

**Tabernacle United Methodist Church**  
83 Main Street  
Binghamton, NY

**SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**  
**2017**

**Safe Sanctuary Team for 2017**  
Beverly Rainforth (Parish-Staff Relations)  
Anderson Clark (Board of Trustees)

**TABERNACLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
POLICY INTENDED TO PREVENT ABUSE AND PROMOTE A SAFE SANCTUARY**

**PURPOSE**

*Our congregation's purpose for this Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.<sup>1</sup>*

**I. SAFE SANCTUARY COMMITTEE**

A committee of at least two members will be appointed at the annual Charge Conference. At least one member from the Board of Trustees and one member from the Parish Staff Relations Committee will serve on the committee. Additional members may be appointed or recruited to assist with fulfilling responsibilities. The Safe Sanctuary Committee will have the following responsibilities:

- A. Review of Safe Sanctuary Policy.** Each year, this policy will be reviewed (usually in June), updated if needed (by September), presented to the Church Council, and presented for approval at the annual Charge conference.
- B. Dissemination.** The current Safe Sanctuary policy will be available in the church office (paper copy) and linked to the church website. Relevant notices will be posted in classrooms, in or near the gym, and in or near other areas routinely used for church-sponsored activities for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A list of church members, employees, and volunteers with "Safe Sanctuary Approval" (acceptable background check and interview) also will be available in the church office. Information sessions about the policy may be offered periodically.
- C. Recruitment and Selection of Workers:** The Safe Sanctuary Committee and/or designees will arrange for interviews and background checks of new workers and, every three years, background checks of ongoing workers. New workers and, every three years, ongoing workers will be asked to review the Safe Sanctuary Policy and sign confirmation of their review.
- D. Compliance by Outside Groups.** The Trustee appointed to the Safe Sanctuary Committee and/or designees will review Building Use Requests and assure compliance with Section IV.B. of this Policy.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Methodist Church defines a "vulnerable adult" as someone age 18 or older who, due to age, illness, or mental or physical condition, is less able to care for herself/himself, or less able to protect herself/himself against harm or exploitation, including but not limited to physical and sexual abuse, neglect by self or other, financial or material exploitation, or emotional or psychological mistreatment. Vulnerable adults are also those adults who work with children and teens who can be in a position where accusations of abuse could arise by mistake, or adults who have been abused as a child or adult.

Regardless of abilities and maturity of individual children and teens, we are responsible for the safety of everyone under the age of 18 in our programs.

- E. Maintenance of Records:** Records will be kept of review of the Safe Sanctuary policy by new and ongoing workers. In a location that is secure but accessible by Safe Sanctuary committee members and the Pastor, records will be kept of all background checks, reference checks, motor vehicle checks, and interviews.

## II. REASONABLE SAFETY MEASURES IN RECRUITING AND SELECTING WORKERS

- A. Direct Unsupervised Access.** Pastors and all paid and volunteer workers in churches who have direct, unsupervised access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults in any ministry setting should, when practicable, be recruited and selected using the following procedures:
- 1. Application, References, Interview.** All employees and any volunteers who will be serving in a position for more than 30 days should fill out an application, provide two references, be interviewed by the Safe Sanctuary Committee and/or designee(s) before beginning to work in children, youth, or vulnerable adult ministries at the church. References should be checked, whenever possible, before the interview, and must be checked before the commencement of service. *Volunteers who have not completed these procedures will work alongside employees or volunteers who have.*
  - 2. Background Checks.** All employees and any volunteers who will be serving in a position for more than 30 days should provide an authorization to the Tabernacle United Methodist Church to request a multi-state criminal and sex offender registry background check for criminal record checks, and child abuse history checks. Any negative information obtained pursuant to said checks shall not be circulated to any members of the church other than Safe Sanctuary committee members, the Pastor, and the church's counsel, without the express consent of the employee or potential employee, or the volunteer.
  - 3. Occasional Volunteers.** Any volunteer who has not gone through the Application, Interview, and Reference and Background Checks outlined above will work alongside at least one adult who has completed these procedures successfully. *Any volunteer who serves more than 30 days in one year must complete the standard application and review.*
  - 4. Restrictions.** Adults convicted of child abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse or emotional 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, will not knowingly be accepted as paid employees or volunteers in any church sponsored activity or setting.
  - 5. Church Participation.** It is hoped that all long-term volunteers involved with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in our church will be participating in church activities, including worship, on a reasonably frequent basis.
  - 6. Drivers.** Drivers of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church van are required to authorize the church to obtain a background check of motor vehicles

records and to keep a copy of their current driver's license on file at the Church office. Records, if obtained, revealing isolated infractions or offenses, as opposed to misdemeanors or felonies, will not be considered as grounds for disqualification, but multiple offenses within two years of the time of service will be evaluated by David M. Gouldin, or if he is unavailable, Sharon Kriner, to determine if any limitations should be imposed on said driver.

**Note:** *Tabernacle conducts criminal and motor vehicle record background checks through TRAK-1 Technology Inc (see <https://trak-1.com/>).*

- B. Other Staff.** It is recommended that the same recruitment and selection procedures set forth in IIA. (except provisions for drivers, which do not apply) be followed for all paid staff and volunteers whose positions do *not* involve unsupervised access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults (such as secretarial, cooking, or cleaning personnel).

### **III. APPROPRIATE PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING PROGRAMS AND EVENTS FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS.**

- A. Adult Supervision.** For all program activities within the Church, including Sunday School, there shall be a requirement of at least one adult supervisor for each program. Whenever the adult supervisor is, for whatever reason, not available on a given occasion when the assigned class or program is scheduled to take place, it shall be necessary for an adult designee to be identified in order for the class or program to go forward on that day.
- B. Two Adult Rule.** For all church sponsored activities *in the gym*, a second *unrelated* adult will be present. For Sunday morning child care and Sunday school, a second adult will be designated each Sunday to stop by the nursery and classrooms in use to check for any concerns.
- C. Age Requirements.** Adult volunteers are those who are at least 18 years old and who are five years older than those children or youth whom they are leading, ministering to or supervising. Youth are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for purposes of the adult supervision requirement under A.
- D. Observing Behavior:** All adult staff, volunteers and pastors are asked to be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse. Observed or suspected abuse should be reported immediately, as outlined in Section V of this Policy. If the abuse occurred during a church-sponsored activity, steps shall be taken to try to preclude any further contact between the alleged abuser and presumed victim while on church property or engaged in church activities.
- E. Training:** Tabernacle United Methodist Church will encourage all its employees and volunteers with direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults to participate in training or informational programs designed to encourage safe sanctuaries and periodically will afford to church members opportunity to participate in programs designed to assist them in recognizing suspected abuse or otherwise inappropriate conduct. It is recommended that such programs be offered on an annual basis and be

available to both new members and those who would like to refresh their understanding on these issues.

- F. Procedures.** The following procedures or practices should be considered for church activities, where appropriate and feasible.
- 1. Open doors.** Endeavor to have open doors or doors with clear glass windows on class or reading rooms to prevent isolation and secrecy.
  - 2. Monitoring.** Provide monitoring of halls, as feasible and appropriate, to suggest that potential abusers will be watched.
  - 3. Overnight accommodations.** Typically, an adult will not sleep alone in the same room with a child or youth. Although it may be appropriate to separate children/youth and their adult chaperones by gender, concerns about the safety of and respect for children and youth participants may suggest other arrangements. Chaperones, parents, other adults who know the participants well, and the participants themselves should have input regarding the sleeping arrangements that are safe and respectful for all.
  - 4. Transportation.** Any adult responsible for transporting children and youth in the church van should have been approved as a transporter by the church. (See section II.A.6 Drivers.) Whenever traveling extended distances, be sure all children/youth in the vehicle have turned in a signed permission slip by their parent/guardian. If circumstances arise in which one adult is transporting one child/youth, have a parent/guardian sign a permission slip stating the time and location of the transportation. Drivers and all passengers will wear seat belts.
  - 5. Proper Display of Affection.** Adults need to be aware of, and sensitive to, the special and differing needs and preferences of each individual child. Physical contact should be age and developmentally appropriate.
  - 6. Bathroom Procedures.**
    - a.** Children who are not toilet-trained will be changed only by adult supervisors, unless other specific arrangements have been made by the parent or guardian.
    - b.** Young children may be escorted by an adult to the restroom. Children will remove and replace their own clothing, but adults may assist with the straightening of clothing and fastening of closures.
    - c.** For children with special needs, parents/guardians are encouraged to make specific arrangements with adult supervisors, as needed.
  - 7. Privacy.** If circumstances arise in which there is a need to speak to a child/youth alone, do so in as open a manner as possible. For example, meet the child/youth in a public setting such as a restaurant, library, or park (in an open space where there are people). If the situation calls for immediate attention, meet in a room where people walking by can see the two of you talking. Always leave the door open and be sure you are meeting in a location where there are other people nearby and in sight.

- 8. Discipline.** Use discipline techniques that show respect and care. Corporal punishment is never to be used.
- 9. Parental Permission.** Permission from parents or guardians is needed for all church sponsored-events and trips out of the Binghamton District of the Upper New York Conference or involving an overnight stay. Permission slips which include the parent or guardian's consent and their contact information should be filled out and signed by the parents or guardians for all such church-sponsored events.
- 10. Current Medical Information.** For all children/youth of the church, it is recommended that the church have on file current contact information, insurance information, and a signed medical authorization form from the parent/guardian of the child. Parents/guardians should notify the church whenever any of their insurance or contact information has changed.
- G. Clergy Role.** To protect all participants in all church ministries and activities, appointed clergy shall be familiar with and regularly review information at New York State's sex offender registry at <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/nsor/>.

#### IV. ACTIVITIES THAT ARE *NOT* CHURCH-SPONSORED

**A. Extensions of Church Sponsored Programs.** It is natural that children, teens, and vulnerable adults may develop personal relationships with adult leaders, such as a mentoring relationship between a confirmand and her or his sponsor. It is important for adult leaders to communicate clearly with parents/guardians when an activity is *not* a church-sponsored program, let the parent/guardian decide whether or not to permit the activity, and communicate clearly about the start and end of the activity.

**B. Outside Groups Meeting at Tabernacle.** When an outside group (e.g., Gang Prevention, 12-step group) requests use of space at Tabernacle, the Board of Trustees -

1. Will determine if the program/activity will involve children, youths, and/or vulnerable adults and,
2. If so, will advise the group of Tab's Safe Sanctuary Policy and either –
  - a. Confirm that the group has liability insurance that would cover claims stemming from incidents that may occur while at Tabernacle; or
  - b. Ask the group to provide written confirmation that they will follow Tab's guidelines, particularly the 2-adult rule and exclusion of anyone convicted of child abuse; for ongoing programs, adult leaders should also pass Tab's background check.

#### V. REPORTING PROCEDURES AND RESPONSE PLAN

**A. Reporting.** Reporting is required by any staff or volunteer who personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations be dealt with as soon as possible to the incident or disclosure.

**NOTE:** *It is critical that volunteers and staff, including the Pastor, NOT try to investigate an allegation to determine its validity. Victim interviews and investigations must be done by trained personnel; trying to help can jeopardize an investigation.*

1. The staff person or volunteer who observed alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse, is required to report the incident or suspected abuse immediately to the person in charge of the ministry or activity. The person in charge of the activity shall **immediately call the NYS Child Protective Service Hotline at (800) 342-3720**. The Pastor will be informed immediately before or subsequent to making the report.  
**Note:** Unless someone else is designated as “the person in charge” of a program at Tabernacle, the Pastor is the first person to contact. If the Pastor is away, the first person to contact would be the substitute designated by the Pastor, the Lay Leader, or the District Superintendent – in that order.
  2. The person in charge of the ministry or 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 or her address and family information.
  3. If the accused is the Pastor or a member of the Pastor’s family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to the established rules in the Book of Discipline with respect to any claims against the Pastor. In the absence of the District Superintendent, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop’s Office in Syracuse, New York.
  4. The Pastor is required by the Methodist *Book of Discipline* (paragraph 341.5) to maintain all confidences inviolate except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law. In such a case, the Pastor will release only that information that pertains to the abuse or neglect.
  5. After the suspected use is reported to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy or supply pastor is to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. In the absence of the District Superintendent, the incident shall be reported to the Bishop’s Office in Syracuse, New York.
  6. The person in charge of the ministry or event must make a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report shall be kept brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. The report, written or typed, shall be turned into the Pastor or the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee Member on the Safe Sanctuary Committee who will place it in the secure file along with applications and background checks.
- B. Response Plan.** A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations shall be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. NEVER discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the church/conference and community. All media requests for statements shall be directed to the Director of Communications for the Upper New York Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (see <http://www.unyumc.org>).
2. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. 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.
3. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, or vulnerable adults and advise the accused that there has been an allegation of abuse. 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 or church authorities, or both.
4. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry/activities with children, youth, and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with *The Book of Discipline*.
5. Notify the parents/guardians or the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well-being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notifications of others.
6. The church shall 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 may take place.

ORIGINAL POLICY APPROVED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL ON 3/16/09  
REVISIONS APPROVED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL ON 6/29/15  
REVISIONS APPROVED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL ON 3/14/16  
REVISIONS APPROVED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL ON 1/9/2017