

Safe Sanctuaries

Creating a safe place
and reducing the risk of child abuse in the church.

Loveland United Methodist Church

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Children/Youth/Vulnerable Adult Protection and Safety Policy

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THE NURTURE AND CARE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

For the purposes of this policy, **children and/or youth** are defined as anyone under 18 years of age. A **vulnerable adult** is defined as anyone over the age of 18 who does not have age-appropriate decision-making skills or abilities. An **adult** is anyone who is 18 years of age or older. The terms *children* and *youth* may be used interchangeably for the purposes of this document and also include *vulnerable adults*.

Jesus said "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Luke 18:16) He also said "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5)

Those who entrust their children and youth to the care of the church have a right to expect that due attention has been given to the recruiting, hiring, training, and supervision of persons in charge of church programs for children and youth. As a Christian community, we believe that children and youth should be safe and well cared for, and we consider it to be our pastoral responsibility to strive to provide a loving, secure environment for children and youth in our congregation by being advocates for children and youth and establishing clearly-defined safeguards, procedures, and policies for children and youth pastoral care and protection.

Basic norms have therefore been developed for prevention of and response to child abuse. We are establishing a policy and program planning process that will:

- (1) Provide a place in which children and youth are loved and safe from all forms of abuse and neglect.
- (2) Provide paid and volunteer staff with clear and shared norms for appropriate behavior in regard to their ministries with children and youth.
- (3) Make prompt, competent, and pastoral response to allegations of child abuse.

Our policy and planning processes include the clergy, lay leaders, and staff who have responsibility for ministry to children or youth.

The Staff Parish Relations Committee, in conjunction with the Youth Ministry Team and Youth Director, plus the Children's Ministry Team and Director of Music and Family Ministry, will oversee the implementation of this policy. The policy will be reviewed annually. The Director of Music and Family Ministry will provide for the safekeeping of Appendix B and Appendix C at the church.

Loveland United Methodist Church will make sure to carry adequate insurance coverage for the scope of ministry offered to children and youth.

Procedures for reporting known or suspected child abuse are given in Section II

Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION

Children and youth protection encompass several areas, including the following:

- (1) We want to be intentional about teaching and modeling appropriate parenting and adult/child interaction skills.
- (2) We desire to educate members/volunteers concerning the proper treatment of children, youth, and vulnerable adults involved in congregational programs.
- (3) We want to provide appropriate channels for reporting alleged abuse.
- (4) We want to protect possible victims.

For the purposes of this document and under Ohio law, an abused child is defined as a person under the age of 18 who is the victim of sexual activity, who is endangered or neglected, or who suffers physical injury, mental injury, or death other than by accident. Child abuse may be physical, sexual, emotional, or mental, and may be the result of actions or a failure or refusal to act (e.g. lack of care for a child).

Our congregation's written policy on child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse prevention includes, but is not limited to, the following specific areas:

1. Parenting Skills:

- When possible, we will provide classes for members of the church and community on sound parenting skills and child- and youth-abuse prevention.

2. Training:

- Training on issues of child sexual abuse in church settings is required for all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth (i.e., Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, etc.).
- Training will include church policy on children and youth protection and safety, procedures to be used in ministry with children and youth, appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse, and details of state laws regarding child abuse.
- A copy of the current Loveland UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy will be given to all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who regularly work with children and youth.
- Church-wide training will be offered at least annually.
- Loveland UMC's Safe Sanctuaries policy will be available in the church office upon request.
- CPR training will be offered for all workers with children and youth and will be encouraged for all volunteers.
- Training for individuals may be offered by a staff person on an as-needed basis.

3. Communication/Supervision:

- It is important that all staff, paid and volunteer, be involved in regular, scheduled ministry meetings to discuss prevention measures, policies, problems, and potential problems.
- Clarification of staff actions and plans of action should be open for discussion at any meeting.
- While convicted child abusers who are members of the congregation are to receive the normal pastoral care afforded any child of God, at no time is a known convicted child abuser to be assigned to ministries with children or youth.
- Parents shall be informed that this Children and Youth Protection policy exists and shall be invited to know its contents.
- Parents will be provided advance notice and full information about activities involving children and youth.

Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION (continued)

4. Individual Counseling:

- One-on-one interactions between an adult and a child or youth are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility to other adults.
- If at all possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.
- Youth receiving individual counseling should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the counseling process with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in counseling.

5. Adult Presence:

- All church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church will have two or more adult leaders present.
- When the group includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is strongly recommended that both male and female adult leaders be present.
- For children and youth Sunday school, if it is not possible to have two adults in the classroom on Sunday morning, one staff person or adult volunteer will be available to walk the halls and periodically check in on classes.
- No workers under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with, any children.
- All volunteers and paid child caregivers will undergo a thorough background check before offering care to the children.
- When necessary, one adult may be present if less than four children are participating in an event, however consent must first be acquired by the parent through the form found in Appendix B.

6. Touch:

- God embraces children and youth with love, placing their nurture and care in our hands. We remember that Jesus of Nazareth wrapped small children in the loving arms of his embrace.
- Christian community includes physical touching as an expression of affection and as a vessel for healing. We hold up common positive examples of touching such as the laying on of hands in healing and the holding of hands in prayer.
- We also recognize evil and understand that the human capacity for evil can corrupt even the holiest of gifts. Therefore, we restrict our touching and affection to those sacramental and public activities commonly held appropriate throughout the history and worship of the church.
- Child-initiated hugs may be returned by adult workers in an appropriate manner keeping in mind the policies of this Safe Sanctuaries document.
- With the exception of attending to infants' and toddlers' hygienic needs, touching children or youth on the genitals, allowing them to touch one another's genitals, or allowing children or youth to touch the genitals of an adult is always inappropriate in any church activity or setting.
- Likewise, violence to children and youth, physically to their bodies or spiritually to their hearts and minds, is never appropriate in a church activity or elsewhere.

Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION (continued)

7. Overnight Trips and Field Trips:

- Situations in which paid or volunteer staff members are taking children or youth on field trips away from the church for long periods of time or for overnight outings are to be carefully planned by the staff and all details fully disclosed to the parents/guardians.
- In no circumstance is one adult to take a child/youth or children on an overnight outing alone.
- In addition, when a group is going on an overnight that includes both boys and girls, and parents are not present, it is required that both male and female leaders be present.
- Permission slips and emergency medical forms are to be completed by parents/guardians and be kept by the event organizer at the event.

8. Open Door Policy:

- Protection for children and youth requires that an open door policy be followed. The parents of the children served, the clergy, and administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children or youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- Classrooms will have eye-level windows, or doors will be kept open.

9. Discipline Policy:

- Children and youth are expected to show respect for adults and each other during all church activities.
- Children and youth will be treated with respect. They will not be spanked or disciplined in ways that deprive them of their basic right to be safe.
- Discipline is expected to be appropriate for the child or youth's age.
- Appropriate responses to inappropriate behavior include verbally reprimanding the child or youth, separating the child or youth from the group (time out), notifying parents of the problem, and/or taking a disruptive child or youth to a parent or a church staff member.

10. Driving Policy:

- The policy on driving stipulates criteria and restrictions that apply to drivers for church-sponsored activities. (See Appendix A, Loveland UMC Driving Policy.)
- If a church-sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more leaders must accompany the group.
- A written permission slip must be signed by a child's parent or guardian prior to departure.

11. Background Checks and Hiring Policies:

- Thorough background checks will be made of all paid staff and may be made of volunteers who have regular responsibility for children and/or youth, as well as all other church program employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, or pedophilic behavior.
- All persons, paid and volunteer, who work with children and/or youth shall sign a form consenting in advance to a background check.
- In the case of clergy, this congregation will rely on thorough background checks made by the West Ohio Conference.
- No person who has had a child abuse conviction shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.
- No person who refuses to sign the Consent Form shall be permitted to work with children and/or youth.
- All clergy, lay staff, and volunteers with children and youth shall sign the Policy Awareness Acknowledgment (Appendix C), signifying that they have read and understand the congregation's policy.

Section I

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULT PROTECTION (continued)

12. Photographs of Children and Youth

Photographs of children and youth who participate in church planned activities can be posted to our website and Facebook page by virtue of participation in the activity or event. However, the names of children or youth will not be added to the photos, and a parent or guardian can request to not have the child's photo published.

13. Lifestyle Guidelines:

Because adults who work with children and/or youth exert significant influence over those in their care, the following lifestyle guidelines for these adults are lifted up:

- A commitment to Christ.
- A commitment to growing in Christ.
- A commitment to using resources in service to Christ and others.
- A commitment to attending church regularly.
- A commitment to the Loveland UMC mission and vision.
- Refraining from the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- Abstaining from use of alcohol and tobacco when in the presence of children and/or youth at church functions.
- Steering clear of any activity that would or could put the adult in a position that might cause harm to others, the cause of Christ, or Loveland UMC. Adults who work with children and youth will
- Refrain from romantic involvement with children and/or youth.
- Take care to avoid leader/student situations that might be construed as something more than leader-to-student relationship.
- Accountability with supervisors and other leaders.
- Living a life that is free of sexual immorality.

Section II

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND VULNERABLE ADULTS ABUSE REPORTING PROCEDURES

The purpose of abuse reporting is to provide children, youth, vulnerable adults and their families with an avenue to air grievances, ensure that they are heard, and provide that some action, when appropriate, will be taken on their behalf. The intent of this church's policy is to be firm and fair without fostering an unnecessary climate of fear or the erroneous presumption that a person is guilty until proven innocent.

Specific details of an alleged abuse incident must be documented in writing and retained. Such documentation of a complaint of abuse by someone connected with Loveland UMC is to contain the following information:

- Name, age, and address of child or youth or vulnerable adult
- Name and address of the parent or guardian
- Name and address of the accused
- Reasons why you suspect the person is being abused or neglected
- Documentation of the steps taken by the church in response to the complaint
- Any other helpful information

If a complaint of child abuse is made, the following policies shall be followed. All complaints shall be investigated promptly.

1. Parents of the alleged victim will be notified promptly.
2. Steps will be taken to ensure the safety of the child/youth/vulnerable adult until parents arrive.
3. Known or reasonably suspected child abuse must be reported immediately to the pastors and lay staff of the church's children and/or youth program (whichever applies).
4. The Staff Parish Relations ministry team must be informed if the incident involves clergy or paid staff.
5. The accused will be treated with dignity but will be removed from further involvement with children and/or youth while an investigation is held.
6. A report must be made to the Hamilton County Police and the Hamilton County Department of Human Services, Children's Services, 513-241-KIDS (5437).
7. The report and pertinent information should be given to the congregational legal representation.
8. The Ohio River Valley District Office and West Ohio Conference shall be informed.
9. If the accused involved is clergy, a trained response team member shall be made available by the Bishop's office to assist congregations with investigations and pastoral care. This response team member shall determine the nature of the charge and whether suspension from work in the congregation is warranted during the investigation. The District and Conference shall be kept informed of the course of the investigation.
10. Pastoral resources shall be made available to the victim, the victim's family, the accused, the accused's family, and the congregation.
11. Prompt reports of any conviction of criminal charges shall be made to the sexual misconduct liability insurance protection carrier.
12. All actions regarding the complaint shall be documented and kept on file.
13. A designated spokesperson will be solely responsible for responding to any media interest.
14. A brief and honest statement to be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating confidentiality should be prepared.
15. Full cooperation will be given to law enforcement officials and child protective services.

Appendix A

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DRIVING POLICY

Purpose: To promote the safety of persons being transported by vehicle to Loveland UMC functions and/or on Loveland UMC business.

Policy: Whenever staff or volunteers use their private vehicles for field trips, business trips, canvassing, sick or elderly transportation and visitation, or the transport of children and/or youth, there are some very important risk control measures that must be taken by the church. Each time a driver gets behind the wheel as a church staff member or volunteer to transport others, the lives of others are in that driver's hands.

- Specific documentation must be supplied by all staff or volunteer drivers. This documentation should include:
 - a) current driver's license
 - b) vehicle registration, including expiration
 - c) proof of automobile liability insurance
 - d) a current safety inspection certificate, where applicable
- In addition to the required documentation, each driver should adhere to the following regulations:
 - a) All drivers must be 21 years of age or older.
 - b) The number of passengers may not exceed the number of working passenger seat belts.
 - c) The driver and all passengers must wear seat belts at all times.
- Drivers who transport a single child or youth (such as giving a youth a ride home from a church event) may take care to avoid any implication of impropriety by asking the child or youth to sit in the rear seat of the car.
- When using rental cars, the event organizer is responsible to verify, uphold and abide by the rental company's policy regarding drivers (age, multiple drivers, insurance, etc.).
- 16-passenger vans will not be used to transport people for safety reasons.

Implementation: It is the responsibility of the event organizer to distribute this document to each staff member or volunteer driver and to enforce the policy.

Appendix B

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CONSENT FORM

I have been made aware and agree to have my children under the care of **one** adult (who has been properly screened) while I am participating in any LUMC meeting/event when 4 or less children are being cared for.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C

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POLICY AWARENESS ACKNOWLEDGMENT

After reviewing the Loveland United Methodist Church's policy for protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults, all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who teach or work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must sign this form, indicating their familiarity with the policy.

I have read and I understand the policy entitled Loveland United Methodist Church, Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

I agree to abide by this policy for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults and the prevention and management of child abuse.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Supervisor Signature/Title: