



# Michigan Conference

The United Methodist Church

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

*Effective June 1, 2024*

“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 Michigan Conference 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

Michigan Conference 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 within district or Conference-related activities, functions, or events who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. 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 during a district or Conference related function, event, or activity.
3. **Applicant:** any person seeking to become an Adult Leader or Assistant Leader for a district or Conference related function, event, or activity.
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. **Conference:** the Michigan Conference of The United Methodist Church.

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

### Definitions [cont.]

6. **DHS:** Department of Health and Human Services in the state of Michigan which guards the safety and welfare of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
7. **Event Director:** the Adult Leader overseeing all personnel and programming at a Conference or District related function, event, or activity.
8. **Event Site:** the location of a Conference or District related function, event, or activity. This includes sites that are not a United Methodist facility.
9. **Neglect:** is failure to provide nutrition, clothing, shelter, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well-being of the Participants.
10. **Participants:** Participants are children, youth, or vulnerable adults who are registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in a Conference or District related function, event, or activity.
11. **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.
12. **Sexual Abuse:** is any sexual contact, sexually explicit language, gestures, or images directed to a Participant.
13. **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).
14. **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.
15. **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

#### A. Implementation

1. The Michigan Conference Connectional Ministries Team and Board of Young Peoples Ministry must implement this policy and develop procedures to that end.

#### B. Minimum Requirements

1. All Adult Leaders must:
  - a. Be at least 18 years of age.
  - b. Be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth being supervised.
  - c. Be connected to a local congregation or ministry setting.
  - d. Complete the current Screening Process (see Section II.A.1) for adults.
2. All Assistant Leaders must:
  - a. Be at least 16 years of age but less than 18 years of age.
  - b. Be at least 5 years older than the oldest child being supervised.
  - c. Be connected to a local congregation or ministry setting.
  - d. Complete the current Screening Process for youth (see Section II.A.2).

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

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

#### **C. 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.
3. 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 Conference 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 Conference has the authority to review or revoke participation.

#### **D. Records Retention**

1. All applications and related documents will be retained digitally through Safe Gatherings.

### **Section II. Screening**

#### **A. Screening and Training**

1. Safe Gatherings for Adult Leaders
  - a. All Applicants must complete the screening process and maintain their approval through Safe Gatherings.
  - b. Safe Gatherings requires re-approval every three years.
2. Safe Gatherings for Assistant Leaders
  - a. All Applicants must complete the Safe Gatherings training module for Abuse Prevention.
3. Training
  - a. The intent of training is to create a safe environment and raise awareness of and sensitivity to the issues of abuse and neglect.
    - i. The goals of the training are for trainees to
      - (a) know, understand, and be familiar with the Policy and current practices
      - (b) agree to implement the Policy of the Conference.
  - b. The content of the training must be consistent with this Policy. Additional material may be added at the discretion of the Conference.
4. Adult Leaders must complete the Safe Gatherings process and provide proof of their Approved Certificate
5. The Conference is responsible for maintaining a current list of all Conference-authorized Adult Leaders.
6. Event Directors may choose to supplement the Safe Gatherings training with additional training specifically relevant to their event.

### **Section III: Supervision**

#### **A. 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.

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

### Section III: Supervision [cont.]

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.

#### B. General Rules

1. Adequate staffing
  - a. All District or Conference-related functions, activities, and events 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.
  - b. Providing staffing is the responsibility of the Event Director of the District or Conference-related function, activity, or event.
  - c. Assistant Leaders may not comprise of more than 20% of the staff for an event, activity, or function.
  - d. Assistant Leaders must work under the supervision of two Adult Leaders.
  - e. 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
  - a. At least two Adult Leaders must be present at each Conference-related function, activity, or event involving Participants and must follow the Rule of Three.
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
  - a. If transportation is required, all drivers must be properly licensed for the vehicle used, and all drivers and vehicles must be insured.
  - b. Written permission from a parent/legal guardian is required for events requiring transportation to and from the event location.

#### C. 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.

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

### Section III: Supervision [cont.]

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 Conference.

#### D. Online or Digital Ministry

1. Online or Digital Ministry must be treated the same as ministry in physical spaces.
2. Only Conference or District 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

#### A. Persons Required to Report

1. All Adult or Assistant Leaders and Conference 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 Conference premises; (b) occur at a District or Conference-related function, activity or event; or (c) are disclosed during a District or Conference-related 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 District or Conference-related 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.

#### B. 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 Conference or District related function, event, or activity 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:

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

### Section IV: Reporting [cont.]

- a. The chairperson of the group sponsoring the District or Conference-related function, activity, or event.
  - b. Conference staff person assigned to the ministries of the sponsoring group. The staff person must inform the Conference Director of Connectional Ministries, the Bishop, and the District Superintendent of the sponsoring District (if applicable).
  - c. The facility director, manager, or host church clergy person.
7. 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.
  8. 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 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.
  9. This process may be edited to comply with applicable State laws. Such edits will be included in annual reports to the Annual Conference.

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

#### A. General Goals and Objectives

1. After reporting procedures have been completed, the following goals and objectives as prioritized below will be addressed:
  - a. Protection for the alleged victim and other Participants from any continued exposure to abuse or neglect.
  - b. Care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
  - c. Respect and preservation of the legal rights of both the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator.
  - d. Safeguarding the privacy of all parties involved.
2. Meeting the above goals will help the Conference provide the highest standard of care and protect its legal and financial interests so that the mission and ministries of the Conference are sustainable in the future.

#### B. Investigation

1. In accordance with the laws of the State of Michigan, Conference 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 Conference, the Conference 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

- A. 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 Conference's annual meeting for action.
- B. Any part of this policy may be edited at any time to comply with applicable state laws. Such edits will be included in the Conference's annual reports.

## Michigan Conference Protection Policy

### Resource Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to the Rio Texas Conference and Rev. Dr. Tanya Campen for permission to use their *Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Safety Policy* as a resource for this revision. <https://riotexas.org/safe>