

**Safe Sanctuary Guidelines**  
**HOPE United Methodist Church**  
**Ephrata, PA**

*Updated September 2018*

**PREAMBLE**

God calls us to create communities of faith where children are protected, safe and allowed to grow strong. Jesus taught “Whomever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me” (Mark 9:37 NRSV). The social principles of the United Methodist Church state that children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse. At a child’s baptism, we affirm our responsibility to their safety by our congregational response, pledging:

“With God’s help, we will so order our lives after the example of Christ that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”

The congregation of Ephrata Hope UMC is committed to provide a safe and secure environment for all children and those who minister to them as staff and volunteers. Building on our theological foundations we believe in a policy that includes hospitality to all, free from harm or abuse while working to protect everyone. We hold these truths applicable to all and strive to keep in compliance with all aspects of the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law (63 PA C.S.A. 6301) as amended from time to time. In the event the law conflicts with this policy, the law shall control.

**KEY DEFINITIONS**

**Child or Youth** is any person who has not reached their eighteenth birthday.

**Direct contact with children** means the care, supervision, guidance or control of children or routine interaction with children.

**Mandated Reporters** means an adult required by Title 23 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes to make a report of suspected child abuse.

**Person responsible for the child’s welfare** – a person who provides permanent or temporary care, supervision, mental health diagnosis or treatment, training or control of a child in lieu of parental care, supervision and control; the term includes any person who has direct or regular contact with a child through any program.

**SCREENING AND SELECTION OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Careful screening is an effective tool to help protect children. It is an essential step in selecting the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers for every program that involves children. We support the following screening standards.

**Screening Standards**

All applicants for paid employment or volunteer service in which the applicant will have direct contact with children in a manner under Pennsylvania law currently in force or as amended in the future from time to time, shall complete the following prior to start of service:

- 1) Written Application – a written application including:
  - a) Name
  - b) Address

- c) Phone Number
  - d) Work/Volunteer History
  - e) Experience and skills related to the position
  - f) Two (2) personal references from persons not related to the applicant
- 2) Background Certifications
- a) All paid staff and volunteers need background certifications required by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended from time to time. Generally this includes:
    - i) Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Report – a report of criminal history record information from the Pennsylvania State Police (*SP4-164A or SPA-164*).
    - ii) Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance – a certification from the Department of Public Welfare as to whether the applicant is named in the statewide database as the alleged perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation or as the perpetrator of a founded report or an indicated report (*CY113*).
    - iii) FBI Report – a report of federal criminal history; required for all paid staff and those volunteers who have not been a Pennsylvania resident during the entire previous 10 years.
  - b) Renewals (PA Child Protective Services, section §6344.4)
    - i) Paid staff – effective December 31, 2014 paid staff are required to obtain updated certifications every 60 months.
      - (1) Certifications obtained prior to December 31, 2014 are required to be updated within 60 months of the date of the oldest certification. For example: a child abuse clearance obtained Jan. 1, 2014, Pennsylvania State Police clearance obtained Feb. 1, 2014 and FBI fingerprint clearance obtained March 1, 2014, updated clearances for all three must be obtained by Jan.1, 2019.
    - ii) Volunteers - effective August 25, 2015, volunteers are required to obtain certifications every 60 months.
      - (1) Certifications obtained prior to August 25, 2015 are required to be updated within 60 months of the date of the oldest certification.
  - c) In addition to the above, all employees and volunteers of the preschool centers operated by Hope UMC must obtain all clearances required for their certificate of compliance by the Department of Education.
  - d) The applicant shall produce the original documents mentioned above and Hope Church will make copies and retain in a secure location.
- 3) Relationship with Church – All prospective volunteer workers who work with children shall have an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being in a supervisory role in activities for children.
- 4) Records – All written records are confidential and will be kept in a secure location with access restricted to those with need to know. Records are maintained for three (3) years after service end date.

## **TRAINING**

All persons who have direct contact with children shall participate in training as required under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended

in the future from time to time. The initial training shall occur prior to the adult having direct supervision of children.

Hope UMC will provide annual training opportunities including review of any changes to this policy, procedures for supervision, along with current information on how to report a suspected incident.

### **SUPERVISION**

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of children and protect staff and volunteers from unfounded accusations.

#### **Supervision Standards:**

All programs and ministries of Hope UMC use the following standards for the supervision of children.

- 1) Two Adult Rule – regardless of the group size, there will always be a minimum two non-related adults present. This may include the presence of an adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms or activities.
- 2) No child will be left unsupervised while participating in a ministry activity or event.
- 3) All ministry activities will occur in open view with each room or space open to public view.
- 4) No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is at least 18 years of age or older and is at least 5 years older than the oldest children being supervised.
- 5) Ministry events involving transportation require a written consent form signed by the parent or guardian of the child.

### **REPORTING**

Reporting any allegation of child abuse shall be done in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently in force and as enacted and amended from time to time.

It is essential all staff and volunteers who have contact with children which under Pennsylvania law currently in force and as enacted and amended in the future define them as a mandated reporter, have a legal responsibility to make a report directly to public child welfare officials any time they have reasonable cause to suspect abuse has occurred. Failure to comply with this requirement can lead to civil and/or criminal penalties for the staff or volunteer.

#### **Reports of suspected child abuse are made by either:**

- **Calling the Pennsylvania Child Abuse Hotline (24-Hour service) at 1-800-932-0313 followed by completion of form CY-47 within 48 hours** (available from the conference website or the PA Department of Human Service)
- **Or online through the PA Department of Human Services established electronic filing system ([www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis))**

Immediately after making the report, the mandated reporter shall inform the Pastor of Hope UMC that a report has been filed. The District Superintendent shall be notified if the alleged perpetrator is paid staff or volunteer of the church.

## **RESPONSES FOR REPORTS OF ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

### **Pastoral responses to reports or allegations of abuse:**

Any allegation of abuse requires a process to address responding to the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the press. The response must be quick, compassionate and unified. All allegations are taken seriously.

A Pastoral response is NOT an investigation of the alleged abuse. The investigation is the responsibility of public officials. In all cases of reported abuse, we will cooperate with official investigating agencies.

### **Response to victims of abuse:**

In the instance of any allegation of abuse, we will reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Pastoral resources shall be extended, and the conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service. The care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Response to the victim and the victim's family will be done in a positive and supportive manner.

The parents of the victim will be notified and steps taken to address the safety and well-being of the child until the parent(s) arrive. If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, the direction of the child welfare authorities will be followed concerning notification of others.

### **Response to all alleged perpetrators of abuse:**

Response to the alleged perpetrator and the perpetrator's family will be in a loving and supportive manor. The conference I-Care Team can be contacted to assist in providing this service.

The alleged perpetrator will immediately be removed from further involvement with children and advised that there has been an allegation of abuse, done with dignity and respect. Details of the allegations of the abuse are not be discussed with the alleged perpetrator; care will be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner.

When it has been alleged that a member of the church staff or volunteer has committed an act of abuse, the staff member or volunteer is required to refrain from all ministry activities/events with children until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities. At that time, a meeting will be held with the employee or volunteer to discuss the incident(s) that led to the report being made. Even if the public agency determines the report to be unfounded, the church has the right to prohibit the volunteer or employee from resuming working in ministries with children based on the facts and circumstances available at that time.

### **Response to the Media:**

The District Superintendent, Conference Director of Communications and pastor shall decide on a single spokesperson for contact with the public/media after consultation with the presiding bishop. All media requests for statements will be directed to that spokesperson.