

Q&A All about Protection/Safe Sanctuary Policy

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What is a protection/safe sanctuary policy? (Please include essential elements as well as an overview)

A Protection Policy (known by lots of names, for this conversation I will refer to it as a Protection Policy, or PP) is a document local churches adopt, implement, and follow through to protect children, youth, vulnerable adults and those who are in ministry with those populations from abuse and allegations of abuse. It's not just for children and youth! It also protects vulnerable adults who are at risk of emotional, sexual, financial and other forms of abuse. The PP may also provide guidelines around staffing, transportation, media, overnights, and other considerations of a local church. The PP establishes guidelines and a process for how one becomes trained and authorized to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It also contains information about what to do if abuse is suspected or alleged.

Who does this policy protect?

The Protection Policy protects children, youth, vulnerable adults and those who are in ministry with them as well as the local church.

Which churches need protection policies, and why?

ALL churches need to have a Protection Policy. There are several reasons why churches need to have a protection policy. First, it cares for God's children by establishing guidelines and expectations to minimize the risk of abuse in vulnerable populations. Second, it cares for those who are in ministry with vulnerable populations, both paid and volunteer, with training and guidelines for care. Third, it creates a policy to minimize the risk and limit the extend of liability for a local church. In addition to the policy, the local church must conduct thorough training and individuals must complete applications and background checks.

Is this really about ministry, or is it fear of lawsuits?

Yes. The Protection Policy is foremost about ministry and it is also about limiting liability for local churches.

I can vouch for my long-time nursery volunteer. Does she really need a background check?

Yes! and everyone needs to complete the training, application, and background check.

Does everyone need training?

Yes! Everyone who wishes to be in ministry with children, youth, and vulnerable adults need to complete the training, application, and background check. There is good news! If you do not feel qualified or prepared to lead such a training, there are people who have been trained by the Michigan Conference Protection Policy who will lead a training at your church.

Budget? What budget?! Give me the bottom line...

The cost of creating, implementing, and following through with a Protection Policy is far less than potential litigation from not having one. There are several tools that local churches may use to create and implement their own policy. Conference staff created a Template that Local Churches may use to create their own policy. This resource is free and includes an appendix with sample forms and information about background checks. Each church needs to decide how they want to proceed with background checks. Free background checks from the Michigan criminal data base may be done for free (with proper application through ICHAT). Nationwide background checks may be completed for a fee

that varies depending on the provider and the scope of the check. Churches also should consult their insurance company and attorney before adopting their Protection Policy to ensure accuracy and completeness.

Where do I start?

The template for local churches is available from the link below. You may also reach out to Kathy Pittenger at kpittenger@michiganumc.org or Christy Miller White at cmillerwhite@michiganumc.org for support, guidance, and additional resources.

Resources and Links:

Michigan Conference Resources (including template) - <https://michiganumc.org/resources/conference-administration/protection-policy/>

Safe Sanctuaries - <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries>

Michigan ICHAT - <https://apps.michigan.gov/>

Safe Sanctuaries by Joy Thornburg Melton is a series of books that may be helpful