

# Mount Zion United Methodist Church

## Safe Sanctuaries Policy

The Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to ensuring that all children and youth, staff and volunteers involved in local church or annual conference ministries are provided with a safe and secure environment. In 2008, Mount Zion formed a task force to develop a safe sanctuaries plan using the United Methodist-recommended book *Safe Sanctuaries* by Joy Melton.

The following plan reflects Mount Zion's commitment to do everything possible to protect our children, youth, and adults from harm.

### General Policies

**Two Adult Rule --** Mount Zion will endeavor to have at least two unrelated adults who have been satisfactorily screened working with our children and youth at all times. If an occasion arises when only one screened adult is available to supervise children, the Director(s) of Children's Ministries and Youth Ministries will take steps to address the situation, such as combining two classes or pulling in an adult from a Sunday school class. Furthermore, if it is not possible to assign two unrelated adults, one adult and one unrelated high school youth may be used (e.g., the nursery). The Director(s) of Children's Ministries and Youth Ministries may allow exceptions to this policy, based on their best judgment, and are responsible for monitoring such situations.

**Age Restrictions –** No one under 18 years old will be solely responsible for supervising children. All those working with children/youth will be at least five years older than those in the group they are overseeing.

**First Aid/ CPR Training –** Mount Zion will ensure that appropriate staff members working with children or youth are trained and certified in First Aid/CPR. A certified staff member or volunteer should be on hand during all church and children/youth functions. A list of certified staff members and volunteers will be posted in the church office in case of emergency.

**Orientation –** All those working with children/youth will receive an orientation and training on Mount Zion's safe sanctuaries policies and procedures.

**Space Requirements –** All meetings, classes, or other activities involving children, youth, or adults will be located in rooms with a window in the door.

**Parent and Family Education –** Mount Zion will provide information about the Safe Sanctuaries policy to parents of children and youth participating in church activities.

**Bathroom Use –** Children in preschool, kindergarten and first grade must be accompanied to the restroom by one of their teachers, who will wait outside with the door open. Children in second through fifth grade may go to the restroom by themselves since the restrooms are in close proximity to the classrooms. Teachers will monitor bathroom visits by the older children.

**Arrival and Dismissal –** All children in the nursery must be signed in and out by a parent or adult caretaker. All children in preschool through fifth grade should be dropped off for Sunday school by a parent or adult caretaker. Parents are strongly encouraged to pick up their children from Sunday school so that they are not allowed to roam the halls on their own.

**New Volunteers –** Adult volunteers working with children or youth must be members or regular attendees of Mount Zion for at least six months before starting a volunteer assignment or be paired with an experienced volunteer or staff member for six months.

**Day Trips** – At least two of the drivers for day trips must meet the criteria for Designated Drivers listed below. Parents or other responsible adults between the ages of 24 and 74 may also serve as drivers for youth day trips without undergoing background or driver record checks. Parents will be asked to give permission for such arrangements on the annual Youth Ministry Permission and Liability Form.

### **Overnight Trips**

- All participants (children, youth and adults) attending any overnight field trips, activities, or retreats off church premises should follow the policies listed above.
- For each off-premises activity, parents of participating children and youth will be required to sign a permission slip that includes the event name, location, date(s), insurance information, release of liability, and photo release. The permission slip will also indicate the type of adult supervision to be expected, rules and guidelines for participants, and consequences of broken rules, including parental responsibility in the event of said consequences.
- Adult drivers must be between the ages of 24 and 74 and meet the criteria listed below under Designated Drivers.
- Driver's vehicle must have a working seatbelt for each participant being transported.
- For overnight stays, the following will apply:
  - Two same-gendered adults with cleared background checks may stay in the same sleeping room with more than two children or youth of the same gender.
  - Same-gendered adults may have their own sleeping room and children and youth may have their own room, provided the rooms are on the same floor (such as in a hotel) or connected to each other (such as in a retreat center).
  - At no time is an adult permitted to be alone in a sleeping room with an unrelated child or youth.
  - Male and female youth are allowed in each other's sleeping rooms from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. only, as long as the door remains wide open. If anyone other than the occupants of the room is in the room, then the door must also remain open.

**Insurance** – The Mount Zion Trustees will ensure that the church has adequate insurance in the event of a legal action involving the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

**Other Groups** – All other groups that use the church facilities will agree to and abide by these policies or to policies followed according to Maryland licensing guidelines. This includes the Mt. Zion Christian Preschool, Boy Scouts, and Seventh Day Adventist congregation.

## **Safe Sanctuary Procedures**

### **Recruiting, Screening, and Hiring**

Regular volunteer staff will be required to complete or provide the following forms:

- Participation Covenant (annually)
- Background Check Permission Form
- Sexual Misconduct Form provided by the Baltimore-Washington Conference, including personal references (annually)

Occasional workers, such as VBS volunteers, preschool parents, and field trip chaperones will be required to complete the following forms:

- Participation Covenant (annually)

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- Sexual Misconduct Form provided by the Baltimore-Washington Conference, including personal references (annually)
- These adults are not permitted to be alone with the children; a person who has been background-checked will always be present.

Designated Drivers – Any paid staff member or volunteer who drives children or youth for a Mount Zion program or activity as defined above must meet the following requirements:

- 24 -74 years of age
- Valid U.S. driver's license
- Proof of current auto insurance coverage
- Sexual Misconduct Form (completed annually)
- Background check including driving record (completed every two years).

**Driving Record Check** – If a driving record check reveals evidence of reckless driving (i.e., numerous moving violations) or driving under the influence (DUI) during the past ten years, the person will not be approved as a designated driver. In case of lesser violations, the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) will make a determination as to the appropriate course of action.

### **Background Checks**

Background checks (including driving record checks) will be performed every two years on all adult volunteers regularly working in ministry with children or youth. An adult in this context is an individual who is 18 years of age or older. The SPRC will be responsible for conducting the background investigations and keeping all information confidential.

In order for Mount Zion to conduct a background investigation, the individual must complete the Background Check Permission Form and Sexual Misconduct Form.

First Advantage (hereinafter “FA”) is the company used by Mount Zion to obtain background information. FA researches the databases of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Criminal Justice Investigation Service (CJIS) to determine whether there is information about an individual having engaged in criminal activity.

The SPRC is primarily interested in safeguarding children and youth participating in (1) church-sponsored activities or (2) activities occurring on Mount Zion's premises.

At most, two SPRC members will be designated to receive background investigation applications from volunteers. These two members will use the FA web-based tools to run background checks and review the reports generated. A copy of all reports will be made available to the Lead Pastor and to the SPRC Chair. If the report indicates that there was criminal activity not related to sexual behavior, a decision will be made by the Lead Pastor and the SPRC Chair as to whether the individual will be approved to work in ministry with children or youth.

The designated SPRC representatives will maintain an up-to-date list of all volunteers who have had background checks. Approvals will be valid for a period of two years.

The Lead Pastor or the SPRC Chair will inform the church committee chair or team leader of the group requesting the background check in the event that the individual is not approved to supervise children or youth.

Upon request, any applicant will be provided a copy of his or her background report, including those applicants whose reports indicated criminal activity.

The SPRC Chair will maintain a confidential file of all documents related to background investigations (including the Participation Covenant, Background Check Permission Form, Sexual Misconduct Form, and completed background

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check reports) in a locked file cabinet drawer. Only the Lead Pastor, the SPRC Chair, and the two designated SPRC members will have access to this drawer; the key to the drawer will be kept in a secure location in the Lead Pastor's office.

Completed applications will be placed in a locked box in the church's front office. Only the two SPRC members designated to run background security checks and the Lead Pastor will have keys to the locked box.

Mount Zion will ensure that the background checks are conducted in as safe an environment as possible due to the sensitive nature of the information.

### **Response to Allegations of Abuse**

Maryland child abuse law requires that anyone who suspects a child or youth is being abused or mistreated must report the matter to the Howard County Department of Social Services or Police. Consequently, if an incident is reported to the Lead Pastor or Director(s) of Children's Ministries and Youth Ministries, it must be reported. This information will be immediately told to the person reporting abuse.

If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the Lead Pastor or designee (If the accused is the Lead Pastor, see below).

The following steps must be taken:

- Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child or youth, as the situation requires.
- IMMEDIATELY contact the Lead Pastor or pastor on call.
- IMMEDIATELY notify the immediate supervisor or adult in charge of the event. This person will:
  - Provide written documentation concerning the incident on the child abuse report form within 48 hours.
  - Notify the Howard County Department of Social Services. This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
  - Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
  - Give the written documentation to the Lead Pastor and/or SPRC chair.
- The Lead Pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
- After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to Mount Zion's legal representative and insurance company and to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the bishop's office. Do not try to handle this situation without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member (deacon, elder) of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church must be followed.
- A list of emergency numbers will be provided to staff and volunteer leaders, posted in the church office, on bulletin boards, and in the Youth Center.
- If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.

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- Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the Lead Pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff person of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, follow the SPRC policies for an immediate leave of absence.
- Any contact with the media should be handled by the SPRC chair or designee. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- The written child abuse report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure ongoing ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It will be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be preserved in a format which does not allow it to be changed (e.g., Read Only). The church must also file a copy of the report with the Baltimore Washington Conference where it shall remain confidential.

**Revised and Approved by SPRC: October 16, 2018**

**Revised and Approved by Church Council: October 23, 2018**

**Next Update: 2022**

**Appendix A:**

**Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant Statement**

The congregation of Mount Zion United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. Anyone who has been convicted of any type of abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse) **will not** be allowed to volunteer to work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers working with children or youth must be members or regular attendees of Mount Zion for at least six months before starting a volunteer assignment or be paired with an experienced volunteer or staff member for six months
3. Adult volunteers working with children and youth will observe the “Two Adult Rule,” so that no adult is left alone with children or youth on a routine basis.
4. Adult volunteers working with children or youth will review the Mount Zion Safe Sanctuaries Policy annually and complete and sign this covenant.
5. Adult volunteers will immediately report to their ministry leader any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

**Please answer the following questions:**

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?  Yes  No
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe the “Two Adults Rule”?  Yes  No
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by the “Six Month Rule” before beginning a volunteer assignment?  Yes  No
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?  Yes  No
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to give permission for a background check, if required?  Yes  No
6. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor(s)?  Yes  No
7. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform a pastor of this church if you are convicted or have ever been convicted of child abuse?  Yes  No

I have read this Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant Statement, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

_____	_____	_____
Email	Signature	Date
	_____	
	Print Name	
	_____	
	Street Address	
	_____	_____
	City	State
		Zip

**Appendix B:**

**Mount Zion United Methodist Church  
Sexual Misconduct Form**

(Please check the appropriate box. If more space is needed, please use an additional sheet of paper.)

1. Have you ever filled out this questionnaire for this church or agency?  Yes  No  
If no, please answer questions 2 through 9 below. If yes, give the date: \_\_\_\_\_

Have any answers changed since you filled out that copy?  Yes  No  
If no, please sign and return this form. If yes or you are unsure, please answer questions 2 through 9 below.

2. Have you ever been accused, in a written and signed statement, of sexual misconduct with a child or a youth?  
 Yes  No

3. Have you ever been accused, in a written and signed statement, of sexual misconduct with an adult?  Yes  No

4. Have you ever been dismissed from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of accusations of sexual misconduct on your part?  Yes  No

5. Have you ever resigned from any position, volunteer or salaried, because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part or to avoid being dismissed because of an accusation of sexual misconduct on your part?  Yes  No

6. If your response to any of the foregoing questions (2 through 5) is "yes," please provide on a separate sheet of paper all details regarding each accusation of sexual misconduct that has been made with respect to you, including a description of the alleged conduct, the name of the person who made the accusation, the date of the alleged misconduct, and the name of your employer at the time of the alleged misconduct.

7. Have accusations of sexual misconduct on your part ever resulted in civil or criminal court proceedings at any level (e.g., indictment, arrest, trial etc.)?  Yes  No

If yes, please provide the complete details of those proceedings (including dates, circumstances, the jurisdiction where the proceeding occurred, the nature of the accusations, and the result of the proceedings) on a separate sheet of paper.

8. Have accusations of sexual misconduct against you resulted in civil or criminal court proceedings on more than one occasion?  Yes  No

9. Other than the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of young people?  Yes  No

10. Please provide three adult references (names, addresses, phone numbers) of persons who are not related to you by blood, marriage, or other family relationship and are not employed or supervised by you, who can, to the best of their ability, provide statements in support of your good character and clean record in regard to sexual misconduct with children, youth, and adults.

Name	Address	Phone
1. _____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____



### QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE FORM

*(To be signed by all laypersons and unappointed clergy who work with children or youth within the local church or a Conference agency. If under 18, a parent or guardian must also sign.)*

I verify that the answers I have provided on this Questionnaire are true and accurate to the best of my ability. I understand that false answers, as well as the failure to sign this Response Form, will result in my being denied the position for which I am being considered.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please print your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_



**Appendix D: Child Abuse Report Form**

**See State of Maryland – Child Protective Services  
REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT**