**Protection Policy Template for Local Churches**

This template is provided as a resource for local churches who are creating or revising the Protection Policy. You **must** update this policy to align with your context and any unique features in your church. You may wish to include a section if you have a playground or for outside groups. You may wish to say that you will accept screening and training from other organizations (such as if a person has gone through Safe Gatherings for the Michigan Conference if that is not the standard at your church) and include additional training those persons may need to complete.

Local churches are encouraged to have their policy reviewed by their insurance company and an attorney for accuracy and potential liability or loopholes. It is important to remember that once your policy is adopted, it MUST be followed. Not following your policy opens you up to harm and liability.

Suggested steps for writing or reviewing your policy:

* Gather a team – may include representatives from Trustees, SPRC (if applicable), clergy, key staff, other persons familiar with abuse or legal policies.
* Pray together
* Gather resources, work through a template such as this one or others on the Michigan Conference Resource [page](https://michiganumc.org/resources/church-protection-policy/), or a recommended resource from your insurance company
* Write your policy and have it reviewed by your insurance company and an attorney (if possible)
* Have your policy approved by church council/board
* Create application process and training resources or register to use a third party (such as Safe Gatherings)
* Communicate with the congregation and others who are impacted by the policy (such as outside groups)
* Implement and follow through
* Review and revise yearly

If you have any questions or need guidance, contact Rev. Kathy Pittenger (please note, Rev. Kathy does not provide legal advice).

**Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults**

***Effective DATE***

“Whoever welcomes one of these children in my name welcomes me.” (Luke 9:37a CEB)

“As for whoever causes these little ones who believe in me to trip and fall into sin, it would be better for them to have a huge stone hung around their necks and be drowned in the bottom of the lake.”

(Matthew 18:6 CEB)

**Call**

In response to God’s call to care for the vulnerable, the **LOCAL CHURCH** is committed to the well-being of every person entrusted to its care. This commitment is in harmony with the Book of Resolutions (¶162 Social Principles) and the baptismal covenant (United Methodist Hymnal).

**Purpose**

**LOCAL CHURCH** United Methodists are determined to provide an environment in which Participants are safe from neglect and abuse. This policy and its provisions apply to all staff, volunteers, clergy, or lay persons in the **LOCAL CHURCH** who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults both on and off-site. The policy sets forth minimum mandatory requirements for screening and training of clergy, lay, staff, or volunteers.

**Definitions**

1. **Abuse:** Harm or threatened harm to an individual’s health or welfare that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment.
2. **Adult Leader:** any person (including employees, volunteers, lay or clergy) who has the responsibility to provide care and supervision of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
3. **Applicant:** any person seeking to become an Adult Leader or Assistant Leader.
4. **Assistant Leader:** any person who has been through the training process but does not qualify as an Adult Leader. Assistant Leaders under the age of 18 are still considered to be Participants.
5. **DHS:** Department of Health and Human Services in the state of Michigan which guards the safety and welfare of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
6. **Event Director:** the Adult Leader overseeing all personnel and programming
7. **Event Site:** the location of a function, event, or activity. This includes ministry that is on-site at the church or off-site.
8. **Neglect:** is failure to provide nutrition, clothing, shelter, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.

**Definitions [cont.]**

1. **Participants:** Participants are children, youth, or vulnerable adults who are registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in a **LOCAL CHURCH** function, event, or activity.
2. **Rule of Three:** At least two unrelated and non-cohabitating Adult Leaders must be present at all ministry events involving Participants. Any engagement with a Participant requires the presence of two Adult Leaders.
3. **Sexual Abuse:** is any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.
4. **Sexual Exploitation:** means allowing, permitting, or encouraging Participants to engage in commercial sex acts, the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer-generated images or any other form of depicting a Participant engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct (see Michigan Compiled Laws Act # 238, Public Acts of 1975, Section 722.622).
5. **Supervision:** is the leadership role of a person who is in charge of a group of Participants. Including, but not limited to: giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety, and being the leader in all situations.
6. **Vulnerable Adult:** an individual who, because of age, developmental disability, mental illness, or physical handicap, requires supervision or personal care or lacks the personal and social skills required to live independently.

**Section I. Implementation and Minimum Requirements**

1. Implementation
   1. *Insert the appropriate implementation team*
2. Minimum Requirements
   1. All Adult Leaders must:
      1. Be at least 18 years of age.
      2. Be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth being supervised.
      3. Be connected to a local congregation or ministry setting.
      4. Complete the current Screening Process (see Section II.A.1) for adults.
   2. All Assistant Leaders must:
      1. Be at least 16 years of age but less than 18 years of age.
      2. Be at least 5 years older than the oldest child being supervised.
      3. Be connected to a local congregation or ministry setting.
      4. Complete the current Screening Process for youth (see Section II.A.2).
3. Qualifications
   1. No one may serve as a Leader if they are known to have been previously convicted of, or pled guilty or no contest to, any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving assault, battery, sexual abuse, or any act or conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child.
   2. No one may serve as an Adult Leader who has acknowledged or admitted that they have participated as a perpetrator in any previous act of sexual abuse of a vulnerable adult, child, or youth. This qualifying rule applies regardless of when the conduct occurred or whether a civil or criminal verdict was rendered.

**Section I. Implementation and Minimum Requirements [cont.]**

* 1. If, through the application and background process, it is determined that the applicant is unsuitable to serve, the application will be denied, and the applicant will be notified. The **LOCAL CHURCH** reserves the right not to accept any person for volunteer or paid service. If the applicant is found to be unsuitable at any time, the **LOCAL CHURCH** has the authority to review or revoke participation.

1. Records Retention
   1. *Insert your records retention plan and process here.*

**Section II. Screening**

1. Screening and Training \*\* Update this section to align with your church policy.
   1. Adult Leaders
      1. All Applicants must complete the screening process and maintain their approval through our **LOCAL CHURCH**/Safe Gatherings/another option.
      2. **LOCAL CHURCH**/Safe Gatherings/another option requires re-approval every **three** years.
   2. Assistant Leaders
      1. All Applicants must complete the **LOCAL CHURCH**/another option/Safe Gatherings training module for Abuse Prevention.
   3. Training
      1. The intent of training is to create a safe environment and raise awareness of and sensitivity to the issues of abuse and neglect.
         1. The goals of the training are for trainees to
            1. know, understand, and be familiar with the Policy and current practices
            2. agree to implement the Policy of the **LOCAL CHURCH**.
      2. The content of the training must be consistent with this Policy.
   4. *(If using a third party for screening and training)* Adult Leaders must complete the Safe Gatherings process and provide proof of their Approved Certificate.
   5. The **LOCAL CHURCH** is responsible for maintaining a current list of all authorized Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders.
   6. Event Directors may supplement the Safe Gatherings training with additional training specifically relevant to their event.

**Section III: Supervision**

1. General Statement
   1. Proper supervision is necessary for the duration of the event.
   2. Proper supervision includes requiring Adult Leaders and Assistant Leaders to be properly trained.
   3. Special attention will be given to high-risk settings such as nurseries, restrooms, and overnights.
   4. Clergy, volunteers, and staff in host churches not directly involved with the program, devotional leaders, event speakers, musicians, or other specialists providing services such as food or entertainment may be present, but there must always be Adult Leaders present, and they may not be alone with Participants.
   5. Parents, legal guardians, and special needs caregivers may be present with their children or care recipient, but there must always be Adult Leaders present (unless caring for their own children or care recipient), and they may not be alone with other Participants.

**Section III: Supervision [cont.]**

1. General Rules
   1. Adequate staffing
      1. All ministry involving Participants must be staffed to meet the standards of this Policy. The Event Director is responsible for ensuring the standards set forth in this Policy are met. In the event that the standards of this Policy cannot be upheld, the function, event, or activity must be canceled.
      2. Providing staffing is the responsibility of the Event Director.
      3. Assistant Leaders may not comprise of more than 20% of the staff for an event, activity, or function.
      4. Assistant Leaders must work under the supervision of two Adult Leaders.
      5. Ratios of staff to children must be in compliance with the rules and regulations of the State of Michigan. (For current ratios visit: https://www.michigan.gov/lara)
   2. Rule of Three
      1. At least two Adult Leaders must be present at each ministry involving Participants and must follow the Rule of Three.
      2. \*\*You may include exceptions to this rule or clarification
   3. Participants will be released only to those indicated on a release form signed by the parent or guardian.
   4. Sleeping Accommodations. All children, youth, vulnerable adults, and staff (volunteer or paid) must have their own sleeping area.
   5. Transportation
      1. If transportation is required, all drivers must be properly licensed for the vehicle used, and all drivers and vehicles must be insured.
      2. Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.
   6. **Additional points that relate specifically to your church such as third party usage, playground/play structures, water or other unique aspects of your church property, on-site childcare (which likely has its own regulations and may not fall under this policy), etc.**
2. The Event Director must:
   1. Secure a safe and appropriate location that is conducive to the health and welfare of the Participants and appropriate for the objectives of the event. Comply with federal, state, and county guidelines. Obtain proper insurance as needed.
   2. Provide adequate supervision of Participants by confirming the number of Adult Leaders needed for the event.
   3. Confirm the application status and suitability of Adult and Assistant Leaders for the event.
   4. Implement these policies and related procedures, including reporting and documentation of all incidents.
   5. Establish and communicate to all staff expectations and procedures for the event, for instance, procedures regarding medications, medical situations (universal precautions) and emergencies and how they will be handled during the event.
   6. Establish a sign-in and sign-out procedure for Participants.
   7. Establish a procedure to obtain copies of permission slips, release forms, medical permission, and other necessary paperwork in compliance with applicable laws and regulations of the State of Michigan and other requirements of the **LOCAL CHURCH**.

**Section III: Supervision [cont.]**

D. Online or Digital Ministry

1. Online or Digital Ministry must be treated the same as ministry in physical spaces.
2. Only **LOCAL CHURCH** accounts may be used for all online or digital ministries.
3. All staff and volunteers must use their common name.
4. Using the Rule of Three, all digital communication must include two Adult Leaders who serve as administrators/moderators.
5. At least one Adult Leader must be capable and knowledgeable of online platforms used to ensure the safety of the group.

**Section IV: Reporting**

1. Persons Required to Report
   1. All Adult or Assistant Leaders and **LOCAL CHURCH** employees who have reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult must report all known and suspected cases of abuse or neglect which (a) occur on the **LOCAL CHURCH** premises; (b) occur at a **LOCAL CHURCH** function, activity or event; or (c) are disclosed during a **LOCAL CHURCH** function, activity or event. All other persons may report known or suspected cases of abuse or neglect in accordance with this Policy and the laws of the State of Michigan. This Policy supports mandatory reporting in compliance with the State of Michigan.
   2. If any Participant arrives at a **LOCAL CHURCH** event with signs of abuse or neglect, the Event Director must immediately implement this Policy’s reporting procedures in compliance with state law.
   3. The reporting requirements in this Policy are the minimum requirements. This Policy does not preclude anyone from reporting a known or suspected case of abuse or neglect to others for the protection of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
2. Required Reporting Process
   1. The Adult Leader must immediately report known or suspected abuse or neglect to the Event Director or to Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services.
   2. For the protection of all parties, if the suspected or alleged perpetrator is in/on the premises, they must be isolated from the program and have no contact with other Participants.
   3. As soon as possible and in all cases within 24 hours, the Adult Leader and Event Director must make an immediate oral report to Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services to the Centralized Intake number for the State of Michigan (855-444-3911).
   4. Within 72 hours, the Leader who observed or received the information must submit a completed State of Michigan “Report of Known or Suspected Child Abuse or Neglect” (DHS-3200) to Children’s Protective Services, or its equivalent to Adult Protective Services in accordance with the directions given at the time of the oral report. The Event Director may be a resource for completing this form.
   5. The Event Director and the entire staff of the **LOCAL CHURCH** must cooperate with Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services.
   6. Following contact with local Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services, the event director must inform:

**Section IV: Reporting [cont.]**

* + 1. The chairperson of the group sponsoring the ministry or event.
    2. **LOCAL CHURCH** staff person assigned to the ministries of the sponsoring group. The staff person must inform the District Superintendent.
    3. The facility director, manager, or host church clergy person.
  1. Notification of a parent or legal guardian of the alleged victim of abuse or neglect will be determined by Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services. The event director must follow the parent’s or legal guardian’s wishes regarding the continued participation of the involved child, youth, or vulnerable adult, unless otherwise instructed by Children’s Protective Services or Adult Protective Services.
  2. Matters of known or suspected abuse or neglect are to be kept confidential, except as required by law, to assist appropriate agencies in their investigations, or as disclosed to **LOCAL CHURCH,** district,or Conference representatives with a need to know such information consistent with the requirements of the law. The incident is not to be otherwise discussed with persons other than those involved in the reporting.
  3. This process may be edited to comply with applicable State laws. Such edits will be included in annual reports to the **LOCAL CHURCH**.

**Section V. Follow-Up After a Report**

1. General Goals and Objectives
   1. After reporting procedures have been completed, the following goals and objectives as prioritized below will be addressed:
      1. Protection for the alleged victim and other Participants from any continued exposure to abuse or neglect.
      2. Care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
      3. Respect and preservation of the legal rights of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
      4. Safeguarding the privacy of all parties involved.
   2. Meeting the above goals will help the **LOCAL CHURCH** provide the highest standard of care and protect its legal and financial interests so that the mission and ministries of the **LOCAL CHURCH** are sustainable in the future.
2. Investigation
   1. In accordance with the laws of the State of Michigan, **LOCAL CHURCH** workers (paid and volunteer) may not conduct any investigation of reports or accusations of abuse or neglect.
   2. Following the guidance of an attorney representing the **LOCAL CHURCH**, the **LOCAL CHURCH** will cooperate in any proper investigations by the Children’s Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, law enforcement agency, liability insurer, and the parties involved.

**Section VI. Revisions**

1. This policy may be reviewed regularly. When it is determined a change is appropriate or timely, the edits or change will be presented to the **LOCAL CHURCH’s** annual meeting for action.
2. Any part of this policy may be edited at any time to comply with applicable state laws. Such edits will be included in the **LOCAL CHURCH’s** annual reports.