

SAFE SANCTUARIES® - THE MINIMUM STANDARDS (revised 2025)

The Minimum Standards set forth below have been established by the Upper New York Annual Conference for all ministries. They are mandatory. They are not inspiration, but set minimum standards to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. Without exception, these standards apply to all local churches/charges, district and annual conference ministries, and those who serve within.

A vulnerable adult is someone aged 18 and over; who due to age, illness or a mental or physical condition, is less able to take care or protect themselves against harm or exploitation; including but not limited to physical and sexual abuse, neglect by self or others, financial or material exploitation, emotional or psychological mistreatment. Vulnerable adults are also those adults who work with children and youth who can be in a position where accusations of abuse could mistakenly arise; or adults who have been abused either as a child or an adult.

Minimum Reasonable Safety Standards in Recruiting, Screening and Selecting Workers

1. Recruiting Workers

- a. A written position description that includes the essential functions of the job shall provide for positions in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- b. Interested workers shall complete and application that includes identification, address, employment history for the past five (5) years, volunteer work during the past five (5) years, experiences and skills specifically related to the position, prior church membership (if any), personal references (not related to the applicant) with complete address and contact information, waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church/charge caused by the references' responses, certification that the information provided is true and correct, voluntary disclosure of past criminal convictions, and authorization to conduct a criminal background check.

2. Screen workers

- a. References provided by the applicant shall be checked by the pastor or a designated Safe Sanctuaries committee/team member. The reference check shall include questions about the applicant's ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults (depending on ministry) and leadership ability.
- b. A personal interview shall be conducted.
- c. A criminal background check and state central child abuse registry shall be authorized by and completed for all clergy in any active status or relationship with the Conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions, as well as paid workers, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children,

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youth, and vulnerable adults. The criminal background check shall be performed after every two (2) years of service and at the beginning of service and after a break in service of one or more years. Background check results shall be kept in a secure manner.

3. Adult volunteers shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church/charge for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

4. Selecting Workers

- a. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
- b. In the event that the criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern, the pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.
- c. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as a perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity or setting.

Procedures for Conducting Ministry Programs and Events for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.

1. Adult staff, volunteers, and clergy shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth or vulnerable adults at a church/charge, district or conference sponsored event or activity. The two-adult rule requires that regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. No child, youth, or vulnerable adults shall be left unsupervised while attending a ministry program or event.
2. Adult staff and volunteers are those who are at least 18 years and who are at least five (5) years older than the oldest minor present, whom they are leading, ministering to or supervising. Youth (those ages 13-17) are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for the “two-adult rule”.
3. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.
4. All adult staff, volunteers and clergy working with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of the applicable local church/charge, district or conference ministry or program Safe

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Sanctuaries® Policy before starting their service and shall agree to convent with the (local) United Methodist Church, District or Conference ministry or program to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies.

5. All ministry activities shall occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry events occur must be open to public view. This may require enclosed spaces such as classrooms having a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a half door configuration or an open door.
6. Attendance records shall be kept for all ministry events/activities involving children and youth. These records shall include at a minimum, the date and names of all participants and shall be kept until Jesus returns (perpetuity).
7. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require a written permission slip/form and signed by a parent/guardian. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21 years of age. The ministry supervisor shall be required to keep a copy of their current license and proof of insurance card on file with the appropriate ministry program (i.e., church/charge, district, conference ministry).
8. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the participants.
9. Every clergy in any active status or relationship with the conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders' registries maintained by New York State law enforcement agencies.

This is done by accessing:

New York: http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/SomsSUBDirectory/search_index.jsp

PA: <http://www.pameganslaw.state.pa.us/EntryPage.aspx?returnURL=~/SearchCounty.aspx>

1. "Social media are tools whereby effective and fruitful ministry may grow and be nurtured. Although these tools can aid us and increase the scope of contact and connection as well as the breadth of people who may be touched by our ministry offerings, social media cannot be the source or foundation of ministry. Our foundation is Jesus Christ. Social media platforms are creations of human ingenuity that provide for us one more way to express and proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are called to use social media with care, consideration, intentionality, and a Christ-like spirit." Safe Sanctuaries in a Virtual World, Joy Thornburg Melton and Michelle L. Foster, Discipleship, Resources, Nashville, TN, 2014. Social Media guidelines should be reviewed at:

http://gbod-ssets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kinterafiles/safesanctuaries/SafeSanctuaries_SAMPLESocialMediaGuidelines1.pdf

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EDUCATION

- (1) All adults who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be Safe Sanctuaries® trained, through the Upper New York Safe Sanctuaries training program.
- (2) The Upper New York Conference has made available the mandatory training program that will assist each charge, district, agency, and ministry to fulfill the covenant to “educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods.” (2011 Safe Sanctuaries® Resolution)
- (3) All adults who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will have an annual orientation that includes but is not limited to the church/ministry Safe Sanctuaries® policies and procedures as it applies to the ministry/event.
- (4) All adults, clergy and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults MUST retake the mandatory UNY Basic training every 5 years.

REPORTING AND RESPONSE

Reporting

Reporting shall be required by any staff or volunteer that personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to staff or a volunteer by a third party and/or when a child, youth, or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate, and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

- (a) The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse shall be required to report the incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the person in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving the information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall **immediately** call:

1. New York State Child Protective Services Hotline: (800) 342-3720
2. Pennsylvania State Child Protective Service Hotline: (800) 932-0313
3. New York State Justice Center Vulnerable Adults Hotline: (855) 373-2122
4. NYS Office of Children and Family Services Adult Abuse Hotline: (844) 697-3505

Identification information for the alleged victim and the adult responsible for their care is required for the report. The pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of the report. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and their address and family information.

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- (b) If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of their family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the district superintendent. The district superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph 1 above. The district superintendent shall take responsibility and act according to the established rules in *The Book of Discipline* with respect to claims against the pastor. If the district superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the bishop's office.
- (c) Every clergy in any active status or relationship with the conference whose appointment is set or approved by the bishop, every person serving as a supply pastor (assigned by the district superintendent) and retired clergy performing ministerial functions are included in mandatory reporting as required by *The Book of Discipline*.¹
- (d) After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastor shall report the incident immediately to the district superintendent. If the district superintendent is not available, the incident shall be reported to the bishop's office.
- (e) The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the church/charge in response to the reported abuse. The report should be kept brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. This report should be kept in a secure place. It should be written or typed to prevent it from being changed.
- (f) **NEVER** discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the church/conference and community.

Response Plan

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations shall be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

- (1) All media requests for statements shall be directed to the Annual Conference director of communications.
- (2) Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed.

¹ The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church ¶341.5, All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law.

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Remember that the care and safety of the victim is **FIRST** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.

(3) Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and advise the accused that there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegation of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff member or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities or both.

(4) When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer /activities with children, youth and vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with *The Book of Discipline*.

(5) Notify the parents/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well-being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult until the parent(s)/guardian(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both parent/guardian is the alleged abuser follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

(6) The church/charge shall provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing may take place.

