

# Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedure Manual



Mills River United Methodist Church

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SAFE  
Sanctuaries®

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# MRUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policies and Procedures

## Article I. Introduction

As a Christian community of faith, Mills River United Methodist Church (MRUMC) pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ both on and off our campus in ways that promote the safety and spiritual growth of all persons whether vulnerable children, youth, adults, or those who serve in ministry with and to them.

As such, this document outlines: a theological foundation, applicable definitions, policy scope, specific policies and procedures related to the performance of ministry, and instructions and requirements for reporting of and response to neglect, abuse or exploitation of vulnerable persons.

*Nothing in this policy or its procedures shall hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported, or confirmed violations of any North Carolina general statute.*

## Article II. Theological Foundation

Jesus says, "Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). He also says, "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).

Jesus goes on to say, "...I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me." (Matthew 25:41)

Further, we affirm our covenant commitment to those in the family of faith at each person's baptism by our congregational pledge: "With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this person, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (*Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge, 11*).

Considering these words of Christ, other scriptural teaching, our baptismal vows, and rich tradition of faith, we are convinced that Christianity calls us to communal living built on acts of hospitality to all and protection of those who cannot protect themselves. These foundations and commitments guide our understanding that these policies and procedures are both appropriate and necessary for people who seek to follow the ways of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

## Article III. Definitions

The following terms and definitions shall apply for the purpose of this policy:

- (a) Abuse: Any act of sexual misconduct, physical or emotional harm, financial exploitation, or neglect as defined by the relevant statutes of the State of North Carolina, *The Book of Discipline, The Book of Resolutions*, The Western North Carolina Conference, or other relevant authorities

- (b) Vulnerable Person: Any person who due to age, limited mental, emotional, or physical capacity, or position/power dynamic requires special care, support, or protection from abuse
- (c) Child or Youth: Any person under the age of 18
- (d) Adult: Any person 18 years of age or older
- (e) Staff: Any person employed by MRUMC
- (f) Volunteer: Any person not paid by the church but with responsibilities in ministry areas with vulnerable persons
- (g) Leader: An adult volunteer who has completed the required screening and training and meets the minimum age requirements as defined in this policy
- (h) Youth Helper: A volunteer age 13-17 serving in a non-supervisory role.
- (i) Outside Group: Any group or organization that utilizes MRUMC's facilities but is not a direct ministry of MRUMC
- (j) Monitor: A Leader who travels from room to room where vulnerable persons are being engaged in ministry

## Article IV. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by MRUMC, regardless of location, as well as any activities utilizing its facilities.

Outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt and adhere to equivalent policies. Should the two policies conflict, the more protective approach shall be followed.

## Article V. Policies and Procedures

### Section 5.01 Insurance

MRUMC shall carry adequate liability insurance for all ministries, including sexual abuse or misconduct coverage.

### Section 5.02 Screening and Selection

#### (a) Qualifications

- An active member of the ministry for at least 6 months
- At least 18 years of age
- At least 5 years older than the oldest person they are supervising / leading
  - Does not apply to adults in ministry with vulnerable adults
- Submission of a volunteer application including personal references
- Consent to a Criminal Background Check

#### (b) Background checks

- Will be completed for each staff person and volunteer every 5 years or after a 1 year or more break in service.
- Any conviction involving abuse of or harm toward children, youth or vulnerable adults will disqualify the applicant from participating in ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults. All other convictions will be reviewed and handled on a case-by-case basis by the Senior Pastor, Trustees & S/PPRC Chairs, the Lay Leader and the ministry

area staff leader in which the person has applied to volunteer in order to ensure the safety of all involved.

- (c) Youth Helpers
  - Children or Youth age 13-17 who assist with ministries
  - Youth Helpers will follow all the same guidelines as adult leaders.
  - Youth helpers shall never be alone with children without an adult present.
- (d) Documentation Access & Retention
  - All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to the Senior Pastor, Administrative Secretary, and ministry area staff leader in which the person volunteers
  - Such documentation will be maintained for 5 years following the departure of a volunteer from service to the ministry area then destroyed by crosscut shredder or others permanent means
- (e) Outside groups (i.e. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, etc.)

Outside groups shall be responsible for screening, selecting, and maintaining files and records like those outlined in this policy on all staff and volunteers who work with children, youth or vulnerable adults on MRUMC premises. The MRUMC Trustees Committee or chairperson may request explanation and proof of such compliance at regular intervals.
- (f) Registered Sex Offenders

In accordance with applicable North Carolina law, we recognize that in certain circumstances, we will be unable to welcome onto our premises certain registered sex offenders. As a result, registered sex offenders should not come on church property without prior communication and permission from both the Senior Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee chairperson. Registered sex offenders who wish to worship, seek pastoral care, or be a part of our faith community will be considered on a case-by-case basis to determine whether appropriate participation in such activities is possible.

### Section 5.03 Training

- (a) All staff and volunteers must receive training in these policies and procedures in both verbal and written form on at least an annual basis. This may take place at MRUMC, another United Methodist Congregation, or at the district or conference level. Conference leadership will be utilized at least once every 4 years to ensure the most recent information on Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures.
- (b) All training must include at least: basic information regarding the care and protection of vulnerable persons (such as minimum supervision and boundary guidelines), MRUMC policies and procedures, how to identify and requirements to report incidents of abuse, procedures for reporting observed or suspected incidents of abuse.
- (c) These policies and procedures will be made known to the congregation and made available via the website or in print upon request to the church office.
- (d) In addition to staff and MRUMC volunteers training shall be made available to: leaders of outside groups that utilize the church facilities for activities with vulnerable persons, any person in the community who wishes to learn more about Safe Sanctuaries and its ministry of abuse prevention

#### Section 5.04 General Activity Procedures

All activities involving children, youth or vulnerable adults shall adhere to the following minimum requirements:

- (a) There shall be two unrelated adults always present.
  - (i) “Unrelated adults” is interpreted as adults who are not related to one another. (The adults may be related to participants, but not to one another.)
  - (ii) When two unrelated adults are not able to be present, two related adults shall be present, so long as they are not in a marital relationship. (Married adults may lead together, but there must be at least one more adult present.)
  - (iii) If it is not possible to have two adults always present, the activity must take place in an open space—indoors or outdoors—where other adults are able to witness the activity and interactions of all involved. Such activities shall only be permitted with the use of a roving monitor.
  - (iv) It is NOT acceptable to have only one adult present with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a private space, or any space where other adults are not able to witness or access the activities and interactions of all involved.
- (b) If participants represent more than one gender, then there shall be at least one male adult leader and one female adult leader.
- (c) It is preferred that at least one adult present at all activities be trained in first aid and CPR. First aid kits shall be readily available in all ministry areas.
- (d) There shall be a roving monitor during high-volume ministry and class times (e.g. Sunday School).
- (e) All doors shall be either half doors with the upper half kept open during ministry events or shall have windows that allow a roving monitor or other adult leaders to reasonably observe the classroom/nursery area. At no time shall windows be obscured, or doors locked to areas where children, youth or vulnerable adults are meeting. (Exception: Active shooter drills or incidents.)
- (f) All leaders assisting with diaper changing, toileting and clothes changes of young children or of children, youth or adults with special needs shall be of the same gender or immediately related (i.e. parent/legal guardian) to the person in need of assistance. In all cases, doors to changing areas and restrooms should be kept sufficiently open to allow monitoring but sufficiently closed to respect privacy.
- (g) All leaders supervising or assisting with recreational or playground activities shall always be alert and aware of their surroundings and the location of all participants in their care. Leaders are not permitted to use their cell phone or other electronic devices while supervising recreational or playground activities. (Exception: Emergency contact due to injury or incident)
- (h) All leaders shall follow appropriate boundary guidelines. For example:
  - (i) Appropriate physical contact such as a hug initiated by a participant may be reciprocated. Such contact should never be initiated by a leader.
  - (ii) All leaders shall respect a reasonable amount of “personal space” and “personal property” between themselves and participants encouraging them to reciprocate.
  - (iii) Exchanging of gifts is discouraged between leaders and participants.

- (iv) Corporal punishment of any kind is never appropriate or permitted and may constitute abuse. Teachers are asked to redirect a child to a positive alternative if they should display inappropriate behavior. Time out may be utilized to reinforce appropriate behavior. A child may sit in time out for one minute per year of age.

#### Section 5.05 Counseling

Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner.

- (a) The clergyperson, staff person, or adult leader shall conduct the meeting in a visible space, meaning that the door is cracked open or an unobstructed window allows someone to reasonably see all persons in the room, or the meeting shall occur in a public place.
- (b) Should either party request, a second witnessing party may be mutually agreed to be in the meeting space during the session.
- (c) No counseling sessions shall take place in private homes
- (d) No counseling session shall take place in church facilities while no one else is present.
- (e) Suspected abuse or neglect uncovered in counseling shall be reported in accordance with North Carolina law.
- (f) All counseling is subject to the ethics of confidentiality notwithstanding the mandatory reporting threshold set forth by the State of North Carolina

#### Section 5.06 Transportation

The following procedures are for providing transportation for children, youth, and vulnerable adults to and from activities sponsored and/or supervised by Mills River United Methodist Church and affiliates. These procedures relate to transportation provided by the church, parents of youth, and adult leaders to and from activities off the church property.

- (a) General Rules for Transportation
  - (i) Any person driving church-owned or personal vehicles on behalf of the church must consent to a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of current insurance coverage. Drivers provided by a charter transportation service shall have had a background check and clear driving record within the past 3 years and evidence of same shall be provided to the event coordinator by the charter company.
  - (ii) Unless otherwise approved by the event coordinator and/or the parents/custodians, all transportation subject to these procedures will begin and terminate at the church property.
  - (iii) All drivers will obey all traffic laws. Failure to do so may disqualify them from driving for church-related activities for a time determined by the Senior Pastor, S/PPRC Chair, Trustees Chair, and/or Director of Family Ministries.
  - (iv) For overnight church functions, signed permission forms will be obtained for each child or youth participant prior to embarking a vehicle. If the participant does not have a completed permission form, he/she will not be permitted to participate in the transportation arranged by the church. The permission forms are to be collected and checked by the event coordinator prior to leaving the church property.

- (v) No driver is to transport a single child or youth without either another approved adult or written or verbal permission from the person's parents. In the event a single child or youth is transported by a single adult in the vehicle, the minor child must be seated in the rear seat. ALL MEASURES SHOULD BE TAKES TO AVOID THIS SITUATION!
- (b) Vehicle Requirements
 

These vehicle requirements pertain to vehicles owned by Mills River United Methodist Church, those provided by parents of participating children/youth, those provided by adult leaders, and any external commercial vehicles provided for transportation of children/youth.

  - (i) All vehicles shall be in good running order, have a current valid license plate, and fully operational passenger restraints. The passenger restraints must be used by each passenger during transport. Only one passenger per seat/set of restraints.
  - (ii) All vehicles shall have insurance coverage as required by North Carolina law. A copy of a current insurance card must be on file with the appropriate staff ministry leader.
  - (iii) All vehicles will be multi-passenger vehicles. No vehicle will be allowed to carry more than the passenger capacity as specified by the vehicle manufacturer.
- (c) Qualification of Drivers
  - (i) All drivers shall have a valid driver's license with the classification for the vehicle being driven and will be at least 25 years of age, unless he or she is a staff member of the church, including staff summer interns.
  - (ii) All drivers shall be sufficiently insured (either personally or by the church) to operate the vehicle they are driving.
  - (iii) All drivers utilizing their personal vehicle for transportation must have a valid North Carolina driver's license and insurance, as well as a driving record clear of major infractions within the past 5 years.

#### Section 5.07 Children's Ministry Programs

These procedures cover the activities in the Nursery/Children's Ministry areas of MRUMC. The Nursery Area is for children from birth up to 4 years old or at the discretion of the Director of Family Ministries. The Children's Area age is 4 years old through 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

- (a) All the requirements from Section 5.04: General Activity Procedures shall be observed.
- (b) Drop-off and Pick-up:
  - (i) All parents or custodians leaving children and staff and adult leaders working in the nursery / children's area shall follow these procedures to ensure proper claiming of children.
  - (ii) All parents or custodians are to complete a Nursery Care Card or Sunday School Registration Card for their children that shall be kept on file in the nursery or with the Director of Family Ministries. These cards will ask for the child's name, parent's or custodian's name, home address, and medical information, which should include allergies and medical conditions.
  - (iii) It is the responsibility of the parent or custodian to indicate to the nursery attendant and Director of Family Ministries if there are any custody concerns regarding the release of the child. In such cases, the parent will provide a copy of the custody order.



- (iv) The parent/custodian shall fill out the daily roster with his/her full name, the child's full name, and the parent/custodian's phone number. The same person who signed the child in shall sign them out when they leave unless another person is designated for sign-out at the time of sign-in. Picture identification may be required if the person picking up the child is unknown to the nursery attendant / children's leader
- (v) All parent / custodian cell phones should remain on vibrate in case the nursery attendant / children's leader should need to contact them.
- (c) Area Restrictions
  - (i) Only trained, assigned adult leaders or youth helpers will be allowed in the nursery or children's areas. No other individuals will be allowed in these areas without an identified need and the approval of the ministry/area supervisor.
  - (ii) No adult leader or youth helper may take a child to an unsupervised area.

#### Section 5.08 Youth Ministry Programs

These procedures cover the activities of the youth at Mills River United Methodist Church.

Youth are those persons in sixth grade through the summer after twelfth grade. Students who turn 18 years old before the end of the summer following graduation from high school remain classified as youth if they continue to participate in youth events.

- (a) All the requirements from Section 5.04: General Activity Procedures shall be observed.
- (b) Supervision of Youth
  - (i) Wherever possible a ratio of 1 adult leader to every 7 youth shall be maintained.
  - (ii) For the purposes of supervising youth, an adult leader is defined as anyone who is at least 23 years old. Anyone under the age of 23 must be screened and approved by the Senior Pastor, Director of Family Ministries, and the Lay Leader before assisting in youth ministries.
  - (iii) Responsibility Times for Youth Ministry Workers. The youth ministry assumes responsibility for supervision of youth from 15 minutes before a scheduled event until 15 minutes after a scheduled event. The youth ministry is not responsible for youth at times when no youth ministry offerings are scheduled and also not responsible for youth when youth are choosing not to participate in youth ministry offerings which are scheduled. Youth parents will be contacted to pick up their child if they choose not to participate.
- (c) Guidelines for Youth Counseling
  - (i) Same gender counseling is encouraged and preferred. However, ministry priorities and immediate circumstances may make same gender counseling unfeasible. When occasions for different gender counseling occur, an adult leader should follow the provisions of Section 5.05: Counseling and ensure a second adult leader is nearby to monitor.
  - (ii) Counseling in public or openly visible places shall be preferred whenever possible.
- (d) Boundaries with Youth
  - (i) The youth ministry has an interest in helping youth and adult leaders maintain appropriate boundaries. Adult leaders need to clearly communicate that they are invested in the well-being and spiritual growth of youth participants but are not "peers,"
  - (ii) Adult leaders under the age of 23 must take special care to maintain the distinction between themselves as leaders and youth as participants. Adult leaders under age 23 should never be alone with youth participants.

## Section 5.09 Overnight Activities

The following shall apply to activities which involve an overnight stay and are MRUMC sponsored and/or supervised whether on or off the MRUMC campus. (e.g. camping, lock-ins, mission trips, conferences/retreats, etc.)

- (a) All the requirements from Section 5.04: General Activity Procedures shall be observed.
- (b) Permission Slips
  - (i) A permission form (including medical and liability release) signed by a parent/guardian will be required for each vulnerable participant prior to the activity. These will be collected and approved by the group leader prior to the activity. Following the activity, the forms will be provided to the appropriate staff ministry leader.
  - (ii) All overnight or off-church-property activities sponsored by MRUMC require the prior approval of the staff ministry leader of the group in question.
- (c) Leaders shall provide parents or guardians with specific information regarding the schedule, sleeping arrangements, and emergency contact information.
- (d) Preferred Leader / Participant Ratios
  - (i) On-site overnight programs that involve children and youth will include ministry staff and adult leaders according to the following ratios:
    - Children in grades 1 and below will not be permitted to participate in on-site overnight activities
    - Children in grades 2-5: 2 adult leaders per 10 children
    - Youth: 2 adult leaders per 14 youth
  - (ii) Off-site programs that involve children and youth will include ministry staff and adult leaders according to the following ratios:
    - Children below grade 3 will not be permitted to participate in off-site overnight activities
    - Children in grades 3-5: 2 adult leaders per 10 children
    - Youth: 2 adult leaders per 14 youth
- (e) Rules of Conduct for Children/Youth Overnight Activities
  - (i) None of the children/youth will be allowed away from the designated overnight area without prior permission of the group leader and unless accompanied by 2 adult leaders.
  - (ii) No members of the opposite gender will be allowed to sleep in the same room.
  - (iii) No unrelated persons shall be allowed to share a bed.
  - (iv) Adults will not be allowed to sleep in the same bed with a child unless the child is their child and of the same gender.

## Section 5.10 Phone, Text, Internet and Social Media Contact

The following shall apply to all forms of contact and communication utilizing digital or telephonic means between volunteers and vulnerable persons:

- (a) Images and names of children, youth and vulnerable adults shall not be utilized on any website or application without the explicit consent of the parent/guardian and the vulnerable person in question.
- (b) Social media shall be utilized by all participants and leaders under the following minimum guidelines:
  - (i) Leaders shall never initiate a social media connection (friend, follower, link, etc.)
  - (ii) Leaders shall not call, text, or private message participants without the knowledge of their parents/guardians and only related to ministry area activities and information
  - (iii) Only those leaders designated by the staff ministry leader shall be permitted to take photo of ministry participants. Such photos shall not be distributed except by the consent requirements outlined above.
  - (iv) Leaders shall not make any social media post about the ministry or activity in which they are leading without the express consent and approval of the staff ministry area supervisor
- (c) Failure to comply with these guidelines shall be grounds for being asked to resign from leadership in a ministry area.

## Article VI. Reporting and Response

If an adult leader or volunteer observes or suspects a violation of this Safe Sanctuaries policy, these steps must be taken immediately.

### Section 6.01 Documentation and Reporting

- (a) Remember that you do not have to know for certain if a violation has occurred but are obligated legally and morally to exercise good judgment, care, concern, and support for vulnerable persons and their families.
- (b) All incidents—including accidents and suspected abuse—shall be documented in writing on the Report of Accident / Suspected Incident form and kept on file. This form is available from the church office or the staff ministry area leader.
- (c) In the event of an accident or injury, one copy of the Report of Accident / Suspected Incident form shall be given to the parent or guardian of the affected child, youth or vulnerable adult. The receiving party should sign a copy retained by the church for record keeping purposes
- (d) Should an allegation of abuse or misconduct be made against another person whether participant or adult leader, a report shall be made to the staff ministry area leader who shall report it to the Senior Pastor as soon as possible.
- (e) Should an allegation of abuse be made against a clergy member or staff person, a report shall be made to the chairperson of the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee as soon as possible.
- (f) All allegations of abuse or misconduct shall be reported to the required authorities per the requirements set forth in Section 6.02: Mandatory State Reporting below as well as the District Superintendent.
- (g) Confidentiality shall be maintained as much as possible concerning the circumstances of the incident.

- (h) Any organization using Mills River United Methodist Church facilities should also notify the Senior Pastor and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee as soon as possible about any incident or suspected incident of abuse involving any person affiliated with that organization while using the MRUMC facilities.

#### Section 6.02 Mandatory State Reporting

All reporting of alleged or actual incidents of child or vulnerable adult abuse must strictly follow North Carolina law.

- (a) Although there is no obligation for private citizens to report evidence of most crimes, North Carolina citizens have a legal duty to report in the following situations:
  - Suspected child abuse or neglect by a parent, guardian or caretaker *NC G.S. 7B-301(a)*
  - Suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult by their caretaker *NC G.S. 108A-2*
- (b) A leader who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred should secure the safety of the child, youth or vulnerable adult (if possible) and then immediately report the incident to appropriate law enforcement.
- (c) It is never the responsibility of a leader to investigate allegations of abuse.

#### Section 6.03 Response to an Accident or Suspected Incident of Abuse

- (a) All allegations will be taken seriously.
- (b) A quick, compassionate response to any alleged incident or abuse will be initiated at the direction of the Senior Pastor in consultation with the District Superintendent and the S/PPRC chairperson. The District Superintendent and the S/PPRC chairperson shall direct the response if the Senior Pastor is implicated.
- (c) Ensure the safety of the vulnerable person. Notify parents/guardians (if applicable) about the incident immediately.
- (d) The person suspected/implicated should be removed from further contact with the vulnerable person until a proper investigation has been performed.
- (e) The designated investigator should speak with the accuser, including the parents (unless parent(s) are the accused) with the Senior Pastor or S/PPRC chairperson present as a witness unless either is implicated. Then another adult leader may serve as a witness.
- (f) If it is reasonable suspected following the initial investigation that a violation has occurred, the investigator shall immediately notify necessary parties, including the Senior Pastor, the proper law enforcement and/or social services agencies, as well as the church's insurance liaison, if applicable, based upon the violation.
- (g) Pastoral care including counseling, access to resources, and support throughout the reporting and investigation process shall be offered to all parties involved.
- (h) Records of all steps taken by the church in response to the allegations shall be kept in a secure file accessible only by the Senior Pastor and S/PPRC chairperson unless either is implicated.

#### Section 6.04 Interactions with Media

In the event an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Senior Pastor and/or the District Superintendent. If approached by the

media, all other parties should direct questions to the Senior Pastor or District Superintendent and assist in identifying such contact information without comment.

## Article VII. Policy Review

A team comprised of representatives of age-level ministries, the Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee, Board of Trustees, and Finance Committee, as well as others whom they invite to participate in the team's work, shall be responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis for relevance and adherence to requirements established by the Western North Carolina Conference.