
MT. ZION UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY



MAY 16, 2019
MT. ZION UMC OF LAUREL GROVE
27108 Mt. Zion Church Road, Mechanicsville, Maryland 20659



Safe Sanctuary Policy– Mt. Zion UMC of Laurel Grove

Effective date: May 16, 2019

For purposes of this document the following definitions apply:

“children” - age 0 through grade 5; “youth” - grade 6 through age 17; adult” - age 18 and older

Purpose Statement:

The community of Mt. Zion United Methodist Church pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as those who work with them. We will follow stated guidelines in the selection of persons, both paid and volunteer, who have access to the children and youth at our site. Defined guidelines for reporting suspected incidents and support to individuals and families demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ. God calls us to make our church communities safe places where children, youth and adults can expect to be protected and be in a safe environment.

A. Applicant Guidelines:

1. A six-month window* of church involvement will be required for a volunteer in a leadership position with children or youth. Anyone who has been previously approved but absent from active involvement in Mt. Zion UMC for an extended period (six (6) months or more), may need to re-apply. This at the discretion of those who have responsibility for the oversight of Safe Sanctuaries Policy implementation.

* The six- month window may be waived for special short-term events, such as VBS, ASP and single day events. (e.g. Easter Egg Hunt, Breakfast with Santa, etc.). The exception requires the approval of the activity director/leader, who will inform the Chair of Christian Ed in advance of the activity.

2. Anyone under the age of 18 will have a written permission from their parent/guardian that they have given approval for the youth to apply as a Safe Sanctuaries worker.

3. Adult applicants to be authorized from this date forward will:

- a. Attend a seminar “Signs of Abuse and Mt. Zion’s Church Policy”, also known as “Safe Sanctuary
- b. Training”, which includes annual signing of the Sexual Misconduct Form required by the Baltimore-Washington conference of the UMC.
- c. Provide three out-of-family personal references.
- d. Complete an Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check, also referred to as a “background check”, as well as a driver’s license check, if planning to transport children or youth as a representative of Mt. Zion UMC.
- e. If the background check is flagged, more in-depth checks may be required.
- f. Background and license checks are required every five years or as needed.

5. Youth participants to be authorized from this date forward will:

- a. Attend a seminar “Signs of Abuse and Mt. Zion’s Church Policy”, also known as “Youth Safe Sanctuary Training”.
- b. Provide three out-of-family personal references
- c. Complete a youth participant application
- d. Be a minimum 3 years older than the children they are helping.
- e. Youth participants will be required to submit an adult application within four (4) months after reaching the age of 18.

NOTE: All completed forms and records will be stored in a secure, locked cabinet. Results of background checks will be confidential.

6. Pictures will be taken of all adult applicants for purposes of identification. Pictures may be displayed within the church campus for purposes of identification and/or used for ID badges in conjunction with church functions and events both on/off campus in those areas/events requiring Safe Sanctuary-trained personnel. These pictures will be kept in the Safe Sanctuary computer files.
7. All Safe Sanctuary approved personnel will wear current name/picture badge for identification and to signify their clearance whenever they are actively “on duty” in a Safe Sanctuary position. The ID tag may be worn on a lanyard or clipped to clothing. Safe Sanctuary trained youth will wear a badge without a picture.

B. Staff and Volunteer Guidelines:

1. Affection to those we care for may be appropriate but allow the child/youth to initiate the hug and be the first to let go. Side by side hugs are preferred.
2. Volunteers holding a younger person on their lap should consider the following: is it age appropriate and am I in the view of others, so that my behavior will not be misconstrued.
3. Two unrelated Safe Sanctuary trained/approved adults should always be present when working with children and youth. (No spouses or parent-child teams, regardless of age/gender) If one adult leaves the room, the door should be left open.
4. Children through Grade 5 will be dismissed from Sunday School classes to parents/guardians or someone with signed consent from the parent/guardian.
5. Children will be sent to the restrooms with a classmate of the same gender, and an approved Safe Sanctuary adult will remain outside the door.
6. Sunday School Superintendents will monitor children’s Sunday School classes.
7. Childcare:
 - a. Children to be cared for must be under 8 per Maryland legal guidelines for childcare supervision.
 - b. Children aged 8 and above must remain with parents.
 - c. Childcare workers must be at least 14 years of age and must have completed both Safe Sanctuaries Training and Childcare Training.
 - d. If two approved youth are conducting childcare (versus an adult and a youth), an assigned adult will be in the building, available for assistance if needed.
 - e. Further guidelines for those involved in childcare may be addressed through childcare training.
8. Those working in the leadership position in youth ministry must be at least 22 years of age and must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest person in the group to which they are working, or they are youth assistants.
9. If youth teachers/leaders feel a need to lead a conversation on a controversial topic (to include, but not be limited to topics such as drugs, alcohol, abortion, safe sex, homosexuality, euthanasia, evolution, capital punishment /the death penalty...) they need to:
 - a. receive permission from the Director of Youth (and Adult) Ministries and/or the pastor(s).
 - b. send a permission slip home to parents/guardians, as it is done in St. Mary’s County Public Schools.
 - c. have the youth and the youth leader sign a “Covenant/Code of Conduct”, which will include (but not be limited to) statements regarding the youth respecting all others’ opinions, the youth not bullying or harassing anyone in class or outside of class due to his or her views on a topic, confidentiality, and demonstrate respectful listening and speaking skills.

- d. Invite the Director of Youth (and Adult) Ministries, pastors and parents to participate, if available. Any adult attending, leading, or participating must also sign the “Covenant/Code of Conduct”.
- e. Leaders/teachers of elementary aged children should address the comment briefly, then re-direct children to speak with their parent and/or the pastor(s) should a controversial topic come up; the conversation may include the leader/teacher.

10. Always give parents/guardians advance notice and full information regarding the events in which their children/youth will be participating.

11. Staff and Volunteers who have first aid and CPR training will be identified.

C. Facility Guidelines

1. All classrooms will have unobstructed window visibility from hallway.
2. Classroom furniture will be arranged in such a way as to increase visibility.
3. Restrooms will be maintained to facilitate use without adult assistance.
4. Exits throughout the facility will have emergency numbers listed as well as pastoral contacts.
5. First Aid supplies will be clearly labeled and available. Accident forms will be completed by supervising adult and submitted to the designated person in charge of the event, who will put them in the mailbox of the office administrator.
6. Playground facilities are for children 2-8 years of age and may not be used without adult supervision.

D. Basic Guidelines for Youth Off-Site Outings and Overnight Guidelines

1. All chaperones are considered in leadership positions; and should be at least 22 years old. An 18-21-year old volunteer may serve as an assistant but may not serve as a chaperone. To serve as an assistant the 18-21-year-old volunteer must complete the Safe Sanctuary training, sign a Sexual Misconduct Form, have photo on file and have a Background check completed with satisfactory results.
2. Parental permission will be obtained before youth outings leave the Church grounds.
3. Drivers will have completed the Safe Sanctuary Training, have a background check and a satisfactory driver record check.
4. Each car will have emergency information for each youth transported in the vehicle.
5. Timelines will be followed as close as possible and parents will be kept informed of any changes.
6. Adults will sleep in a separate room from the youth. Youth rooms will be monitored during the night. (Exception: due to room limitations on ASP trips, this rule does not apply; however, parents will be made aware of this in advance)
7. Hotel rooms will open to an inside hallway.
8. Youth and adults will remain in groups, of a minimum of 3 persons, throughout the outing.

E. Social Media Guidelines:

1. For the safety & security of our children and youth, parents and the pastor or the Director of Children's or Youth and Adults Ministry are to be copied/included in any e-mail or text messages or messages to youth or children sent through social networking pages by any adult leader in the church.
2. Staff members and volunteers who work with children and youth should not text or communicate with minors online after 9:00 p.m. except in the case of an emergency. If such an emergency communication is necessary, the parent or caregiver of the youth should be notified as well.
3. It is strongly recommended that volunteer leaders not initiate being "friends" with minors on social media sites. Should you accept a friend request always let parents or caregivers know that you are "friends" with their child.
4. Consider using the blind carbon copy field when sending emails to groups of minors so email addresses are not displayed.
5. Acquire parental in writing and youth permission before posting pictures of youth or children on websites or social media.
6. Never post contact lists of minors on your website or on other social media sites.

F. Reporting Abuse/Neglect Situations

1. Maryland Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 02.07.02, B:33) defines a mandated reporter as a health practitioner, educator, human service worker, or law enforcement officer required to notify a local department or law enforcement of suspected child abuse or neglect pursuant to Family Law Article, §5-706, Annotated Code of Maryland.
2. Concerns for suspected child abuse or neglect must be made as soon as possible. Any delay in reporting could place a child at continued risk of harm.
3. Anyone serving in the capacity as a Safe Sanctuary trained volunteer at Mt. Zion United Methodist Church, is considered by Mt. Zion as an "educator" as defined above. Therefore, all Safe Sanctuary trained volunteers are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. If you do not feel you are capable of this responsibility, please discuss this with the Safe Sanctuary Coordinator IMMEDIATELY.
4. The following numbers should be used for reporting child abuse and neglect:
 - a. During the hours of 8 to 5, Monday through Friday, call St. Mary's County Department of Social Services at 240.895.7016.
 - b. Outside of the above hours as well as on holidays and weekends, call the St. Mary's County Control Center at 301.475.8016. Ask to speak to the on-call social worker regarding a concern for child abuse/neglect.
5. A written report should follow all oral reports made. Blank copies of State of Maryland – Child Protective Services REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT Forms (DHR/SSA 180 (6/2016) can be found in the Safe Sanctuary mailbox in the office/admin area or made available from the Pastoral Staff and Preschool Director. You should provide a copy of the form (DHR/SSA 180) to the Pastor and Preschool director (if applicable). It is advised that you complete this form prior to calling in the report. If you complete the form fully, then you will have all information needed by the screener.
6. Reporting child abuse and neglect DO NOT require the prior approval or authorization of the Pastor. However, a copy of the DHR/SSA 180 form should be given to the Pastor after such calls are made.

7. Any reports made involving the Preschool should be made known to the Preschool Director.
8. The Pastor, Preschool Director, Chair of the Church Council or designee will conduct any necessary contacts with media. At no time should any member of the church, speak to the media regarding reports of child abuse and neglect.
9. All parties involved with reports of child abuse and neglect will be made aware of local resources for services and support including but not limited to counseling.

Note to File: Mt. Zion UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy as stated herein was approved at the Church Council meeting of 16 May 2109 and is accordingly effective as of this date.

**Mt. Zion UMC of Laurel Grove:
Safe Sanctuary Policy
Addendum**

From time to time, a local church pastor or church leader learns that a member, or any person who regularly frequents church premises for worship or other reasons, is a registered sex offender. When that happens, and even while resolutely affirming every person's need to be part of a faith community and receive redemption, we hold in balance the imperative to do all we can to keep all or parishioners safe, especially (but not only) our children and youth. To that end, the following Safe Sanctuaries protocol will be followed:

1. **Maintenance of List:** The Staff Parish Relations Committee should establish and maintain a list of registered sex offenders who attend worship or are otherwise known to visit the church premises on one or more occasions. A copy of the list will be delivered to the District Superintendent and updated as needed.
2. **Meeting and Covenant with the Registrant:** Upon learning that a member or visitor is a registered sex offender the pastor and Chair of SPRC (or designee) will have an in-person meeting with them. The registrant may choose another person to be present at the meeting. The procedures to be followed for the Registrant to participate in the life of the church will be explained. This covenant will include, but is not be limited to:
 - a. Designation of attendants, unrelated to the registrant, to accompany them to all church activities and worship.
 - b. Areas of the church grounds that the registrant may use.
 - c. Designated restroom the registrant may use.
3. **Designated Attendants:** Registrants should not be allowed in any church building or anywhere on church grounds, unless they are accompanied by an adult member of the congregation who has been approved by the SPRC as a designated attendant, and has been briefed on the specific covenant of that particular registrant. If a designated attendant is not present, the registrant may not attend services or activities.
4. **Confidentiality:** This covenant is confidential to protect the registrant and is only shared on an as needed basis. For example: If the registrant is a member of the choir, the choir director will be made aware of the covenant. If the registrant has a child in Sunday School the covenant will be shared with the Director of Children's Ministries.
5. **Privacy/Safety:** Mt. Zion UMC of Laurel Grove will make every attempt to protect the privacy of the registrant while maintaining the safety of the congregation.
6. The SPRC reserves the right to make exceptions to this policy in extraordinary circumstances.
7. Questions or concerns regarding this policy should be directed to Staff Parish Relations Committee.
8. Non-compliant registrants will be banned from church property, using legal means if necessary.

Resources: Maryland: <http://www.dpss.state.md.us/sorSearch>.
District of Columbia: <http://sexoffender.dc.gov>
West Virginia: <https://apps.wv.gov/StatePolice/SexOffender/Forms>

Approved by Church Council September 27, 2018