of the alleged perpetrator and that person's relationship to the child.*

**What:** *Type and frequency of alleged abuse/neglect, current or previous injuries to the child and what caused you to become concerned.*

**When:** *When the alleged abuse/neglect occurred and when you learned of it.*

**Where:** *Where the incident occurred, where the child is now and whether the alleged perpetrator has access to the child.*

**How:** *How urgent the need is for intervention and whether there is a likelihood of imminent danger for the child.*

*Any person who, in good faith, makes a report of child abuse or neglect or testifies in a child abuse hearing resulting from such a report is immune from any criminal or civil liability as a result of such action. Calls can be placed to the hotline anonymously.*

*Any person who knowingly fails to report suspected abuse or neglect according to the law or to comply with the provisions of the law is a disorderly person.*

*When a report indicates that a child may be at risk, an investigator from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency (formerly Youth and Family Services) will promptly investigate the allegations of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours of receipt of the report.*

(All text in italics taken from [www.nj.gov/dcf/reporting/how](http://www.nj.gov/dcf/reporting/how))

## 9.1.2 Immediate action

Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and/or other vulnerable people. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the alleged victim's safety is secured, the pastor in charge or other designated people should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.

## 9.1.3 Internal reporting

If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the ministry supervisor and the pastor in charge. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the pastor in charge is to report the incident immediately to the district superintendent if he/she has not already done so. If the district superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the bishop's office.

If the pastor in charge is not available or is implicated in the abuse, the matter should be immediately reported to the district superintendent and the proper authorities, as required by state and local law. The district superintendent will take responsibility, acting in accordance with the established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor.

If the district superintendent is not available or is implicated in the abuse, the matter should be reported to the bishop's office immediately.

As soon as possible after the safety of the alleged victim is confirmed, the ministry supervisor shall work with a volunteer or paid staff member who observes, receives a disclosure of, or suspects abuse to make an incident report documenting the abuse, taking care to note the information recommended by the state in reporting (see section 9.1.1)

### 9.1.3.1 Contacts

#### **Emergency Services**

911  
**NJ Division of Child Protection and Permanency (formerly Division of Youth and Family Services)**

1-877-NJ-ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)

#### **Pastor (First UMC Blairstown):**

Pedro Pillot (215) 802-8441

#### **District Superintendent (Skylands District):**

Eunice Vega-Perez (908) 343-3706

**Bishop (Greater NJ Annual Conference):**

John Schol (732) 359-1010

#### 9.1.4 Notification of the Parent/Guardian(s)

Notify the parents/guardian(s) of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and wellbeing of the child, youth, or other vulnerable people until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive.

NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of local authorities concerning notification of others.

#### 9.1.5 Caring for Survivors

Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.

#### 9.1.6 Caring for the Church

The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

#### 9.1.7 Documentation

In addition to an initial incident report, the ministry supervisor shall keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. The report should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

#### 9.1.8 Media

Any contact with the media should be handled by the pastor in charge.

#### 9.1.9 Notes on Procedure of Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse:

**9.1.9.1 Spokespersons** The conference communications department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of all who are affected and assure that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

**9.1.9.2 Clergy Confidentiality:** The question that sometimes arises is: "What about confidential communication with a clergyperson?" Many states have laws addressing "clergy confidentiality." Thus, a clergyperson may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2016 United Methodist Book of Discipline, par. 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Again, the moral imperative is to do what will best protect children.

## 10. Implementation of Safe Sanctuaries Policies:

The Pastor, SPRC and Church Council will ensure that the church has a Ministry Safe Administrator and a yearly refresher for the entire congregation on the importance of Safe Sanctuaries and any updates to the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

Churches will utilize Ministry Safe for their background checks and their training.

The Ministry Safe Administrator is in charge of sending background checks and training to volunteers and staff.

## 11. Congregational Covenant and Adoption:

First United Methodist Church of Blairstown's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries Policy for the protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable Persons and the accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical wellbeing, emotional safety, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people. We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism that we will "nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care." With this policy, we renew our baptismal pledge to "live according to the example of Christ" and surround children, youth, and other vulnerable people with a "community of love and forgiveness, that they may grow in their trust of God, and be thus confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Book of Worship, p.96).

This policy coordinates and supersedes the previous policies used by First United Methodist Church of Blairstown.

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we are committed to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable people, as well as all the workers with the children, youth, and vulnerable people.

By this policy and its accompanying procedures, we implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events:

**a. Training:** We will annually conduct training on this policy and its procedures to ensure that adults involved in children's, youth's, and vulnerable people's activities are aware of these standards and will abide by them.

**b. Screening:** All adults who have direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be screened in accordance with Greater New Jersey Annual Conference policy. All people who are subject to this policy will be rescreened every three (3) years. Any person who was screened but, for whatever reason, has been absent from the First United Methodist Church of Blairstown community for more than one (1) year and thereafter returns, will be rescreened.

**c. Supervision:** All activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be supervised by the appropriate number of screened adults.

**Conclusion:** In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable people, First United Methodist Church of Blairstown is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each of God’s children here will be “surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (“Baptismal Covenant 11,” United Methodist Hymnal, p.44.)

This Safe Sanctuaries Policy is hereby adopted by action of the church council of First United Methodist Church of Blairstown on the date here after indicated.

## Appendix

### i. Safe Sanctuaries Application Form for Volunteers and Employees

**CONFIDENTIAL**

This application must be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or employment) involving the supervision of children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons. This is not an employment application. The purpose of this form is to assist in the creation of a safe environment for children or students who participate in the programs of First United Methodist Church (Blairstown, NJ) or use First United Methodist Church (Blairstown, NJ) facilities. The following information will be kept confidential except where required by law. The information provided will be used to generate a consumer report (i.e. background check).

#### Biographical Information and Background

Name:

Address:

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Phone:

Driver’s License #

Social Security Number:

Sex:

Date of Birth:

Marital Status (*single, married, separated, divorced, widowed, etc.*):

How long have you lived at your current address?

Previous address:

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List all other cities and states where you have lived as an adult:

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Please list all previous volunteer work or employment involving children or students (List each organization's name and address, type of work, dates, and **a contact person familiar with your work there**. (Use back of this page for more space, if necessary.)

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List any talents, vocations, preparation, training, or other experiences that have equipped you to work with children/youth/vulnerable people



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### Questions

**Because we care for children, youth, and other vulnerable persons and desire to protect them, please answer the following questions. We understand that the answers to these questions may be private and deeply personal, and we will protect your privacy in every possible context. It is the position of First United Methodist Church of Blirstown that suspicions or allegations of child abuse or neglect will be reported to relevant state authorities.**

Why do you want to work with children, youth, or other vulnerable persons at First United Methodist Church of Blirstown?

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Do you have a preference concerning the age group or sex of those with whom you would like to volunteer? If so, what is the basis of this preference?

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What is your philosophy concerning re-direction or discipline of children?

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When you are unhappy, angry, or emotional about a person or circumstance, what do you do?

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Have you ever physically abused a child, youth, or other vulnerable person?

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Has someone ever accused you of physically or sexually abusing a child, or molesting a child?

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Do you consider yourself to have been physically or sexually abused as a child? **Yes | No**

*(We realize this information is potentially sensitive, and it will be kept entirely confidential, where another child's safety is not negatively impacted by confidentiality.) If so please explain:*

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Have you ever received counseling or resources to address any resulting spiritual harm or damage from your experience?

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Have you read First United Methodist Church of Blairstown's Safe Sanctuaries Policy **Yes | No**

Do you agree to abide by the Safe Sanctuaries Policy **Yes | No**

### Release

I authorize First United Methodist Church (Blairstown, NJ) to contact all individuals, organizations and references listed on this Safety Application Form in order to verify the information I have provided. I agree to release from liability any person or organization providing information related to me, including those persons I have listed as references, as well as contact persons from my previous volunteer work or employment with children.

I specifically authorize First United Methodist Church (Blairstown, NJ) to undertake a criminal background check concerning my past.

I understand and agree that any information received from the background check and application verification will not be disclosed to me except as required by law, and I hereby waive any right I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me on this form.

By signing this form, I certify and affirm that the information I have given on this form is true, complete and correct in all respects.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

“Safety Application Form for Volunteers and Employees” © MinistrySafe 2016. All Rights Reserved. ‘Base policy material created by MinistrySafe, program-specific edits added by First United Methodist Church of Blairstown, New Jersey 2023.

## ii. Safe Sanctuaries Incident Report Form

**CONFIDENTIAL**

Name and Role of person writing report:

Date and Time of Report:

Date and Time of Incident:

Description of incident (include names and ages of all persons involved as well as witnesses):

*For incidents concerning the observation, disclosure, or suspicion of child abuse/neglect, see Safe Sanctuaries Policy of First United Methodist Church of Blairstown, Section 9: “Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse.”*

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Subsequent actions taken

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Further actions to be taken

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*“Safe Sanctuaries Incident Report Form” © First United Methodist Church of Blairstown, New Jersey 2023. May be adapted by any other church or non-profit organization.*