

**BETHLEHEM  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
FRANKLIN, TN  
SAFE SPACES POLICY**

Bethlehem UMC  
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# Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The following is a reflection on the adopted resolution. (Book of Resolutions, 2016 #3084)

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The United Methodist Church is eager to do all it can to protect the youth, children, and other vulnerable people who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children, youth, and other vulnerable people recognizes that:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our children, youth, and other vulnerable people. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state, "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." The Social Principles also state, "...all persons are individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. Neglect, sexual abuse, and exploitation occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, racial, and ethnic lines. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable people from abuse.

Abuse prevention and ministry protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, but also for our volunteers and staff working with them.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons (Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10).

Jesus taught, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Mark 9:37 NRSV) and "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6 NRSV).

We should not allow possible risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children, youth, and other vulnerable persons; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, thus making a difference in their lives. (Adapted from Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth, page 10).

Bethlehem UMC does not condone sexual misconduct, abuse, or neglect. This policy is intended to prevent abuse and neglect. Safe Sanctuaries policies and implementation of practices that reflect those policies seek to fulfil this call for our church.

## Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people in a leadership or supervisory role at Bethlehem United Methodist Church, Franklin, TN (hereafter referred to as Bethlehem UMC) will be:

- At least 18 years old. Persons not meeting this requirement may not be left in charge of children (birth through fifth grade), youth (sixth through 18 years of age) or vulnerable adults (any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation twkumc.org or tnumc.org).
- Youth Helpers (youth under 18) must be supervised by two adults and may not serve in a supervisor role.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A regular attendee at Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN for at least six months. Persons not meeting this requirement may serve as an assistant with another adult.

*Exceptions to the above stated Volunteer/Staff Selection Policy:*

- *Rare exceptions will be made following approval by the Pastor in Charge and the Safe Spaces Committee for special situations.*
- *Exceptions will apply related to employees of the church, including interns, with completed background screening and Safe Spaces Policy Training. Interns must be accompanied by at least one adult.*
- *Exceptions will apply to adult leaders Pack 298 or Troop 444 with completed BSA background checks and BSA Youth Protection Training.*
- *Third Party Organizations will follow the requirements in section titled: THIRD PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AND USE FROM OTHER OUTSIDE GROUPS.*

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Upon request, provide the names and contact information of two or more personal references.
- Undergo a Bethlehem UMC, Department of Human Services (DHS), Boy Scouts of America (BSA) or Project Transformation (PT) criminal background check if they will have leadership responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or other vulnerable people.

- All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.
- Applications and related documents will be retained and on file in the church office.

Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN volunteer and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. They will be rescreened every three years. Bethlehem United Methodist Pre-K and Parents Day out will follow DHS background check requirements.

## Training

Prior to working in the youth's or children's ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers (e.g., youth group leaders) who regularly supervise activities for children, youth, and other vulnerable people. This training should be offered at least annually and required for all volunteers in a supervisory role and staff every three years.

First Aid/CPR Training will be provided annually.

## Ministry Supervision Guidelines

### GENERAL REQUIREMENT

Whenever supervising activities involving children, youth, and other vulnerable people at Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN,

- At least two non-related adults will always be present. When youth or young adult helpers are used, they will be supervised by an adult volunteer/staff member as defined above at all times.
- Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
- Participants will have reasonable access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment that blocks or prohibits viewing.
- If the preferred two- or unrelated- adult rule cannot be observed practically, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be posted in the main program areas of the church and included on the church's website.
- Spontaneous events, such as pickup basketball, will follow the posted rules, e.g. Gym Rules.

## RELEASE OF CHILDREN

- On church grounds daytime including Sundays (Sunday school): We will release children 5th grade and younger to brothers or sisters provided each family has completed a pick-up informational form. Emergency cases will be determined on an as needed basis.
- On church grounds nighttime including Sundays (all programs): All children 5th grade and younger must be picked up by a parent or guardian unless parental permission is provided.
- Off church grounds events: Where the event originates and terminates should be communicated to parents and guardians. Drivers are not allowed to drop off children on the way back to the church from an off-site event, without parent's approval in advance.

## UNSUPERVISED CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Any person or group using, attending, or visiting any area of the church cannot leave their children under the age of 18 unsupervised on church property.

## OVERNIGHT EVENTS

For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities,

- Two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.
- Children or youth will room together separated from the opposite sex and from all adults. In situations where adults must room with youth or children, there must be two adults. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth and cannot sleep in the same bed with the youth or children unless they are the parent or guardian of that child.

## TRANSPORTATION

Whenever Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus,

- No youth will drive to/from events. An exception will apply if parental permission is provided and the youth is driving alone or with a sibling.
- An adult will never transport one unrelated child, youth or other vulnerable person.
- Drivers of church vehicles will be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers will go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

## ELECTRONIC / MEDIA

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements will be met:

- Official church accounts and private member groups should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Best Practices: group messaging should be used whenever possible, automatically archive all text messages and only use social media primarily for advertising and

announcements. Media that does not archive messaging should not be used (i.e. SnapChat).

- If an adult leader receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult 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.*
- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites after the event has passed. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
  - *Exception applies to live Sunday morning services, which will be livestreamed and posted online following the service.*
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth, and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and adult participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meetings should be documented.
- All electronic communications shall be documented and retained.

## THIRD PARTY ORGANIZATIONS AND USE FROM OTHER OUTSIDE GROUPS

Whenever Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church or community organization,

- Groups using the church facility will follow Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN's Child, Youth, and Other Vulnerable People Protection Policies and procedures. Exceptions must be approved by the Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN Safe Spaces Committee.

Third party groups will:

- Follow Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN Safe Spaces Policy. **Exceptions to this policy must be submitted in writing and approved by the Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN Safe Spaces Committee.**
- Fill out a Building Use Agreement which includes the costs and requirements associated with facility use.
- Provide proof of insurance listing the host organization as a third-party insured.
- Without exception:
  - All organizations must provide written confirmation for *adult leaders/supervisors/overnight attendees* (as previously defined) of:
    - Sexual Abuse Awareness Training (provided either by Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN or the third party organization)

- Completed Screening or Application Processes Meeting the Third Party Organization's Written Standards
- Background Check (Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN's or that of the 3rd party organization)
- All third party organizations are responsible for the following:
  - All events or gatherings must require *no less than two, unrelated adults* supervising all youth, children or vulnerable adults.
  - A minimum of one *adult leader/supervisors* must be present at all organization events including activities lead by youth helpers.
  - *All adults* participating in overnight trips with youth, children or vulnerable adults must complete a Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN background check.
  - Provide a written process of Monitoring and Oversight of the above.

## REPORTING

As required by state law, if a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person/adult leader of Bethlehem UMC, or a third party organization at a Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or other vulnerable person.
- Call the ministry supervisor, pastor in charge, or designee.
- Call the appropriate county/state hotline.
- We will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and the necessity of reporting any allegation of improper behavior.
- We will have a clearly defined and displayed procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.
- We will be prepared to respond to the needs of all involved if an incident should occur.
- All media inquiries will be handled through a single point of contact as defined by the Annual Conference Media Crisis Response Plan. (Found on Annual Conference website)

## Ongoing Review

The committee will meet on a recurring basis (no less than quarterly) and address any events or concerns on a regular basis, and meetings will be scheduled as needed for concerns or issues.

Event planners will evaluate events for safety both in planning and in preparation for delivery of the event.

The committee will revisit the policy each January for accuracy and timeliness and will present updates to the congregation following the annual policy review.

# Congregational Covenant and Adoption

Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN's purpose for establishing this Safe Spaces Policy and 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 Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN. All change to this policy to be made via Addendum. This policy will be reviewed annually by the Church Council.

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 conduct training on this policy and its procedures to assure that adults involved in activities with children, youth, and vulnerable people are aware of these standards and will abide by them.
- b. Screening: All adults eighteen years of age and beyond who have a direct involvement with activities covered by this policy and its procedures will be screened in accordance with Tennessee-Western Kentucky Conference of the United Methodist Church (TWK UMC) 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 Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN community for more than one (1) year continuously and thereafter returns, will be rescreened.  
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, Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN 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 Spaces Policy is adopted by action of the Church Council of Bethlehem UMC, Franklin, TN this 30 day of January, 2022.

Appointed clergy and/or supply pastor(s): [Signature]

Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee: [Signature]

Chair, Church Council: [Signature]