

Safe Sanctuaries Policies

INTRODUCTION:

Newark First United Methodist Church joins with churches across the country and of all denominations in adopting procedures aimed at reducing the risk to children, youth and elders from accidental incidents or abuse in the church and church related activities. We recognize our special and sacred responsibilities to welcome the individuals of our community, to assist them in their Christian journey and maturation, to work closely with parents, guardians, and caregivers and at all times make every effort to keep our facilities and programs a safe place for anyone to grow and learn. It is also our responsibility to be intentional in our recruiting and training of people with the gifts necessary for the care of individuals and to protect those staff from becoming involved inadvertently in situations which may endanger someone. We also carry the responsibility to protect all staff from false accusations. Further, it is our responsibility to oversee all programs involving vulnerable citizens to make sure there is a safe environment and to have a plan of response in place should an incident or accusation arise.

PURPOSE:

Newark First United Methodist Church's purpose in establishing the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety and growth of all people who fall under our care and those who care for them.

We also recognize our responsibility to note and report any suspicion of a child abuse or neglect which may have taken place outside the church

STATEMENT OF COVENANT:

As a Christian community of faith committed to the ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ, we are guided by our sacred texts and traditions as we answer the call to minister to the vulnerable individuals of our community. We pledge to conduct all our activities and ministries in such a way that assures the safety and encourages the spiritual growth of all the individuals entrusted to us. We will follow reasonable safety measures in 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 will be able and equipped to minister to all individuals in Jesus' name. We will report and respond to all suspected incidents of abuse as is required by law, Annual Conference and local church policies, and our moral conscience. At all times we will be prepared to compassionately minister to individuals and families of both the abused and the accused – before and after any allegations may be resolved.

PROCEDURES:

NOTE: It is critical that all adults involved in ministry to and teaching of individuals understand that without exception ALL STAFF are considered to be MANDATORY REPORTERS of any suspected (physical, sexual or emotional) abuse of children, youth and elderly individuals.

We adopt these minimum standards for our ministries with vulnerable individuals.

1) SCREENING AND RECRUITING:

- a. All Staff will have completed a background check and 3-hour course certificate of completion for safe sanctuaries.
- b. All Potential leaders working with children and youth will have completed an application listing standard contact information, job history, references, preferably from previous employers and organizations which serve vulnerable individuals.
- c. All potential leaders will be meet with the pastor, CE chair, youth ministry director/children's ministry director before they begin teaching. Whenever possible, another associate will participate in the meeting as well.
- d. References will be contacted by phone or in writing. Phone conversations with references will be recorded in writing and kept on file.
- e. All Potential Leaders will demonstrate an active relationship with this church of at least 6 months before being allowed to supervise vulnerable individuals.
- f. All leaders will be required to complete a request for Criminal Background Check and Child Abuse History Clearance. This will be required yearly.
- g. If there are any discrepancies or concerns that arise from the above process, then a second, confidential meeting with the pastor will be conducted to discuss them with the applicant.
- h. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file. All forms shall be kept in a locked file on the church premises.
- i. Helpers who occasionally work under a screened leader are not required to go through this recruiting process.
 - i. If they have not gone through this procedure, they are not allowed to be left alone with a vulnerable individual for any amount of time.
 - ii. This process is for those who wish to regularly lead and supervise our vulnerable individuals or are employed through the church.

2) Supervision:

- a. Two Adult Rule: No vulnerable individual meeting or traveling activities will be held unless two or more adults can be present. Both leaders will remain at the meeting until all vulnerable individuals have left.

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- b. If possible, during Sunday school and Kid's Church there will be two adults in each classroom. If this is not possible, then classroom doors will remain open.
 - c. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the oldest student.
 - d. No person under 18 shall be considered as one of the adults.
 - e. Children/youth will not be released to anyone other than a parent or other guardian who regularly provides rides to and from activities with written documentation that they are allowed to pick up that individual.
 - f. If a parent/guardian wishes someone else to pick up their child, then advanced notice must be given in writing or via telephone in an emergency to the youth/children's ministry director.
 - i. You must check ID and make note on the attendance sheet who picked them up and you checked ID.
 - ii. Attendance sheets need to be completed at every meeting, activity, or trip and turned in to the office for record keeping in a locked file cabinet.
 - 1. You can do a paper attendance sheet or Servant Keeper app on your phone.
 - g. If there is a question or concern regarding releasing a child/youth into the care of an adult other than a parent, the director/volunteer should not release the child/youth until the situation is satisfactorily resolved.
 - h. Registration forms must be kept on file for all children/youth that includes contact, emergency, and health information.
 - i. These forms must be kept in the office file cabinet locked.
 - i. Permission slips will be required for any activities that involve traveling to and from the church.
 - j. Release forms will be required for zoom meetings
 - k. Release forms will be required for any images or videos taken for social media or messenger.
- 3) Transportation:
- a. Staff should note that the church's liability insurance covers the transportation of children, youth, and elderly people in private cars on church related outings. HOWEVER, all staff are advised to check with their own insurance carriers for details particular to their own circumstances.
 - b. No child or youth shall be transported without the specific permission of a parent/guardian. When such permission cannot be secured in writing, telephone confirmation can be obtained. IT IS ALWAYS PREFERABLE that parents/guardians transport their own children.
 - c. All staff must practice caution in agreeing to transport children.

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- i. To prevent anything from happening, being said, or feeling uncomfortable. ALWAYS have a second adult with safe sanctuaries training and background check ride with you.

4) Reporting:

Note: Apart from any procedures listed below, in the face of evidence that we reasonably believe a child to be in immediate danger our first course of action will be to call 911 so the appropriate agencies can become involved.

- a) Any concerns/questions must be brought to the attention of Director of Children's Ministries, the Director of Youth Ministries, the Director of Pastoral Care, and/or the pastor immediately.
- b) The pastor will, without delay, interview the identified persons and in consultation with the appropriate Director determine whether the concern merits reports.

In the absence of the pastor, the Directors, in consultation, will determine whether the concern merits reporting and will assume the responsibilities of the pastor outlined below until the pastor is contacted.

- c) Upon confirming the question/concern the pastor will report the concern to the New York State Child Protective Services, Child Abuse Hotline (1-800-342-3720). They will investigate and take the appropriate steps to respond. Reporters will also complete a written report for submission to New York State Child Protective Services (LDSS 2221 A Report of Suspected Child Abuse or Maltreatment) which can be found at <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cps/>
- d) Any church volunteer or staff involved in the suspected incident will immediately be removed from contact with children, youth, and elderly until the incident is investigated and resolved. This shall be done in the most discreet manner possible. Suspected involved parties will not be denied the other ministries and services of the church including, but not limited to the church's Sexual Abuse Advocates.

5) RESPONDING:

- a. A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse or neglect will be initiated. All allegations will be taken seriously. Nothing will be covered up.
- b. The District Superintendent, Finger Lakes District, or other person designated by the Bishop; New York West Area will be the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements will be forwarded through the pastor.
- c. The pastor will coordinate communications between appropriate senior staff members and Lay Leadership of the church. At a minimum this will include the Directors of Youth and Children's Ministries, the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations ministry team, the chair of the Christian Education team and the chair

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of the Ad Council. **All conversations will be held in strictest confidence. Every effort must be made to suppress rumors, damaging innuendo and gossip. All parties to the incident will be treated with the greatest regard for their privacy, dignity and worth.** In all actions we will strive to emulate Jesus and his teachings.

- d. If the allegation is against a staff member or the pastor, the District Superintendent will be contacted immediately. In the case of an allegation against the pastor, the District Superintendent will assume the responsibilities of the pastor as contained in this/these policies.
- e. Pastoral support will be available to all persons involved in the incident as indicated.

6) SIGNS OF CHILD ABUSE OR MALTREATMENT

a. INDICATORS:

- i. The list that follows contains some common indicators of abuse or maltreatment. This list is not all-inclusive, and some abused or maltreated children may not show any of these symptoms.

1. Indicators of Physical Abuse can include:

- a. Injuries to the eyes or both sides of the head or body (accidental injuries typically only affect one side of the body);
- b. Frequently appearing injuries such as bruises, cuts and/or burns, especially if the child is unable to provide an adequate explanation of the cause. These may appear in distinctive patterns such as grab marks, human bite marks, cigarette burns or impressions of other instruments;
- c. Destructive, aggressive or disruptive behavior;
- d. Passive, withdrawn or emotionless behavior; and
- e. Fear of going home or fear of parent/guardian(s).

2. Indicators of Sexual Abuse can include:

- a. Symptoms of sexually transmitted diseases;
- b. Injury to genital area;
- c. Difficulty and/or pain when sitting or walking;
- d. Sexually suggestive, inappropriate or promiscuous behavior or verbalization;
- e. Expressing age-inappropriate knowledge of sexual relations; and
- f. Sexual victimization of other children.

3. Indicators of Maltreatment can include:

- a. Obvious malnourishment, listlessness or fatigue;
- b. Stealing or begging for food;

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- c. Lack of personal care – poor hygiene, torn and/or dirty clothes;
 - d. Untreated need for glasses, dental care or other medical attention;
 - e. Frequent absence from or tardiness to school; and
 - f. Child inappropriately left unattended or without supervision.
- 7) Parent and Worker responsibilities:
- a. All parents will receive a copy of the safety policies and will be required to sign an acknowledgment form stating that they have read, understand, and agree to follow our safety guidelines.
 - b. All shut ins will receive a copy of the safety policies and will be required to sign and acknowledgment form stating that they have read, understand, and agree to follow our safety guidelines.
 - c. All leaders will receive initial training on recognizing the signs of abuse.
 - d. All leaders will receive a copy of the safety policies and will be required to sign an acknowledgement form stating that they have read, understand, and agree to follow our safety guidelines.
 - e. All children will be given guidelines to follow and will sign/verbally acknowledge that they understand the rules.
 - i. This will need to be done and posted at the beginning of Sunday School and Youth groups.
 - ii. This will also be given with permission slips before trips/activities so that parents can go over all the rules with the child and have both sign and return.