

# **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY FOR NEW PALTZ UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**Approved by NPUMC Administrative Council  
December 8, 2016**

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## PURPOSE

It is an important purpose of the members and staff of the New Paltz United Methodist Church (the “Church”) to provide a safe and secure environment for all who attend, participate in, and are entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage everyone to grow in their relationship with God and with one another.

A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our entire church family at the New Paltz United Methodist Church.

## SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising, directing, coordinating, teaching and/or assisting in the activities of our church.

## DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. **Child** for the purposes of this policy is any “preschooler,” “child,” “youth,” or “minor” and shall be defined as any individual under the age of eighteen (18).
2. **Adult** shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
3. **Vulnerable Adult** shall be defined as any adult that is reliant on others to meet their basic needs. For the purposes of this policy, all rules and guidelines that apply to working with children shall also apply to working with vulnerable adults.
4. **Worker** shall be defined as any adult who is given the responsibility of working with or caring for others. This includes Employee, Contractor, Coordinator, or Volunteer as defined below.
5. **Employee** for the purposes of this policy shall be anyone who is paid by the Church, whether full or part time.
6. **Contractor** for the purposes of this policy shall be anyone who is not an employee but who is paid by the Church to perform a service.
7. **Coordinator** for the purposes of this policy shall be anyone who works with participants in a supervisory capacity, such as Sunday School and program coordinators, administrators or superintendents, and the chairpersons of the Church committees that oversee those programs.
8. **Volunteer** for the purposes of this policy is anyone who teaches or is responsible for the care of others and is not a paid employee of the Church.
9. **Teenage Worker** shall be defined as any worker at least fourteen (14) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of minors.

10. **Participant** for the purposes of this policy is anyone who attends or is involved in the activities of this church and does not fall into one of the above designated roles.
11. **Child Abuse** shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a child as defined by NY state law.\*\*
12. **Abuse** shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse or neglect of an individual as defined by NY state law pertaining to Protection of People with Special Needs.\*\*
13. **Criminal Background Check** is the procedure used to perform a national check of the background of adult employees and volunteer workers for criminal activity.

\*\* On file at New Paltz United Methodist Church. New York State laws are available online at: <http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/menuf.cgi>  
Open the tab “Laws”, follow the link to “Laws of New York”, search for the corresponding law by category and number: Social Services 371; Family Court Act 1012; Social Services 488.

## **WORKER ENLISTMENT**

1. All employees of the Church will be required to complete an Employment Application Form, and Background Investigation Consent Form.
2. After an employment application is received, prior employment and volunteer service and personal references will be checked. At a minimum, personal references must be telephoned and a written memorandum be made of the contents of those telephone conversations, and prior employment and church service references will be contacted in writing.
3. All contractors of the Church that have direct involvement with the Church community will be required to sign the New Paltz UMC Safe Sanctuary Agreement form.
4. All outside organizations using the Church property will be required to sign a form acknowledging the Safe Sanctuary policy put in place for the Church. This acknowledgement will be included as part of the Church building usage form. Once on file, the acknowledgement must be renewed annually for organizations that continue to use the Church property.
5. All coordinators and volunteers (as defined above) working with children or vulnerable adults will be required to complete a Background Investigation Consent Form and a Safe Sanctuary Agreement Form. Once on file, the Safe Sanctuary Agreement Form will need to be renewed once a year; electronic yearly renewal via email will be sufficient once an initial signature is on file.
6. All coordinators and volunteers (as defined above) working in other capacities will be required to sign a Safe Sanctuary Agreement form acknowledging the Safe Sanctuary policy put in place for the Church. Once on file, the Safe Sanctuary

- Agreement Form will need to be renewed once a year; electronic yearly renewal via email will be sufficient once an initial signature is on file.
7. Upon approving new programs or events for the Church, the Administrative Council shall determine whether the coordinators and/or volunteers of that program will require background checks.
  8. Teenage Workers will be required to complete a Teen Volunteer Information Form.
  9. Any prospective worker who has been convicted of committing an act of sexual misconduct or abuse as revealed by a criminal background check will not be allowed to serve in any capacity where they would be responsible for the care of others unless an exception is made by the unanimous decision of the Confidential Screening Committee.
  10. Criminal background checks will be performed on each employee (as defined above) after the applicant has signed the Background Investigation Consent form, and prior to being enlisted as a worker. Criminal background checks will be performed on any volunteer worker working with children or vulnerable adults. Annual criminal background checks may be performed on employees and workers, randomly or as deemed necessary. After every five years a new criminal background check will be performed on any of the above who are still active.

To summarize, the following workers require Safe Sanctuary Agreement forms on file:

- All employees of the Church
- All contractors that have direct involvement with the Church community
- All outside organizations using Church property
- All coordinators and volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults
- All coordinators and volunteers working in other capacities
- All teenage workers (Teen Volunteer Form)

In addition, the following workers ALSO require completed criminal background checks:

- All employees of the Church
- All coordinators and volunteers working with children or vulnerable adults

## **GUIDELINES FOR SAFE MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH**

### ***The “Six Months Involvement Rule”***

The “Six Months Involvement Rule” requires that all coordinators and volunteers who work with children or vulnerable adults shall be involved with the Church for at least six months before they are placed in a position of responsibility.

### ***The “Two Adult Rule”***

The “Two Adult Rule” requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during a church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or vulnerable adults. Optimally, the two adults are unrelated and not living together (non-cohabitating).

### ***The “Five-Years Older Rule”***

Coordinators and volunteers should be a minimum of five years older than the oldest child under their supervision. Teens may help with programs but can not be counted towards the two adult minimum.

### ***Confidential Sessions with the Pastor***

If a child or vulnerable adult requests a confidential session with the pastor, the pastor will first inform a qualified person of the time and location of the meeting. A qualified person is a member of the Church that has been cleared with a background check.

### ***Release of Children from Events***

For events where children are dropped off and picked up, a system to identify the adults who may pick up the child shall be adopted.

### ***Windows in All Meeting Room Doors***

Each meeting room should have a door with a window in it or half door. Any meeting room doors without windows should remain open when the room is in use.

### ***Appropriate Equipment and Supervision***

All coordinators and volunteers should ensure safe operation of all equipment that is being used.

### ***Communication with Children***

The mission of this church is to reach all people and to bring them into relationship with each other and with God. To that end, the pastor, coordinators and volunteers may use all forms of communication including, but not limited to, email, Facebook, twitter, cell phones, etc. Parents/guardians shall be notified when a child’s contact information is received.

### ***Public Images of Children***

Pictures and videos of Church activities may be shared beyond the local Church. No image will be publicly posted that identifies a child by name. No image that identifies an adult will be publicly posted without permission.

### ***Off-Site Activities with Children***

Written permission from parents/guardians will be obtained for off-site Church activities with children.

### ***Drivers for Off-Site Activities***

Anyone driving participants other than their family members for church-related off-site activities must be 21 years old or older. All New York State driving laws must be adhered to.

### ***Church Building, Grounds, and Play Yard***

Parents/guardians are responsible for their children on church property unless the child has been placed into a church-sponsored program for children with a Coordinator or Volunteers present. The church play yard is for the use of Church and Playschool only. Children must be supervised by an adult when using the play yard.

### ***Confidentiality of Church Groups***

Each church group in which confidential information may be shared will establish its own guidelines regarding confidentiality. The Church strongly recommends, but does not mandate, that group guidelines allow members who receive information regarding potential harm or danger to others which they feel should be reported to the Confidential Screening Committee have the right to do so.

### ***Disclosure of Registered Sex Offenders***

The Sex Offender Registry will be accessed at least once a year and disclosed as part of the yearly Safe Sanctuary Orientation session for employees, coordinators, and volunteers. If a known registered sex offender attends worship, or participates in other activities of the Church, that person will be asked by the Pastor to self-disclose to the congregation. If refused, the Pastor will disclose this person to the congregation at their next attendance

## **POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS OF THE POLICY**

The following may be violations of this Policy and should be reported to the program Coordinator who will immediately consider and act on the issue as appropriate to ensure the health and safety of all participants. Any dangerous activity will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program of the Church or in the Church. All incidents must be reported by the Coordinator to the Pastor.

Dangerous activity includes but is not limited to:

- ❖ Any demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards anyone.
- ❖ Infliction of physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to anyone.
- ❖ Physical neglect of a child or vulnerable adult, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of the Church or in the Church.
- ❖ Mental or emotional injury to anyone.
- ❖ The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of the Church.
- ❖ The presence, possession, consumption of, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs while leading any function of the Church.
- ❖ The consumption of or being impaired by alcohol while leading any function of the Church.

## **ABUSE REPORTING**

The Church will offer training to those working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in listening for and recognizing abuse, as well as in understanding when a breach of confidence is required.

Workers should immediately go to the pastor if there is a suspicion of abuse. The pastor will work with the person reporting the situation to evaluate the incident and take appropriate action. In all instances, an Incident Reporting Form should be filled out to record the information. The Pastor will work with the Incident Reporting Team to handle the incident through closure.

In the event that the pastor is not available, or that the pastor is suspected of abusing someone, the worker should go to another member of the Incident Reporting Team (i.e. the Trustees President or the Administrative Council Chair) who will then immediately go to the District Superintendent to report the incident.

## **SAFE SANCTUARY OFFICER**

The Safe Sanctuary Officer oversees the implementation of this policy within the Church. Responsibilities include:

1. Member of the Confidential Screening Committee.
2. Convenes Confidential Screening Committee meetings.
3. Ensures forms and copies of this policy are available to the congregation and others requiring this information.
4. Ensures background checks are done.
5. Ensures orientation sessions are held.
6. Ensures User Groups have been contacted and Church building usage forms have appropriate Safe Sanctuary information.
7. Ensures Sex Offender registry is accessed at least once a year.

The Safe Sanctuary Officer is nominated by the Lay Leadership/Nominations Committee and elected by the All-Church Conference.

## **CONFIDENTIAL SCREENING COMMITTEE**

1. The Confidential Screening Committee is comprised of the Pastor, the Lay Leader, the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, and the Safe Sanctuary Officer.
2. Only members of the Confidential Screening Committee of the Church will have access to the criminal background check report. Each person being screened will be given a signed copy of the Church Privacy Statement disclosing the list of those officials who serve on the Confidential Screening Committee.
3. The screening committee may receive information about an applicant from a variety of sources, including background checks, self-disclosure, and observations of the committee members or others. The committee is responsible for holding information received in confidence. If they receive information from a private source about an applicant, they will not reveal that source.
4. The Confidential Screening Committee will inform the Staff Parish Relations Committee, the Committee on Lay Leadership or other appropriate individuals or committees if the applicants have been cleared.
5. Background check reports will be kept on file at NPUMC permanently.

## **INCIDENT REPORTING TEAM**

1. The Incident Reporting Team is comprised at a minimum of the Pastor, the Trustees President, and the Administrative Council Chair.
2. Other members can be assigned to this team if needed by the appointment of the Administrative Council.



3. If the Pastor is suspected of abuse, the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee will automatically replace the Pastor on the Incident Reporting Team for handling that incident.
4. The Incident Reporting Team will be responsible for:
  - a. Receiving and reviewing all Incident Report Forms
  - b. Ensuring all steps in the Checklist for Response to Allegations of Abuse are properly addressed
  - c. Proper closure of the incident
  - d. Forwarding all documents to the Confidential Screening Committee for filing after closure of the incident.

## **SAFE SANCTUARY ORIENTATION**

Once every three years, an information session on Safe Sanctuary will be provided to the Church. This may include review & discussion of the Church Safe Sanctuary policy, identification of the members of the confidential screening committee and reporting committee, and relevant information regarding safe sanctuary issues for the Church.

A yearly discussion will be held with children regarding safety issues. This may include discussions of private electronic communications, social networking, and concepts that may help the child to build an awareness of appropriate contact with adults. Other topics may include physical safety within the Church, and situations that may endanger the welfare of a child.

A yearly orientation session will be provided to Employees, Coordinators, and Volunteers. This will include a review and discussion of the Safe Sanctuary Policy, review of NYS laws, disclosure of all registered sex offenders in the local area, basic Church safety information (such as location of first-aid kits, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, emergency call lists, etc.), discussion of each person's role in implementing the Safe Sanctuary Policy, and the support available to help abide by these policies and guidelines. This orientation session would also be an appropriate opportunity to have all workers renew their Safe Sanctuary Agreement Forms on file.

## **INSURANCE**

The Church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that is available and would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the Church should have the levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

## **SUPPORTING FORMS**

Supporting forms for this policy are:

- Background Investigation Consent Form
- Church Privacy Statement
- Safe Sanctuary Agreement Form
- Teen Volunteer Form
- Checklist for Response to Allegation of Abuse
- Incident Reporting Form

The Church Trustees will be responsible for obtaining signed Safe Sanctuary Agreement Forms from all contractors that have direct contact with the Church community and outside groups that use the building.

Sunday School Superintendents will be responsible for giving the Safe Sanctuary Officer a list of all teachers and volunteers for all programs working with children.

The Church Administrative Council will be responsible for giving the Safe Sanctuary Officer a list of all program coordinators working with children or vulnerable adults, and any other program coordinators or volunteers they deem require Safe Sanctuary Agreements or background checks.

The Safe Sanctuary Officer is responsible for:

- a. Obtaining the following forms from coordinators, teachers, and volunteers received from the Sunday School Superintendents or the Administrative Council so that signed forms can be obtained and background checks completed prior to their working with children:
  - i. Safe Sanctuary Agreement Form
  - ii. Background Investigation Consent Form
- b. Obtaining signed Safe Sanctuary Agreement Forms from all other coordinators and volunteers.
- c. Encouraging all members of the congregation to have background checks performed so that their information can be on file for future participation in Church programs involving the care of others.
- d. Ensuring that everyone who fills out a Background Investigation Consent Form and for whom a background check is performed receives a signed copy of the Church Privacy Statement.

## **POLICY REVIEW AND MODIFICATION**

The Administrative Council is the owner of this policy. Changes to the policy may be proposed from the floor at an Administrative Council Meeting. Future changes to the policy should be addressed by a sub-committee appointed by the Administrative Council. This policy should be reviewed and re-evaluated following any significant changes that may occur in the Church or its programs, especially those involving children, or whenever the Administrative Council deems necessary.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our Church desires to be a “Safe Sanctuary” for all people through the implementation of the above policy. This policy will be constantly evolving to meet the needs and demands of our Church. Adoption of these provisions enables the Church to provide a more safe and secure environment for our entire Church family and its guests.