



Princeton United Methodist Church

Safe Sanctuary Policy

The Leadership Board of Princeton United Methodist Church (PUMC) approved this Safe Sanctuary Policy on **July 9, 2024**. The purpose of the policy is threefold:

1. To demonstrate our steadfast commitment to the physical safety, emotional health, and spiritual growth of our children and youth (those under age 18), and vulnerable adults (those adults with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities);
2. To protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from potential wrongful allegations of abuse;
3. To limit the legal liability of our church.

This policy will be reviewed annually by the Leadership Board. The updated policy will be sent to the Annual Conference every other year for certification. Our last certification was 2022.

To achieve this purpose, the following components will be implemented:

PART ONE: SCREENING AND SELECTION

Background checks, application forms, and reference checks.

PART TWO: SUPERVISION AND PROCEDURES

Day-to-day operating procedures, including Two-Adult Rule, 5-Years-Older Rule, and open classroom doors or windows on doors.

PART THREE: TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Training and education for staff and volunteers, for adult members of the congregation, and for children within our congregation.

PART FOUR: REPORTING

Procedures for reporting allegations of abuse.

PART FIVE: RESPONDING

Procedures for responding to allegations of abuse.

PART SIX: DEFINITIONS

Definitions of terms

Church-Operated and Non-Church Programs

This policy covers all church operated programs. To be classified as church operated, the church must have control over starting and stopping the program, hiring, or firing the employees, and management of day-to-day operations. The decision to operate a program should be included in the minutes of a Leadership Board, Discipleship Board, Staff, or Clergy meeting.. Programs that do not meet this definition are to be defined as non-church operated programs.

For non-church programs. Programs that do not fall under church-operated must, at a minimum:

- Annually provide their certificate of insurance with a minimum of \$1,000,000 general liability insurance and be covered by worker's compensation with the church listed as an additional insured. Certificates will be requested and received annually by PUMC.
- Certify using a screening process for those who work with young people and vulnerable adults that includes a screening form, a background check, an interview, and reference checks.

All buildings in which either church operated or non-church programs are housed will have posted certificates of occupancy.

PART ONE: SCREENING AND SELECTION

EMPLOYEES

1. Employees of PUMC must:
 - a. Complete the application process set out by the Leadership Board, which includes a written application, interview, and reference checks.
 - b. Undergo a background check, the cost of which will be paid by the church; and
 - c. Agree to abide by the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and any written procedures developed in accordance with said policy.
 - d. Background checks must be re-run every three years.
 - e. Employees must complete a sexual abuse awareness training every two years.
2. Employee background checks shall be reviewed by the chairperson of the Leadership Board or their designee, the staff supervisor, and the Pastor.

VOLUNTEERS

1. Volunteers who work with children and/or vulnerable adults on a regular basis must:
 - a. Be regular attendees for at least six months before being allowed to supervise young people or vulnerable adults.
 - b. Complete a ministry-specific volunteer application (with two references)
 - c. Undergo a background check, the cost of which will be paid by the church; and
 - d. Agree to abide by the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and any written procedures developed in accordance with said policy.

- e. Have their Background checks re-run every three years.
 - f. Volunteers must complete a sexual abuse awareness training every two years.
2. All volunteer applications and materials shall be reviewed by the Chairperson of the Leadership Board, the supervisor of the prospective volunteer, and the Lead Pastor.

Any new incidents that would appear on a new background check shall be reported to the lead or supervising pastor or District Superintendent immediately by the volunteer or staff person involved.

Screening forms and background checks shall be maintained in secure, confidential personnel files to be maintained by the church, and retained after a move, stepping down, or termination for a minimum of 20 years.

PART TWO: SUPERVISION AND PROCEDURES

1. **Two Adult Rule.** Adults are persons 18 years of age or older. Two unrelated adults should be on-site at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. This includes our nursery, Sunday School classes, music programs, youth programs, programs for vulnerable adults, and any other programs where children, youth or vulnerable adults are present. An exception may be made when transporting children or youth during a church-sponsored activity if all below requirements are met:
 - a. Driver must be at least 21 years of age;
 - b. Driver must have proof of automobile insurance, a valid state driver's license, and a motor vehicle report on file;
 - c. Driver has specific written permission from the parent giving consent;
 - d. There must be two or more children in the automobile.

When gathering online for church-sponsored programs, the two adult rule also applies and both adults shall be within eyesight and earshot.

Under no circumstance should one adult be left alone with one child.

2. **Five-Years-Older Rule.** Any staff member or volunteer supervising an event involving children or youth must be at least five years older than the children or youth with whom they are working.
3. **Nursery Log.** All infants, toddlers, and children using the nursery must be signed in and out by a parent or guardian.
4. **Diaper Changing Procedure.** Nursery staff or volunteers may change soiled diapers as long as parents have given written consent and another adult is present at the time of the diaper change. All diaper changes will be recorded in a log using the following format: "time, name of child needing diaper change, provider who changed diaper." At the end of the event, the parent or guardian will be informed that a diaper has been changed.

5. **Bathroom procedure.**
 - a. A child under the age of 7 needing to use the toilet shall be escorted by a staff member or volunteer to the bathroom. For a staff member or volunteer to escort a child to the bathroom, at least 2 children must be going to the restroom at once or 2 adults must be accompanying the child.
 - b. If assistance is requested by the child, the staff member or volunteer shall prop open the main bathroom door prior to assisting the child. The staff member or volunteer will then log the event using the following format: “time, name of child who requested help, provider who gave help.” At the end of the event, the parent or guardian will be informed that bathroom assistance was requested by the child and provided.
6. **Open Door Counseling.** During any counseling session with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the door of the room used shall remain open for the entire session. In addition, the session shall occur within the line of sight and hearing distance of others. Likewise, if the session is happening online, the session shall occur when others are nearby, and at least one person shall not wear headphones. Lastly, if the session happens over text message or email, there shall be another youth volunteer/clergy on the group text or email.
7. **Parental Consent Forms.** All ministry events and activities will be publicly communicated to parents. Parental consent forms will be obtained for:
 - a. Overnight activities.
 - b. Activities not on church property.
8. **Overnight Activities.** All overnight activities will include an outlined transportation and sleeping arrangement plan in agreement with this Safe Sanctuary policy, and shared with parents in the parental consent forms for the activity.
9. **Transporting Children and Youth.** Any employee or volunteer transporting children or youth must have a motor vehicle report on file and follow the guidelines outlined in this policy.
10. **Classroom and Office Doors.** All classroom and office doors shall have windows allowing visibility or remain open when children or vulnerable adults are present.
11. **Agging Out.** Youth will be transitioned out of the youth group during the summer after their high school graduation. This means they may not attend youth group events.
12. **Church Owned Computer Devices.** All church owned computer devices will:
 - a. Be password protected.
 - b. Be monitored when in use by children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
 - c. Only be used for ministry-related purposes.
 - d. Include parental controls to block use of inappropriate websites and materials.
13. **First-Aid/CPR.** A First Aid/CPR trained person must be available for all ministry programs.
14. **Appropriate Supervision.** We acknowledge that some settings or activities will require more supervision or expertise than others. Therefore, there must be appropriate supervision and equipment for the ministry setting and activity.

Annual Review. The Leadership Board will review this policy annually., Any changes legislated by the Annual Conference will also be reflected in our policy updates.

PART THREE: TRAINING AND EDUCATION

PUMC Staff and volunteers will receive training regarding the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and written procedures developed in accordance with that policy. Members of the PUMC community will receive information concerning the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy. Training and education will be coordinated by a designee of the Lead Pastor and will be offered on an annual basis or when a new staff member is hired or a volunteer is invited to serve. An annual orientation and training for all volunteers and paid staff will be required to remind them of appropriate behavior, policies, and procedures.

1. Training and Educating Staff and Volunteers

- a. Review the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and any written procedures developed in accordance with that policy;
- b. Review definitions and signs of abuse in all their forms (See Attachment Below); and
- c. Review causes and consequences of abuse
- d. Review LGBTQIA+ affirming practices, including use of pronouns and bathroom usage.
- e. All staff and volunteers will sign a form indicating that they have read and understood the PUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy and related procedures and that they will abide by the requirements of said Policy and related procedures.

2. Educating Members of the Congregation

- a. Provide copies of the Safe Sanctuary Policy to parents registering their children for youth activities and Sunday School.
- b. Make the Safe Sanctuary policy available to the congregation, including posting it to the PUMC website.
- c. Annually publicize the Safe Sanctuary Policy through internal publications, highlighting the issue of abuse and ways to prevent abuse.

3. Educating Children and Youth

- a. Designate one Sunday annually in September or October to educate children and youth (using age-appropriate materials) during regular programming on the topic of physical safety and abuse.

PART FOUR: REPORTING

1. State law requires that anyone who has any knowledge or suspicion that a child has been abused or neglected must report it immediately to New Jersey's Child Protection and Permanency (DCP&P).
2. If suspected abuse is observed by or reported to a staff member or volunteer, the following actions should take place and documented in writing:
 - a. If observed, immediately remove the child or vulnerable adult from the situation;

- b. Contact DCP&P Hotline 1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873). In cases when the child is in immediate danger, call 911.
- c. Report the incident immediately to the staff person responsible for sponsoring the activity. The staff member shall contact the Lead Pastor who will contact the chairperson of the Leadership Board and the District Superintendent as needed;
- d. If the reported abuse takes place during a church sponsored event, follow the steps outlined in part (c) above, actively contacting the Leadership Board chairperson and District Superintendent.
- e. Complete an incident form, taking detailed notes and provide these to the staff member in charge of the activity.

PART FIVE: RESPONDING

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, all volunteers or staff involved shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

- a. The person(s) who are the subject of any report will be removed from any activities with children, youth or vulnerable adults until the incident is resolved.
- b. DCP&P will lead an investigation into the reported abuse according to their policies.
- c. The Lead Pastor is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media
- d. If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, follow the processes outlined in (a) - (c).
- e. The Lead Pastor, or their designee, will work with the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim of the abuse to determine the appropriate pastoral care.

PART SIX: DEFINITIONS

- a. Child: In the United States, this term is commonly used to identify anyone age eleven or younger.
- b. Youth: Anyone not a “child” and under eighteen (age of legal majority).
- c. Adult: Anyone who has reached the age of legal majority and has finished high school.
- d. 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.
- e. Paid staff person: Someone paid by the church, overseen by the Leadership Board, and screened according to the church’s Safe Sanctuary policy and any additional required personnel screening.
- f. Unscreened adult: Someone who has not been screened. The individual may work in a room with two screened adults or screened-paid staff persons. They should

never be alone with children, youth, or other vulnerable people. Unscreened adults may or may not be church members. The use of unscreened adults should be an exception rather than normal practice. Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge in special situations.

- g. 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.
- h. Youth helpers: People under the age of eighteen who are assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered adult volunteers and should always be supervised. Youth helpers should be at least three years older than the children or youth they are helping. A youth helper will normally be considered "unscreened." It is recommended that before Youth Helpers participate in an activity as a helper, they are Safe Sanctuaries trained.
- i. Roamer: A Safe Sanctuaries trained/screened adult leader who meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy and moves throughout the facility to provide additional oversight and supervision during activities.
- j. Ministry supervisor: A screened individual, staff, or volunteer, responsible for a particular ministry with oversight of the leaders in that ministry.
- k. 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.
- l. 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.
- m. Emotional abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
- n. 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.
- o. Screening Forms: Screening forms for use with volunteers are designed to assist the local church in gaining information on persons who are applicants for working in church programs with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Their use is designed to enhance the protection of those who participate in the programs. The use of the screening process should be required in both "church" and "non-church" programs.
- p. Background Checks: As with the screening forms, background checks are designed to protect those individuals involved in the programs offered by the church to children, youth and vulnerable adults.



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Child/Youth or Elder/Vulnerable Adult Incident Report

Injured/Endangered Person

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____

Date/Time of Injury/Incident: _____

Description of the Injury/Incident: _____

What was the child/youth or elder/vulnerable adult doing when the injury/incident occurred? _____

Where did the Injury/Incident occur? _____

Who were the adults supervising? _____

Emergency procedures followed at the time of injury/incident: _____

Was the parent/guardian contacted? _____

By whom? _____

By what method? _____

Time of contact? _____

What steps did the parent/guardian wish to take?

Were these steps followed? _____

If not, why not? _____

DCP&P notified? _____ When? _____

Pastor(s) notified? _____ When? _____

Leadership Board chair notified? _____ When? _____

DS notified? _____ When? _____

Follow up necessary? _____ By whom? _____

Further Action Taken: _____

Name of person making report: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

**Copies to Parent/Guardian, Pastor(s), Leadership Board Chair, DS, DCP&P as needed.*