

**UNITED METHODIST MINISTRIES OF MECOSTA COUNTY
ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY**

INTRODUCTION

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and physical abuse. God calls us to communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County is committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for all individuals, including children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers. This Abuse Prevention Policy is designed to outline guidelines, procedures, and expectations to prevent any form of abuse within our community and ensure the well-being of all participants at our campuses and within our ministries and programs.

To that end, we make the following commitments:

- We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting staff and volunteers.
- We will maintain appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care.
- We will provide appropriate training to staff and volunteers that engage with vulnerable persons.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting suspected incidents of abuse consistent with state law.

DEFINITIONS

- Abuse: Intentional and harmful behavior or mistreatment of individuals, often involving actions that cause physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Abuse can manifest in various forms. The key types of abuse include:
 - Physical Abuse: Involves the use of force, violence, or physical actions that result in bodily harm, pain, or injury to another person.
 - Emotional or Psychological Abuse: Includes behaviors that inflict emotional distress, mental anguish, or psychological harm. This may involve verbal abuse, manipulation, intimidation, or other tactics that negatively impact a person's mental well-being.
 - Sexual Abuse: Encompasses non-consensual sexual activities, coercion, or any form of sexual exploitation that causes harm to the victim.
 - Neglect: Refers to the failure to provide necessary care, attention, or support, leading to the physical, emotional, or developmental harm of an individual.
- Vulnerable Person: Any individual who, due to their age, physical or mental condition, or other factors, may be at a higher risk of experiencing abuse, neglect, or harm. Factors include, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Age: Children and elderly individuals are often considered vulnerable due to their dependency on others for care and protection.

- 55 ○ Physical or Mental Condition: Individuals with physical or mental disabilities, impairments,
56 or conditions that may limit their ability to protect themselves or recognize and report
57 abuse are often classified as vulnerable.
- 58
- 59 ○ Dependence on Others: Anyone who relies on others for care, support, or assistance in
60 daily activities may be considered vulnerable. This can include individuals in healthcare
61 settings, residential facilities, or those under the care of others.
- 62
- 63 ○ Power Imbalance: Vulnerability may also arise in situations where there is a significant
64 power imbalance, such as in relationships where one person has authority or control over
65 another.
- 66
- 67 ● Mandatory Reporter: Any individual who is legally required to report suspicions or incidents of
68 abuse, neglect, or harm to relevant authorities. The obligation to report is typically mandated by
69 law and applies to certain professionals and individuals who, due to their roles, have frequent
70 contact with vulnerable populations.
- 71
- 72 ○ Common categories of mandatory reporters include healthcare professionals (doctors,
73 nurses), educators (teachers, school staff), social workers, law enforcement personnel,
74 childcare providers, clergy, and other professionals who work closely with vulnerable
75 populations.
- 76
- 77 ● Staff: Staff members receive compensation for their services, which may include a salary, hourly
78 wages, benefits, and other perks as outlined in their employment contract.
- 79
- 80 ● Volunteer: Volunteers do not receive a salary or wages for their contributions. Their involvement
81 is based on a willingness to contribute to a cause or organization.
- 82
- 83 ● Adult: (Michigan.gov) For most purposes, you become an adult when you turn 18, an age
84 established by The Age of Majority Act. If someone under the age of 18 is emancipated, they are
85 legally an adult. Emancipation is the legal process where a child between the ages of 16 and 18
86 becomes free from the control of his/her parents or legal guardian.
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89 **RECRUITING, SCREENING AND HIRING STAFF / VOLUNTEERS**

- 90
- 91 ● Candidates for staff positions will complete an application for employment, provide three
92 references and submit to a State of Michigan background check. Those persons recently living in
93 another state will submit to an FBI Criminal record check and/or appropriate State background
94 check. Criminal background checks will be completed prior to beginning employment at the
95 church.
- 96
- 97 ● Volunteers will provide basic information regarding their legal name, address, phone number and
98 email to the church office, and review / update this information on an annual basis.
- 99
- 100 ● Criminal background checks will be completed annually on all staff and volunteers who serve
101 directly with children, youth, and vulnerable adult populations. These will remain confidential
102 except where there is a duty to inform. These will be stored in a secure location and only
103 authorized individuals will be allowed to access the information.
- 104
- 105 ● Staff and volunteers who serve directly with children, youth, and vulnerable adult populations, will
106 attend and document attendance at, an abuse prevention training event every two years. Training
107 can be online or in person, provided that it's offered by someone with skills or experience in
108 understanding State laws and reporting requirements relating to prevention of abuse. Online

- 109 abuse prevention training must be approved by the Director of Family Ministry or the Pastor prior
110 to acceptance.
111
- 112 • Staff and volunteers will review, and document review, of this policy no less frequently than every
113 two years.
114

115 PROCEDURES FOR BUILDING SAFETY

- 117 • At least two adults will be in any classroom, office, or gathering space where children and youth
118 are present. These adults will not be married to each other, cohabiting with each other, or related
119 to one another.
120
 - 121 ○ *Alternative:* One adult in any classroom or gathering space with an adult floater checking
122 on all classrooms throughout the gathering time. All doors will be left open if only one
123 adult is present.
124
- 125 • All doors to classrooms, offices, gathering spaces shall have windows allowing for observation.
126
- 127 • There will be no person in authority less than 18 years of age and there must be a five-year gap
128 between a volunteer and any children / youth in attendance at the event.
129
- 130 • A sign in and out procedure will be in place for children under the care of nursery volunteers or at
131 any event / activities outside of the Sunday morning worship experience.
132
- 133 • Children and youth may use the kitchen only with appropriate adult supervision.
134
- 135 • Preschool children may be assisted in the bathroom by an adult only if doors are left open.
136
- 137 • School aged children will be accompanied by an adult to the bathroom and the adult will wait
138 outside the bathroom.
139
- 140 • Overnight Activities:
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 - 142 ○ The church is committed to creating an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment. All
143 individuals, regardless of gender identity, expression, or any other characteristic, are
144 welcome and respected.
145
 - 146 ○ Accommodations for overnight activities will be provided in a manner that respects the
147 privacy and dignity of all participants. Sleeping arrangements and facilities will be
148 organized to ensure the comfort and safety of vulnerable persons and take into account
149 any specific needs or requests related to gender identity.
150
 - 151 ○ Respecting the privacy of individuals, especially non-binary and transgender participants,
152 is of utmost importance. Personal information related to gender identity will be treated
153 confidentially, and disclosure will only occur on a need-to-know basis for accommodation
154 purposes.
155
 - 156 ○ All staff and volunteers involved in organizing and supervising overnight activities will
157 receive training on creating a safe and inclusive environment. This includes awareness of
158 the diverse identities and needs of participants, with specific emphasis on understanding
159 and respecting non-binary and transgender individuals.
160
 - 161 ○ General Guidelines for Overnight Activities:
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- 164 ▪ In settings with multiple beds or sleeping bags in a room, adults are to be the
165 same biological gender as the students they are chaperoning.
- 166
- 167 ▪ Adults of the same gender will be in rooms on the same floor.
- 168
- 169 ▪ Two adults of the same gender will be required to be present for overnight
170 activities. If an overnight includes boys and girls, at least four adults must be
171 present, two biological females and two biological males.
- 172
- 173 ▪ Youth are required to have access to private dressing areas.
- 174
- 175 ▪ Adults will not place themselves in a position where they cannot be observed.
176 Adults will avoid physical contact or other displays of affection that could be
177 misunderstood or encroach on someone's personal space.
- 178
- 179 ▪ Overnight sleeping situations with transgender / non-binary youth will be
180 considered on a case-by-case basis after discussion between the parents and
181 pastor, and will adhere to the values named in this policy.
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184 **DISCIPLINE POLICY**

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186 If a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is disrupting a class or event, one care provider will initiate this policy
187 as the other care provider continues with the activity:

- 188
- 189 • Move over by the person or sit next to the child. Ask the child questions pertaining to the material
190 or activity or why they are struggling.
- 191
- 192 • Gently remind the person of the expected behavior.
- 193
- 194 • Give the person an opportunity to regroup and refocus away from the group, but in the same
195 room.
- 196
- 197 • The child, youth, or vulnerable adult may be reunited with the group after the above have been
198 tried.
- 199
- 200 • The care provider, teacher or leader may choose to contact the parent either immediately or upon
201 sign out.
- 202
- 203 • Corporal punishment is never appropriate.
- 204
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208 **MANDATORY REPORTING**

- 209
- 210 • In Michigan, the mandatory reporting requirements are outlined in the Child Protection Law (MCL
211 722.621 et seq.) and pertain to the reporting of abuse and neglect of vulnerable persons. The law
212 designates certain professionals as mandated reporters who are required to report known or
213 suspected cases of abuse or neglect of vulnerable persons.
- 214
- 215 • Professionals who have regular contact with children in the course of their duties are mandated
216 reporters. This includes but is not limited to clergy, teachers, medical professionals, law
217 enforcement, social workers, and childcare provider.
- 218

- 219 • Mandated reporters are required to report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect.
220 This includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, or emotional abuse.
221
- 222 • Reporting Process: Reports should be made immediately to the Michigan Department of Health
223 and Human Services (MDHHS) or the local law enforcement agency. Mandated reporters may be
224 required to provide their names to authorities when making a report.
225
- 226 Mandated reporters are protected from civil or criminal liability as a result of making a good-faith
227 report of child abuse or neglect.
228
- 229 Failure to report known or suspected child abuse or neglect as a mandated reporter may result in
230 penalties, including fines or imprisonment.
231
- 232 Reporting the suspected allegations of child abuse and/or neglect to the head of the organization
233 does not fulfill the requirement to report directly to DHHS.
234
- 235 The verbal report must be completed by calling 855-444-3911.
236
- 237 The individual who had contact with the child must make the report and provide as much detail as
238 possible about the following information:
 - 239 • The child's primary caretaker, including name and address
 - 240 • Names and birth dates for all members of the household
 - 241 • Name and birth date of the alleged perpetrator(s)
 - 242 • Whether the alleged perpetrator lives with the child
 - 243 • Address where the alleged abuse or neglect occurred
 - 244 • What makes the mandated reporter suspect the child is being abused or neglected
245
- 246 MDHHS encourages the use of the Report of Actual or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect (DHS-
247 3200) form when filing the written report, which includes all the information required under the
248 law. If more than one mandated reporter suspects child abuse or neglect based on the same
249 incident, they may submit just one DHS-3200 form. Additional information about mandated
250 reporting and DHS-3200 can be found online at [https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-
251 serv/abuse-neglect/childrens/mandated-reporters](https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/abuse-neglect/childrens/mandated-reporters) .
252
- 253 • Paid staff and volunteers that are mandatory reporters must notify the Pastor if such knowledge
254 was provided on church property or the event occurred on church property or at a church
255 sponsored event.
256
- 257 • Matters of known or suspected abuse or neglect are to be kept confidential, except as required by
258 law or to assist appropriate agencies in their investigations. The incident is not to be discussed
259 with persons other than those involved in the reporting.
260
- 261 • If allegations involved the pastor or a staff member, the above procedures will be followed, the
262 incident will be reported to the Leadership Team Chair, and the procedural requirements of the
263 most current Book of Discipline will be followed.
264
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266 **VEHICLE / DRIVING PROCEDURES**

- 267 • Church Owned Vehicles
- 268
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- 270 ○ Drivers must hold a current and valid drivers' license.
- 271
- 272 ○ Drivers must be at least 25 years of age.
273

- 274 ○ There will be two adults in each vehicle and records of passengers will be kept.
- 275
- 276 ○ All vehicle occupants must use restraint devices as required by state law.
- 277
- 278 ● Personal Vehicles
- 279
- 280 ○ Drivers must hold a current and valid drivers' license.
- 281
- 282 ○ Drivers must be at least 25 years of age.
- 283
- 284 ○ Youth (15 – 17) may never drive other youth.
- 285
- 286 ○ There will be two adults in each vehicle.
- 287
- 288 ○ All vehicle occupants must use restraint devices as required by state law.
- 289
- 290 ● Youth Driving
- 291
- 292 ○ Youth (15 – 17) are never to drive other youth. Parents may allow a youth to drive to a
- 293 church or event.
- 294
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296 **SEX OFFENDER / VIOLENT OFFENDER ENGAGEMENT WITH VULNERABLE PERSONS**

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- 298 ● UMMMC is committed to creating a safe and secure environment for all individuals, especially
- 299 vulnerable populations, participating in church activities and programs. This policy establishes a
- 300 clear prohibition on the engagement of individuals with a history of violent offenses or sex
- 301 offenses in roles that involve direct interaction with vulnerable populations.
- 302
- 303 ○ Individuals with a history of violent offenses, including but not limited to assault, battery,
- 304 domestic violence, or any other acts causing physical harm, are strictly prohibited from
- 305 working in roles that involve direct interaction with vulnerable populations.
- 306
- 307 ○ Individuals with a history of sex offenses, including but not limited to sexual assault,
- 308 molestation, or any other sexually predatory behavior, are strictly prohibited from working
- 309 in roles that involve direct interaction with vulnerable populations, and are prohibited from
- 310 holding leadership roles within the congregation.
- 311
- 312 ○ Individuals with a history of violent or sex offenses may only participate in a
- 313 predetermined service each week, and will not be allowed to attend any social functions.
- 314
- 315 ● The statements below outline the obligations and responsibilities of sex offenders under Michigan
- 316 law regarding the duty to inform churches. The purpose is to ensure the safety and well-being of
- 317 the congregation members and the community at large.
- 318
- 319 ○ All individuals designated as sex offenders under Michigan law must comply with the duty
- 320 to inform churches of their presence within the community.
- 321
- 322 ○ Sex offenders are required to provide timely and accurate information to the relevant
- 323 church authorities, including the church leadership or designated security personnel. Sex
- 324 offenders must disclose relevant details such as their identity, address, and any other
- 325 information required by applicable laws. Failure to provide accurate information may
- 326 result in legal consequences.
- 327
- 328 ○ Information provided by individual / specific sex offenders, or related to individual /
- 329 specific sex offenders, will be handled with utmost confidentiality, ensuring that it is only

disclosed to individuals with a legitimate need to know, such as the pastor, the Leadership Team, ministry staff, administrative staff, and key volunteers as needed.

- UMMMC will implement monitoring mechanisms to ensure ongoing compliance with the duty to inform. Non-compliance will result in appropriate legal action.

PROCEDURE FOR THE APPROPRIATE SUPERVISION AND MONITORING OF SEX OFFENDERS AND VIOLENT OFFENDERS DURING WORSHIP

- This procedure aims to ensure the safety and well-being of the entire church community, particularly vulnerable populations, by establishing clear guidelines for the supervision and monitoring of individuals with a history of sex offenses or violent offenses while participating in worship activities at UMMMC Campuses.
 - The Pastor and Leadership Team will be informed of the presence of individuals with a history of sex offenses or violent offenses attending worship services.
 - The membership of the Church shall be made aware that individuals with a history of sex offenses or violent offenses are in attendance in worship. This notification shall be made annually at the Church Conference. The offender's name shall not be released.
 - The pastor or his / her designee will establish clear communication with individual's subject to supervision, explaining the church's commitment to safety and the importance of adherence to specified guidelines.
 - The pastor or his / her designee will assign individuals to act as supervisors for attendees with a history of sex offenses or violent offenses during worship services.
 1. Supervision Guidelines:
 1. Maintain visual contact with the individual throughout the worship service or event.
 2. Avoid situations that may create isolation between the individual and vulnerable populations.
 3. Monitor interactions to ensure appropriate behavior and intervene if necessary.
 4. Report any observed inappropriate behavior or concerns related to individuals with a history of offenses immediately to the pastor or other appropriate church leadership immediately.
 5. Ensure that the individual has left the property at the end of the worship service.
 2. Seating Arrangements:
 1. The pastor or his / her designee will assign seating for individuals with a history of sex offenses or violent offenses in areas that allow for effective supervision while maintaining their dignity and privacy.
 2. The pastor or his / her designee will ensure that individuals with a history of offenses are not seated in close proximity to vulnerable populations such as children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

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AFFIRMATION OF COMPLIANCE WITH THE ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY

I, the undersigned, have read and understand the United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County Abuse Prevention Policy. I agree to abide by the guidelines, procedures, and expectations outlined in this policy to ensure the safety and well-being of all individuals, including children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers within our church community.

By signing this document, I commit to upholding the principles and practices set forth in the Abuse Prevention Policy of United Methodist Ministries of Mecosta County.

I acknowledge that failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, including the termination of my role as a volunteer or staff member.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Role (Volunteer/Staff Member): _____

Witness Name: _____

Witness Signature: _____

Date: _____