Harrison United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuary Policy

Introduction

The United Methodist Church affirms the sacred worth of all people and is committed to protecting children, youth, and vulnerable people from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In 1996, the General Conference adopted a resolution encouraging churches to implement Safe Sanctuaries policies to create safe and welcoming environments for all.

Because abuse can occur in any setting, churches are called to take practical steps to prevent harm, protect participants, and support volunteers and staff. These policies reflect both our commitment to safety and our call to ministry.

As followers of Christ, we are called to welcome and care for children and vulnerable people with hospitality, compassion, and protection. This Safe Sanctuary policy helps our church live out that calling faithfully and responsibly.

Definitions: For the purposes of this policy, a "vulnerable individual" is defined as a person less able to care for or protect themselves from exploitation.

Volunteer/Staff Selection Policies

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals at Harrison UMC will be:

- At least 18 years old. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
- At least five years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- A regular attendee at Harrison United Methodist Church for at least six months. ***Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor for special situations.***
- Students away at college are exempt from the regular attendee requirement.

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who regularly work with, or have any supervisory responsibility for children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals at Harrison UMC will:

- Undergo a criminal background check. 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 other vulnerable people. Background checks must be renewed every three years. Should a volunteer be convicted of a misdemeanor or felony during this time, it must be disclosed to the ministry Director.
- Be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the Director of the program area in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.
- Applicants may be asked to provide personal references.

Training

All clergy, church employees, and volunteers working with children, youth, or other vulnerable individuals must complete annual training on safety, protection, and sexual abuse prevention. A copy of this document will be provided at training.

A summary of current abuse statutes and mandatory reporting requirements in the applicable legal jurisdiction will also be provided.

Ministry Supervision Guidelines

Whenever supervising activities involving children or youth at Harrison UMC:

- At least two screened, unrelated adults must be present at all activities and the following adult-to-child ratios should be followed (based on the youngest participant in the room):
    - 1 adult for every 4 infants and toddlers (under age 2)
    - 1 adult for every 6 two-year-olds
    - 1 adult for every 8 three- and four-year-olds
    - 1 adult for every 10 children 5 years old–5th grade
    - 1 adult for every 10 youth in grades 6–12
    - 1 adult for every 8 participants on overnight trips
- Children (5th grade and younger) must be checked in and out of church-sponsored activities by a parent, legal guardian, or person authorized by parent or guardian.
- Youth (grades 6–12) must check in with a screened volunteer, who will ensure they leave safely.
- In the case of an emergency, participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone during all on-site and off-site activities.
- All classroom and office doors must have a window or remain open to allow visibility from the hallway while occupied. Windows and doors must remain unobstructed.
- Every effort should be made to maintain a two-adult presence at all times. If the two-adult rule cannot be observed:
    - The doors should remain open at all times.
    - A screened, designated individual will serve as a floater, regularly checking in on any group supervised by only one adult.
- Youth volunteers ages 12–17 may assist adult Directors but may not count as adults for supervision ratios. They must be at least five years older than the oldest child in the group.
- For church-sponsored overnight events, whether on or off-campus, two or more screened unrelated adults must be present and must include at least one male and one female if the group is of mixed-gender.

One on One Conversations

- If a child, youth, or vulnerable individual requests a confidential one-on-one conversation with a screened adult, the conversation must occur in an environment that provides clear visibility by other adults. Another screened adult volunteer or staff member must be present nearby in the building, and aware of the meeting location and participants. Participants should be informed they may discuss the conversation with a parent or guardian. Any suspected abuse or neglect disclosed by the child, youth, or vulnerable individual during the conversation must be reported by the screened adult according to church policy.
- Off-Campus meetings should be in public places and should have written permission from parent/guardian. The child/youth should be dropped off and picked up by the parent/guardian unless the student drives themselves.

Transportation to off-site, church-sponsored events or activities:

- Youth may not drive to or from off-site church events without written parental permission. Youth may not transport other youth without written permission from the parents or guardians of both the driver and passenger. Siblings are an exception to this policy; however, parents must communicate transportation arrangements with the ministry director.
- An adult may not transport a child, youth, or vulnerable individual alone. At least two screened and unrelated adults must be present.
- Drivers of church vehicles must be approved by the church's insurance company, complete the same screening process required for staff and volunteers, as well as a motor vehicle background check.

Social Media and Electronic Communications

The use of social media or electronic communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements must be met:

- Before communicating via text with children or youth, parental permission must be obtained and documented (by text, email, via form).
- A volunteer or staff person shall not initiate a connection on social media with a youth or child associated with Harrison UMC.
- If a student initiates a connection on social media, the Ministry Director should be notified, AND a parent or guardian must give permission before the connection is made.
- No communication should take place over social media platforms (for example, direct messaging, instant messaging, snap chatting, etc).
- If an adult Director receives a private text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that is of concern, the Director should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and inform the Ministry Director who will determine next steps. If it is decided an in-person conversation is needed, guidelines for one-on-one conversations will be followed.
- Only staff and designated volunteers are allowed to post photos or videos of children or youth. associated with HUMC on HUMC social media sites. When posted, PHOTOS OR VIDEOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED with names. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- No photos or videos should be posted by volunteers and/or staff on their personal social media accounts. However, posts originated by HUMC may be shared.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. (For example, two screened, unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as in a physical room).
- All online activities should use the official church account, not a personal account.
- Parents/guardians must be aware of any online meetings involving children, youth, and other vulnerable individuals.
- All electronic communications shall be retained.

Requirements for Documenting and Reporting Suspected Abuse or Neglect

If abuse or neglect of a child, youth or vulnerable individual is suspected or disclosed during a Harrison UMC-sponsored activity, whether on or off campus, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the immediate safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable individual.
- Immediately notify the Ministry Director, who will then promptly inform the Pastor.
- Document the incident in writing as soon as possible.
- Cooperate with any required reporting procedures. If appropriate, the Ministry Director and/or Pastor will notify the proper authorities regarding the suspected abuse or neglect.
- The Ministry Director and/or Pastor will ensure the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Pastor Relations Committee (SPPRC) is informed.
- The privacy and confidentiality of all individuals involved will be respected and protected to the fullest extent possible.

Outside Organizations Utilizing Harrison Facilities

- Outside organizations using Harrison UMC facilities must review, sign, and agree to follow all Harrison UMC Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures, including requirements for criminal background checks, supervision ratios, and reporting suspected incidents or concerns.

Congregational Covenant and Adoption

Harrison United Methodist Church is committed to the physical safety, emotional wellbeing, and spiritual growth of all children, youth, and vulnerable individuals participating in our ministries and activities.

This policy reflects our baptismal promise to nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and to surround them with a community of love, care, and support. As a congregation, we seek to follow the example of Christ in all ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable individuals.

This policy replaces all previous Safe Sanctuary policies of Harrison UMC. To support a safe and healthy ministry environment, Harrison UMC will:

- Provide regular training for staff and volunteers serving with children, youth, and vulnerable individuals.
- Screen all staff and volunteers who work directly with these groups, in accordance with Annual Conference requirements. Individuals will be rescreened every three years, or sooner if they have been absent from the Harrison UMC community for more than one year.
- Ensure all activities are supervised by an appropriate number of screened adults.

In all ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable individuals, Harrison United Methodist Church is committed to sharing the love of Jesus Christ while creating a safe, caring, and faith-filled community for all. This Safe Sanctuary Policy was adopted by Harrison United Methodist Church on the **31st day of May, 2026.**

Volunteer, Staff, and Clergy Acknowledgement and Agreement

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the procedures and guidelines set forth in this document. I agree to abide by and comply with all such procedures and guidelines in my role as a volunteer, staff person, or clergy within the church. I give permission to Harrison UMC to check references (if requested) and conduct a background check.

I understand that these procedures and guidelines are intended to support a safe, respectful, and Christ-centered environment for all members, participants, and visitors. I commit to conducting myself in a manner that reflects the values, mission, and standards of the church while serving in this role.

I further understand that failure to follow these procedures and guidelines may result in the termination of my role, or other appropriate measures as determined by church leadership.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____