

# Hope Mills UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy

## Effective January 2020

### I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Recognizing the threat of child abuse and its presence even among God's own people, the 1996 General Conference adopted a resolution on "Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church" which states, "God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong." Safe Sanctuaries is the movement and initiative to fulfill this call upon us – to make our churches safe places for the young and the vulnerable and those in ministry with them.

Therefore, the congregation of Hope Mills United Methodist Church, in response to the 1996 General Conference resolution and the 2005 North Carolina Conference Annual Conference Safe Sanctuaries resolution, establishes these policies and procedures to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the physical safety, emotional integrity, and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and adults. We will define and follow appropriate safety measures in the recruitment and selection of workers. We will educate children/youth workers regarding these policies and procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to state law requirements for such reporting. If an incident occurs, we will be prepared with a response plan that includes responding to media inquiries and supportive care for persons involved in the incident.

The church staff and volunteers are responsible for the diligent implementation and enforcement of these policies. The congregation is responsible for supporting the implementation and enforcement of these policies and will be informed annually of these policies and procedures. Information about these policies will be presented to the Staff Parish Relations Committee, Church Council, Trustees and all those working with children and youth.

These procedures will be reviewed annually. Revisions will be presented to the Staff Parish Relations Committee, Church Council, and Trustees for acceptance. Final Approval rests with the Church Council.

### II. OPERATING POLICIES FOR ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH MINISTRY PROGRAMS

#### **Activities Covered by these Policies**

All church sponsored activities of Hope Mills United Methodist Church, both onsite and offsite, which require workers acting within the scope of their duties to have custody of persons less than 18 years of age shall follow these policies. In addition, **any group that uses the facilities of Hope Mills United Methodist Church shall adhere to the same policies.**

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### **Reporting Suspected or Observed Abuse**

Leaders, workers, and participants in church sponsored activities that observe suspicious or questionable behavior must promptly follow the procedures in Section IV for reporting suspicious or questionable behavior.

### **Two Adult Rule**

At least two non-related screened adults will be present at all times during any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children and/or youth. At no time should a child/youth be alone with an unrelated adult. Parents should not drop-off or leave their child for a scheduled activity unless there are two supervising adults present. If no supervising adult is present, a parent should remain with the child until the supervising adults arrive.

In the event of unforeseen circumstances that result in less than two adults being available at all times during a church sponsored activity for children/youth, doors to the rooms used for the activity shall remain open unless there is an interior window allowing visibility into the room. If a staff person or other adult volunteer is available, s/he should periodically check on the room and its occupants.

### **Five Years Older Rule**

All workers must be at least five years older than the oldest minor in the group that they are assigned to supervise and lead.

### **Selection of Workers**

Workers will be selected, screened, and assigned to activities involving children/youth according to the procedures outlined in Section III.

### **Special Population Children**

Parent(s)/guardian(s) or other “safe” support person(s) designated by parent(s) or guardian(s) of special population children are welcome to stay with the specific child to provide needed support for that child only. Our staff would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this to allow us to assist you in meeting the needs of your child. Since you will be staying with your child, you will be required to have a background check done at no expense to you, following the procedures in Section III.

### **Check in/Out Procedures**

Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at HMUMC:

- Children and youth will be checked in and out of a church sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by parent/legal guardian.
- They will have access to a working telephone, cell phone or pager when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visibility to all.

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### **Right to Observe**

Whenever HMUMC sponsors an activity involving children or youth:

- Parent(s)/guardian(s) have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced. For pre-school and nursery this observation will be through window, on outside of the area fencing, or from the hallway.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.

### **Transportation**

Whenever HMUMC transports children or youth away from the church campus:

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- Adults should never transport a child or youth without another unrelated adult present in the car.
- Approved and covered by church's insurance company.
- Drivers should go through same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

### **Photography**

Pictures of children are only taken with the parent/guardian permission and a signed permission to publish form is required for any pictures of children to be published on the internet. Even when pictures are published with permission on the internet (such as FaceBook or our website), a child's name is not published.

### **Touching and other forms of affection**

Hugs, kisses, and other forms of appropriate physical affection are important for human development and are generally suitable in our church setting. We recognize that the line between appropriate and inappropriate physical affection can be difficult to define. The following guidelines—when carefully observed—should help to safeguard our children/youth while promoting a positive, nurturing environment for ministry to them.

1. Touching behavior should not give the appearance of wrongdoing. The behavior of ministry workers must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.
2. A child or youth's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child or youth.
3. The child or youth should initiate touching, or it should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. Touching and physical affection should not be based upon the adult's emotional need.
4. Touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other church workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued

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as such when two workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This rule is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.

5. Church workers are responsible to protect children and youth under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others and must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader.

### **Waiver of Rules**

The Two Adult Rule and Five Year Older Rule may be waived in **exceptional circumstances**. The goal of Hope Mills United Methodist Church is to promote safety while maintaining practical flexibility in children and youth ministry. The waiver of these rules **will only be authorized** by the written consent of the parents or guardians of the children/youth involved and the pastor, and a child/youth may not participate in the activity where a rule has been waived without the parent or guardian's written consent.

### **Training**

HMUMC volunteer and paid staff will be given the opportunity to attend training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures and child abuse issues on a regular basis. If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs at or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at a HMUMC sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Insure the safety of the child or youth.
- Follow the procedures in Section IV of this document.

### **III. GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION AND SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORKERS**

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children and youth at HMUMC will:

- be 18 years or older.
- be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- be a faithful participant of the HMUMC congregation for at least 6 months. All leaders must be members of HMUMC.
- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of 3 personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check at no expense to them. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.
- Individuals who are currently under investigation for physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not volunteer until the investigation is complete.
- Any candidate seeking to work with children or youth who is a survivor of sexual or physical abuse needs the love and acceptance of the Hope Mills United Methodist Church family. A person's experience with abuse and their

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recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as ministry workers. Candidates who are survivors of abuse must discuss these circumstances with the pastor who will then determine the candidate's suitability for work with children or youth. These conversations are held in strictest of confidence.

The Youth and Children's Director, in consultation with the Pastor, is responsible for evaluating the suitability of a candidate for working with children or youth. The church will keep confidential all information received in the selection process. Background checks are kept securely online with the background check provider. All provided documentation for background checks are shredded after the background check takes place and the results of said check are on the secure location with the background check provider.

#### **IV. CONGREGATIONAL PLAN FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

When responding to allegations of abuse, the church and its representatives will keep several key principles in mind:

- Reports of questionable behavior **must be taken** seriously. They should not be ignored or allowed to circulate without concern for the integrity and reputation of the accuser, the accused, and the church.
- Allegations should be handled with sensitivity for people's privacy and confidentiality. Allegations may occur in a variety of ways, and the church cannot control how a report may surface. Therefore, it is important that the steps below are followed. These steps will ensure that the allegation is channeled to the appropriate person and that the situation is not made worse by an improper response.
- The church should cooperate with law enforcement and social services.
- The victim should not be blamed.
- The church should seek to provide Christian support as appropriate for alleged victims, alleged offenders, and their families during this period of great stress.
- The insurance carrier should be contacted as soon as possible.

#### Procedure for Initial Responders

Any person receiving the initial report of alleged abuse or suspicious behavior should follow these steps:

- Listen supportively—do not minimize or discount the allegation
- Do not judge the allegation negatively or positively.
- Ask questions to clarify facts, but do not try to investigate or verify the allegations of the report.
- **NEVER INTERVIEW A CHILD. INTERVIEWS WITH CHILDREN ARE ALWAYS DONE BY A POLICE OR DSS CHILD FORENSIC INTERVIEWER**
- Note the pertinent details in writing as soon as possible after hearing the report. Do not take notes while the victim is speaking, as you want to give him/her your full attention. Incident Report Forms are available from the Pastor as well as the Director of Children and Youth Ministry.

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- Contact the Pastor immediately. If the Pastor is not available, contact the chair of SPRC. If the allegation involves a paid staff member, then the chair of SPRC **must** also be contacted. These persons will contact the annual conference, who will guide the church through the process, which may include consulting with legal counsel and making the report to law enforcement if appropriate.
- If an appointed Pastor or Deacon is being accused, contact the District Superintendent or a Conference Sexual Ethics Support Team member and follow the procedures outlined in the Book of Discipline. The District Superintendent can provide these procedures to you.
- Do not discuss the allegation unless directed to do so.
- If the safety of the minor is at issue, the worker must use his/her own judgment to decide the best way to proceed. **Workers may contact law enforcement directly if timing is critical and church leaders are unavailable for consultation.** Workers should notify church leadership as specified above as soon as possible.

### Procedures for the Response Team

A Response Team **may be** formed as the situation requires. If a Response Team is formed, it will consist of:

- Senior Pastor (or their designee),
- the Director of Children's and Youth Ministry (unless accusations are being made against this person)
- SPRC Chairperson
- Any other person the team feels necessary to include

Responsibilities of the Response Team include:

- Deciding if a report to the authorities is warranted. Guidance of the church's attorney may be necessary to make this decision. The NC Annual Conference has an attorney on retainer who can help with this decision at no cost to the church. **In some cases, the Pastor will automatically call Law Enforcement and/or DSS if the safety of a minor is at stake.**
- Developing and implementing a pastoral care plan for the persons involved in the allegation.
- Informing the church's insurance carrier.
- Designating one of its members as a spokesperson to handle all contact with the news media. All media inquiries should be directed to this person.
- Designating one of its members as a secretary to document all steps taken and decisions made.
- Communicating and consulting with the District Superintendent and other Conference staff as necessary

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### V. NURSERY PROCEDURES

The nursery staff respectfully requests that parent(s)/guardian(s) assist us as we follow these child health & safety policies:

- Please be sure to **leave your name and mobile phone number** when you drop off your child. Our staff respect and appreciate that you want to be notified if your child needs you.
- Children who are too ill to participate in all activities should remain in the comfort of their own home. Our loving, caring staff cannot accommodate a “sick” area and may request you take them home if they feel your child is not their happy, normally active self, as this may indicate an oncoming illness. Your child should not attend if they have the following symptoms:
  - Temperature over 99°F within the past 24 hours (including those whose fevers have been reduced to normal with Tylenol, Motrin, or other fever-reducers.
  - Diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting within the past 24 hours.
  - Any contagious condition (*pink eye, head lice, impetigo, strep throat, scarlet fever, chicken pox, measles, hand-foot-and-mouth disease, etc.*) until the child has been confirmed non-contagious by a physician.
  - Any green or yellow discharge from the nose.
  - Any rash that has not been confirmed non-contagious by a physician.
- We request that you leave the nursery to go to the function or class you are attending. Only those scheduled paid or volunteer nursery workers should be in the nursery. This will allow them to give their full attention to the children in their care.

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This page must be signed and returned to the Director of Youth and Children's Ministry by all paid and volunteer workers with Children and Youth.

I have read and understood the Hope Mills UMC Safe Sanctuary Policy, and agree to abide by it. I have had all my questions satisfactorily answered.

Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_