Safe Sanctuaries Policy

for

Hayes Barton United Methodist Church

*Policy and Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Abuse*

Introduction:

*“Whoever welcomes [a] child…welcomes me.”*(Matthew 18:5).

*“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones… it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.”* (Matthew 18:6).

*“Now it is required that those who have been given trust must prove faithful.”* (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to our future – the children and youth of our congregation. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.” God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this Policy for the general safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons and for the prevention of abuse in our church.

Purpose:

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this Policy is to confirm our commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and vulnerable persons (as defined in the “Definitions” section below). Our church, as a holy place of sanctuary, must continue to be a place where people of all ages can come together for worship, study, and service, with the assurance that they are safe and secure in the community of faith.

Our goal is four-fold: (1) to protect children in our care from sexual abuse, child molestation, or any type of inappropriate sexual behavior by employees or volunteers in this church; (2) to protect vulnerable persons from abuse of any kind by employees or volunteers in this church; (3) to avoid the appearance of impropriety and reduce the potential risk to employees and volunteers of false accusations; and (4) to protect the ultimate mission of HBUMC by reducing the risk of legal liability to our church.

Scope:

This Policy shall apply to all paid and unpaid staff/volunteers who have direct contact with children, youth or vulnerable persons participating in any activities or events formally sponsored by HBUMC. This policy, however, does not supersede or countermand requirements that apply to any paid or unpaid staff/volunteers by reason of applicable law or regulation.

Screening of Staff and Volunteers:

A. All employees/staff and volunteers who work with youth, children or vulnerable persons shall complete the appropriate online application form(s), including the Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check. By completing the online application and providing an electronic signature, the applicant gives the staff person in charge permission to contact references, to perform any investigation deemed appropriate and to complete the review of the application. *This policy does not apply to clergy. The Conference policy on “Professional Sexual Misconduct” applies to “church professionals,” which for purposes of the policy applies to a clergy person, diaconal minister or local pastor appointed by the Bishop.*

B. Individuals serving on a one-time or very infrequent basis and who have not been screened will be able to serve under the supervision of a staff member or volunteer who has been screened.

C. Application information is maintained on a secure server that is password-protected. It is backed up to an offsite secure location.

D. Reference checks on employees will be handled by a staff member designated by the Staff/Parish Relations Committee.

E. Background checks will be performed on volunteers on a periodic basis. Volunteers shall provide authorization for rescreening as described in “A.” above.

Training:

A. All screened volunteers and staff will be given a written copy of this policy and will be required to sign an acknowledgement to that effect. The staff person responsible for each applicable department will store the signed acknowledgements for volunteers in his or her department.

B. Information on recognition, disclosure, reporting, and prevention of abuse shall be provided to screened volunteers and staff working with children, youth or vulnerable persons.

Procedures:

A. “Two-Adult Rule.” Two or more volunteers are to be involved at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children/youth including overnight accommodations. It is recommended that at least a five-year differential exist between children/youth and their leaders. If one-on-one interactions between adults and children/youth are unavoidable, the interaction should occur in an area that is visible to others and with the knowledge of another adult. No volunteers under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with, children/youth. With regard to transportation, screened volunteers who drive students to, from, or for church-sponsored activities should ensure that, except for unusual or unavoidable situations, there are always at least two adults or two children/youth in the car.

B. Windows in all classrooms. Each room or space where children/youth are being cared for shall have an eye-level window in the door or the door shall be left open. Classrooms or child-care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff and parents.

C. Restroom Procedure. Whenever possible, an adult shall escort at least two children in grades pre-K through 5th grade to the restroom and wait outside, including during Sunday School, special events, and worship. When there is no adult available, children should be sent in pairs.

D. Name Tags/Identification. Screened volunteers and staff shall wear their nametags or other identification at all times when working with children and vulnerable persons.

E. Drop Off/Pick Up Procedure. The church nursery will require a parent to sign his or her child in for all events, according to the church nursery policy. When dropping off children, nursery through kindergarten, for any activity at the church, a designated staff/volunteer shall oversee the parent/guardian signing in the child. Children in the nursery will receive an ID sticker. The ID sticker will be the identification to the staff/volunteer when the child is picked up. For special events, the sign-in policy will apply to all children, nursery through 5th grade.

F. Outside Groups Meeting in Church Building. Any group using HBUMC facilities must comply with the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and enforce these provisions. No outside group which might compromise the standards of our Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be given permission to meet in the church building. Outside groups will be asked to renew their covenant agreement with HBUMC on a periodic basis.

Reporting of Incidents:

Whenever any type of abuse (as defined in the “Definitions” section below) is suspected, the individual with this information shall take the following steps:

* Seek out the director/coordinator responsible for the ministry area immediately and give him/her the information so that the abuse can be reported immediately.
* In the case of suspected abuse of a child or youth, the individual discovering the suspected abuse and/or the director/coordinator, or the Senior Pastor or his/her designee shall contact the Department of Human Services and, if applicable, the appropriate law enforcement agency.

All known or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse on church property or at church activities are to be reported to the director/coordinator responsible for the ministry area and to the church administrator. HBUMC will report abuse in accordance with North Carolina law, including North Carolina General Statues §7B-301 *et seq*. This does not mean that the individual staff/volunteer cannot independently report suspected abuse.

Safe Sanctuaries Team:

The HBUMC Safe Sanctuaries Team will be nominated by the Committee on Lay Leadership. The Safe Sanctuaries Team shall report to the Trustees and have two principal areas of responsibility: regulatory and educational.

A. The Committee shall, at least annually, review and (when necessary) recommend revisions of the HBUMC Safe Sanctuaries policy to the Trustees. The Committee shall submit an annual report to the Trustees with the following information:

1. That the policy has been reviewed;

2. Recommended adjustments to the policy, if any; and

3. Other pertinent information.

B. The Committee will advise the congregation at large of the existence and application of this Policy.

C. The Committee is responsible for addressing emerging safety issues that may arise.

Definitions:

A. HBUMC - Hayes Barton United Methodist Church

B. Child - a person under the age of 18

C. Youth - a person who participates in HBUMC’s youth group and attends middle school or high school (a person will be considered a youth as long as they are a participant in the youth group and enrolled as a middle or high school student)

D. Types of Abuse

1. Emotional - abuse in which a person exposes a protected person (as defined below) to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

2. Neglect - abuse in which a person endangers a protected person’s health, safety, or welfare through negligence.

3. Physical - abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a protected person.

4. Ritual - abuse in which physical, sexual or psychological violation of a protected person is inflicted intentionally and in a stylized way as part of ceremonies or rites by a person or persons responsible for the protected person’s welfare.

5. Sexual - abuse in which sexual contact between a protected person and an adult (or, in the case of abuse of a youth or child, another older and more powerful youth) occurs.

E. Ministry - on-campus, or church-sponsored off-campus, activities or programs involving protected persons, including but not limited to those related to child care, preschool, district and conference youth events, mission trips, and United Methodist Youth Fellowship.

F. Vulnerable person - those with special needs participating in any ministry.

G. Protected person - children, youth under the age of 18, or vulnerable persons participating in any ministry.

Statement of Covenant:

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and as a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons, as well as all of the staff and volunteers who regularly work with children, youth, and vulnerable persons.

Conclusion:

In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that all persons will be “...surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.” (“Baptismal Covenant II,” *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.44).

*I have read and understand the policies and procedures of Hayes Barton United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy and agree to adhere to these policies and procedures.*

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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