

Immanuel United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuary Policy
Amended March 12, 2019

INTRODUCTION:

In April of 1996, The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution calls for all churches to welcome all children and youth and to make our churches safe places for children and youth to grow and learn. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and youth and to protect these volunteers from false accusations. It is also our responsibility to oversee all programs involving children and youth and to make sure these programs are conducted in a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an accusation of abuse arise. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have in place a policy for protecting children and youth. In 2016, the General Conference revised the policy to include vulnerable adults. A vulnerable adult is someone aged 18 or over; who due to age, illness or a mental or physical condition, is less able to take care of himself/herself, or less able to protect himself/herself against harm or exploitation.

PURPOSE:

Immanuel United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT:

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children and youth, we pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures on the selection and recruitment of workers and we will be responsible in overseeing our programs and events and in training our staff, so that they are able and equipped to minister to children, youth and vulnerable adults in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as required by state law and our moral conscience and we will be prepared to minister to the families of both the abused and the perpetrator.

PROCEDURES:

We adopt these minimum standards for our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults

1. Screening of Workers
 - a. A written job description shall be provided for positions in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults that includes the essential functions of the job.
 - b. All workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults will have completed an application listing standard contact information, employment and/or volunteer history during the past five years, their gifts for that ministry and personal, unrelated references with their contact information.

2. Recruiting of Workers:

- a. The Pastor and/or Christian Education Director will personally interview all workers before they begin teaching and/or supervising children, youth and vulnerable adults. References will be contacted. Any paid staff position applicant will be interviewed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee of Immanuel.
- b. All workers will demonstrate an active relationship with Immanuel for at least six months before being allowed to teach and/or supervise children, youth and vulnerable adults.
- c. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers will be asked to complete a request for a criminal background check and state central child abuse registry. Background checks will be renewed at a minimum of every two years.
- d. Under the supervision of the Pastor, all forms and reference reports for these workers shall be kept as a part of the applicant's confidential file at Immanuel.
- e. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of Immanuel's Safe Sanctuary Policy before starting their service and shall agree to covenant with Immanuel to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies.

3. Selection of Workers:

- a. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
- b. In the event that the criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern, the Pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.
- c. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, shall not be accepted as paid employees or volunteers to have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity or setting.

4. Education of Workers:

All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be Safe Sanctuaries trained. The Upper New York Annual Conference shall make available a standardized training program to assist each charge, district, agency and ministry to fulfill the covenant to "educate all of our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods." All adults who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have an annual orientation that includes but is not limited to the church's ministry Safe Sanctuaries Policies and procedures as it appears to the ministry/event.

5. Supervision of Children, Youth & Vulnerable Adults:

- a. The two adult rule: There will be two unrelated adults in each classroom/activity. If this is not possible, there will be an adult "roamer" who moves amid the classroom/activity during the program period.
- b. No person under 18 years of age shall be considered one of the two adults.
- c. No adult shall supervise any age group unless he/she is at least five years older than the oldest minor present.
- d. All ministry activities shall be in a room with a window. In the absence of a window, the door to the room will be left open at all times.

- e. Attendance records shall be kept for all ministry events/activities involving children and youth. These records shall include at a minimum, the date and names of all participants and shall be kept in perpetuity. If possible, the children/youth shall sign the attendance sheets.
- f. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require a written permission slip/form which shall include any necessary medical information and emergency contact information. Each permission slip/form shall be signed by a parent/guardian.
- g. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21 years of age. The Christian Education Director shall be required to keep a copy of the drivers' current license and proof of insurance card on file with church office.
- h. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the participants.
- i. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers shall refrain from using or being under the influence of tobacco, alcohol products or illegal drugs.
- j. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers shall treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, consideration, dignity and with the love of Jesus Christ.
- k. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.
- l. Every clergy in any active status or relationship with the conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders registries maintained by New York State Law enforcement agencies.

6. Reporting of Abuse

Reporting shall be required by any staff, church leader or volunteer that:

- i) personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation;
- ii) has been informed by a child, youth or vulnerable adult that an incident of abuse or exploitation has occurred; and/or
- iii) has been informed by a third party that an allegation of abuse or exploitation has occurred.

It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

- a. All information of abuse or suspected abuse shall be directed to the Pastor, who has been designated as a New York Mandated Reporter. In the event that the Pastor is not available, all information of abuse or suspected abuse shall be directed to the Christian Education Director. Upon receiving the information, the Pastor and/or Christian Education Director shall immediately call:
 - NYS Child Protective Services Hotline: **(800) 342-3720**; or
 - NYS Justice Center Vulnerable Adults Hotline: **(855) 373-2122**; or
 - NYS Office of Children and Family Services Adult Abuse Hotline: **(844) 697-3505**
- b. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.

- c. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 6 above. The District Superintendent shall take responsibility and act according to the established rules in The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against the pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office.
- d. After the Pastor and/or Christian Education Director has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the Pastor shall immediately report the incident to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop's office. Allegations are never to be discussed with any other person except law enforcement or designated county investigators.
- e. The Pastor and/or Christian Education Director must keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report shall be kept in a secure place.

7. Responding to Reports of Abuse:

- a. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse will be initiated. All allegations will be taken seriously, with full disclosure with all official investigating agencies.
- b. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the accused shall be removed from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse.
- c. The parents/guardians of the victim shall be notified and all necessary will be taken to assure the safety and well-being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the parents/guardians arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents/guardians is the alleged abuser, notifications of others shall be followed based on the advice of the authorities.
- d. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state and/or church authorities.
- e. All media requests for statements shall be directed to the Upper New York Annual Conference Director of Communication for the United Methodist Church.
- f. The church shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected by the allegation, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing may take place.

8. Connecting on Social Media with Children, Youth & Vulnerable Adults:

- a. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers should avoid relationships with children/youth via social networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc) already exists between them. Adults shall not submit "friend" requests to children or youth on any social media site. In addition, "friend" requests submitted to adults by children or youth, shall only

be granted with the express consent of the child/youth's parent and/or guardian.

- b. For the sake of their own privacy and the well-being of the child and youth participants, staff, church leaders and adult volunteers should not add or invite children or youth to any groups, events, pages, chat rooms, etc. that are not solely dedicated to activities directly related to the children or youth ministries or ministry activities of the church.
- c. It will be the responsibility of the Christian Education Director to continue to educate him/her self on the capabilities of social media networking sites and continue to education the adult volunteers who wish to use social media with children and youth.

9. Communicating on Social Media:

- a. Staff, church leaders and volunteers will be mindful of how information is presented in a social media medium and should never share news about another person without their express prior consent.
- b. Staff, church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth should consider the content and nature of any posts that will be seen or read by others.
- c. Prudent judgment will be used regarding the time you contact children and youth through social media, e-mail or other forms of digital communication. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – do not text or chat with children or youth before 9am or after 9pm.
- d. "One on one" video or chat room interaction is generally not appropriate between staff, church leaders and adult volunteers and children and youth.
- e. When the content of received communications raises concerns or questions, it shall be shared with a member of the Pastoral team. The Pastoral team will determine how the received communication will be handled.

10. Sharing of Information obtained from Social Media:

- a. All staff, church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth must not post photos or video that identify children or youth on any online site or printed publication without the written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
- b. Only pictures depicting children and youth in an appropriate light should be posted. If a picture would make the children or youth feel self-conscious, vulnerable or would subject the child or youth to ridicule, the picture should not be posted.
- c. When checking in with any location tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in a child or youth.

11. Administration of Immanuel UMC Social Media Groups:

- a. Each church related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of two unrelated administrators, who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry.
- b. Sites must be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
- c. Any inappropriate material posted to a church related social media site, group or page must be deleted and addressed.
- d. No social media site shall be created in Immanuel's name without permission of administrator.