



## **Hilliard United Methodist Church**

### **Safe Sanctuaries Policy**

**(Last reviewed and revised September 2021)**

#### **Introduction**

National research indicates that a report of child abuse occurs every 10 seconds and abuse of vulnerable adults is prevalent and continues to increase. While reporting is on the rise, there is still much abuse that goes undetected and unreported. Often, abuse occurs in places where children, youth, and vulnerable adults feel safe – homes, schools, camps, residential care settings, and even churches. In over three quarters of reported cases, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. The intent of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy is to: 1) prevent such abuse from happening in our church; 2) be a place where children, youth, and vulnerable adults can feel safe in disclosing abuse; and 3) protect the individuals who minister to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

#### **Covenant**

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Hilliard United Methodist Church (the “Church”) pledges to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that seek to protect the safety and enable the spiritual growth of all of our Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults as well as those who work with them. We seek to follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; and to implement prudent operational procedures in our ministry activities and events.

# Definitions

**“Abuse”** means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to another person. Abuse includes:

1. The infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means.
2. The creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of risk.
3. Committing or allowing to be committed, an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution.

**“Child”** or **“Children”** or **“Youth”** means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday. As the context requires, “Child” shall mean an individual who is in the sixth grade or below and “Youth” shall mean an individual in the seventh grade through twelfth grade.

**“Exploitation”** means obtaining or using another person’s resources, including but not limited to funds, assets or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

**“Sexual abuse”** includes, but is not limited to, any contact or interaction in which the parent, legal guardian, or other person uses or allows, permits, or encourages the use of the Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult for the purposes of sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

**“Sexual exploitation”** includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, legal guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under Ohio law. Sexual exploitation also includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, legal guardian, person having custodial control or supervision, or person who is responsible for the welfare of a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult; allows, permits, or encourages the Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a Child as provided for under Ohio law.

**“Staff”** means any compensated individual who works with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults at any Church-sponsored activity, including but not limited to clergy.

**“Supervision”** means to oversee or direct a ministry or ministry activity or event.

**“Vulnerable Adult”** means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older who is unable to protect him or herself from abuse, neglect, or exploitation by others because of a physical, mental, or emotional impairment.

**“Volunteer”** means any non-compensated individual who works with Children, Youth or Vulnerable Adults at any Church-sponsored activity.

## A. Screening

1. All Staff and Volunteers who may have regular or direct contact with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults must undergo a background screening including:
  - a. Standard contact information
  - b. Experience/qualifications for the position
  - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history, including any criminal charges and/or convictions
  - d. Authorization allowing the Church to secure any background screening to be conducted and/or to contact references.
  - e. Listing of 2 non-relative references. This list should have complete contact information for all references. *(This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.)*
2. All Staff and Volunteers, 18 years of age and older, who may have regular or direct contact with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults must undergo a criminal records check:
  - a. Individuals will be asked to pay for the background check, if able. If the cost is prohibitive, the Church will cover the fee.
  - b. Individuals under the age of 18 must complete the information on the *Permission to Obtain a Background Check* form and have a parent sign it even though a background check is not required because those records are sealed.
3. Each conviction should be evaluated in view of all the facts, including the date of the conviction, the nature of the offense, the position sought, applicable law, and the obligations imposed by Ohio Amended Senate Bill 187. However, offenses listed in R.C. 109.572(A)(1) will generally disqualify a person from having unsupervised access to Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.
4. Background checks will be repeated every two years.
5. Any individual who has had a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years shall resubmit all paperwork and undergo a new background check.
6. All records required by this policy are confidential, permanent records and must be kept in a secure location that is accessible only to Church leadership.
7. Volunteers must demonstrate an active relationship with the Church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for Children, Youth, or

Vulnerable Adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor may replace the six-month waiting period.

8. The Church complies with Amended Senate Bill 187 (Exhibit 1).

## **B. Training and Supervision**

These training and supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse or exploitation of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults, and to protect Staff and Volunteers from unfounded accusations. Careful judgment should be exercised in all supervisory situations.

1. Training is required for all Staff and Volunteers working with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults. An initial educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, including its procedures and practices, is to be implemented prior to any Staff member or Volunteer having direct supervision of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults. Thereafter, training is required annually, or sooner, if significant changes are made to this Policy.
2. All ministry workers will be issued an ID badge, to be worn at all times when serving with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults in church-sponsored activities.
3. Every effort should be made to provide the minimum supervisory standards of the “two-adult rule” or the “rule of three”.
  - a. The two-adult rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. This may include the presence of an assigned adult ‘roamer’ who moves in and out of rooms and places where ministry activities or events occur.
  - b. When transporting Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults for a Church ministry event or activity:
    - i. All drivers will have on file in the church office a copy of a valid driver’s license and proof of insurance.
    - ii. All drivers must be willing to submit to a motor vehicle record check.
    - iii. All drivers must be at least 21 years of age.
    - iv. When traveling in multiple vehicles, there will be contact between all vehicles by way of cell phone.
    - v. Youth are not be permitted to transport themselves or other Youth to off-site events (events at private residences are excluded).

- c. The “*rule of three*” can be followed for ministries with Youth, age 12 and older. The “*rule of three*” states: there will always be a minimum of three people together for ministry events, this can be two Youth and one adult, or one Youth and two adults.
4. Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults must be supervised while attending a ministry activity or event.
  - a. Children: Minimum ratio of 1:7, Staff and/or Volunteer to Child ratio.
  - b. Youth: Minimum ratio of 1:10, Staff and/or Volunteer to Youth ratio.
  - c. Vulnerable Adults: Every effort should be made to provide the minimum supervisory standards of the “two-adult rule” or the “rule of three”.
5. All ministry activities and events should occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry activities or events occur should be open to public view. For example, enclosed spaces such as classrooms could have a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, a ½ door configuration, or an open door.
6. Whenever a Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult is being served, it is highly encouraged to have at least one person on site who is trained in First Aid/CPR and Child abuse recognition and prevention.
7. When possible, Children are to be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. Preschoolers will be escorted to the bathroom, but Staff and Volunteers should not enter the bathroom with them. Should assistance be required, this will be done with the bathroom door open, and only after another adult has been informed of the need for assistance. Elementary-aged Children should use the buddy system (groups of three) when leaving the classroom to attend to bathroom needs.
8. Before the start of every activity or event, appropriate contact information should be collected or be on file for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults. Annual registration must include the following: individual’s name, parent or guardian name(s) and contact information, current address, age, insurance information, two emergency contact names and numbers, permission to transport and treat, and a photo release signed by a parent or guardian.
  - a. The photographing of Children and Youth is prohibited, unless there is a specially designated person photographing for a special event. This is done only with consent from parents, and photos are shared only with permission.

9. Children younger than sixth grade will be released to parents or guardians at the reception counters or classroom doors. Persons other than the Child's parents or guardians must be authorized to pick up the Child.
10. For camps, retreats, mission trips, lock-ins, and similar overnight ministries, the prior approval of a pastor and/or the Director of Children's/Middle Grades/Youth Ministries must be obtained. Parent or guardian permission will be obtained.
11. A ministry plan including travel plans and sleeping arrangements should be made available in writing to and signed by the parents or legal guardians prior to the event.
  - a. Overnight events that are attended by minors of various genders must be chaperoned by Staff and/or Volunteers of various genders, with on-call back up of one person of each gender in case of emergency.
  - b. Two Staff and/or Volunteers will work as a team when it is not possible to have two adults in the same sleeping room. The team approach will be encouraged and coordinated by the Director of Children's/Middle Grades/Youth Ministries.
  - c. No attendee will be allowed to leave early, or leave and return, without prior notification from a parent or guardian and approval by the Staff and/or Volunteer in charge of the ministry event.
12. No person shall supervise an age group unless they are at least eighteen years of age and at least five years older than the Children or Youth being supervised.
13. Those who are not a professionally licensed counselor in the State of Ohio should limit confidential conversations to three sessions. These sessions should follow all aspects of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. If the problem has not been resolved after three sessions, the Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult should be referred to a professional licensed counselor. It is recognized that certain confidential conversations may preclude the presence of two adults. In these situations, the door must be left open or the window of the door must remain uncovered, and a second adult must be in proximity to the meeting.
14. The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church requires the trustees of each local church to secure adequate liability insurance to cover the risk associated with its ministries. The Board of Trustees shall review annually the adequacy of the property, building, and personnel coverage.

## **C. Substance Abuse and Weapons**

Staff and Volunteers will not consume, or be under the influence of, illegal drugs or alcohol while conducting ministries of the Church or on Church property. Consumption of alcoholic beverages is not permitted on church property. Staff and Volunteers may also not be under the influence of prescription drugs if they put at risk the health and safety of the Staff, Volunteers, Child, Youth or Vulnerable Adult being served. A prescription drug taken in a manner different from the prescribing physician's instructions is considered substance abuse and is in violation of this policy.

No weapons (including but not limited to firearms of any kind, knives with a 3 inch or longer blade that are not being utilized for food preparation or consumption) concealed or otherwise, are allowed on Church property or at any Church-sponsored event or ministry.

## **D. Reporting**

Safe Sanctuaries reporting is required by any Staff or Volunteer who personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation or when an allegation of such an incident is made by a Child, Youth, or Vulnerable Adult. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegation(s) dealt with as soon as possible to the incident or disclosure.

All Staff and Volunteers are included in mandatory reporting in the cases of suspected abuse or neglect as required by The Book of Discipline and Ohio law.

If any of the above situations occur, the following steps will be taken:

1. If the victim is in immediate need of medical attention, the appropriate medical assistance will be obtained. If the alleged perpetrator is onsite and danger is perceived, local police authorities will be called.
2. Upon securing medical attention for the victim and ensuring the safety of the environment, the Staff or Volunteer must report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the ministry or activity using the Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse with his/her age, reason for suspected abuse and any other helpful information to the investigation. The senior pastor (or church council lay leaders) will ensure contact is made with Adult Protective Services or Child Protective Services of Ohio Health and Family Services (855-OHI-OAPS). However, if the Volunteer also happens to be a mandatory reporter, the Volunteer should, at a minimum "co-report" with the senior pastor. When making a report by telephone, it is advisable that it be conducted in the presence of an objective witness. The

witness can verify the report has been made and who made the report. All reports should be documented and securely filed.

3. Notify the parents or legal guardians of the victim. Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of the victim until the parent/legal guardian(s) arrive. However, if one or both of the parents/legal guardians is the alleged perpetrator, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification.
4. The senior pastor (or church council lay leaders) shall immediately call the superintendent of the district in which the church resides and report the allegations.
5. Further communication or steps taken with the Staff, congregation, community, or media shall only be taken after consultation with the District Superintendent and the Conference office.
6. The person in charge of the ministry activity or event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed and kept in a secure location.

## **E. Response Plan**

A quick, compassionate, and unified response to a reported incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

1. All media requests for statements should be directed to a designated church spokesperson who will work in conjunction with the District Superintendent and the Conference Crisis Communication Team. The spokesperson shall update the District Superintendent of any media inquiries. The West Ohio Communication Office is available at any time for consultation and to provide advice for handling media or other community inquiries.
2. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of removal. In any removal of Staff or Volunteer from a ministry activity or event, care should be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or West Ohio Conference of the UMC, or both.



3. When it has been alleged that a Staff or Volunteer, has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the Staff or Volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry activities and events with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate civil authorities and in accordance with The Book of Discipline.
4. Take all allegations seriously. Reach out and respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. The church should seek to provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

## **Amended Ohio Senate Bill 187**

On March 22, 2001, Amended Ohio Senate Bill 187 became law (Ohio Revised Code sections 109.574-577, 121.401, 121.402). The legislation's purpose is to help ensure that Youth-serving organizations that place volunteers in positions requiring "unsupervised access to Children on a regular basis" use appropriate screening methods.

Churches are required to adhere to Amended Ohio Senate Bill 187

The Six Ohio Revised Codes

109.574 Volunteers have unsupervised access to Children definitions.

As used in sections 109.574 to 109.577 of the Revised Code:

(A) "Organization or entity" means a religious, charitable, scientific, educational, athletic, or service institution or organization or local government entity that provides care, treatment, education, training, instruction, supervision, or recreation to Children.

(B) "Unsupervised access to a Child" means that the person in question has access to a Child and that either of the following applies:

(1) No other person eighteen years of age or older is present in the same room with the Child.

(2) If outdoors, no other person eighteen years of age or older is within a thirty-yard radius of the Child or has visual contact with the Child.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001

109.575 Information provided by volunteers having access to Children.

At the time of a person's initial application to an organization or entity to be a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis will have unsupervised access to a Child, the organization or entity shall inform the person that, at any time, the person might be required to provide a set of impressions of the person's fingerprints and a criminal records check might be conducted with respect to the person. Not later than thirty days after the effective date of this section, each organization or entity shall notify each current volunteer who is in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child that, at any time, the volunteer might be required to provide a set of impressions of the volunteer's fingerprints and a criminal records check might be conducted with respect to the volunteer.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001

109.576 Notice of volunteer's conviction.

(A) If a person has applied to an organization or entity to be a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child, if the organization or entity subjects the person to a criminal records check, if the report of the results of the criminal records check indicates that the person has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to any of the offenses described in division (A)(1) of section 109.572 of the Revised Code, and if the organization or entity accepts the person as a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child, the organization or entity shall notify the parent or guardian of each Child for whom it provides services that the volunteer has been convicted of one or more of those offenses but that, nonetheless, the person will be serving the organization or entity in that position. The notification required by this division shall be in writing, and the organization or entity shall send the notice to the parent or guardian on the date the organization or entity commences providing services to the Child or on the date the organization or entity decides to accept the person as a volunteer after receiving the report of the results of the criminal records check, whichever is

later.

(B) If a person is serving an organization or entity as a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child, if the organization or entity subjects the person to a criminal records check, if the report of the results of the criminal records check indicates that the person has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to any of the offenses described in division (A)(1) of section 109.572 of the Revised Code, and if the organization or entity retains the person as a volunteer in the same position or in any other position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child, the organization or entity shall notify the parent or guardian of each Child for whom it provides services that the volunteer has been convicted of one or more of those offenses but that, nonetheless, the person will be retained by the organization or entity in that position. The notification required by this division shall be in writing, and the organization or entity shall send the notice to the parent or guardian on the date the organization or entity commences providing services to the Child or on the date the organization or entity decides to retain the person after receiving the report of the results of the criminal records check, whichever is later.

(C) A notification to a parent or guardian of a Child that is required by division (A) or (B) of this section shall identify by name the person who is accepted or retained as a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child, shall state the fact that the person has been convicted of or pleaded guilty to one or more of the offenses described in division (A)(1) of section 109.572 of the Revised Code, but shall not identify the offense or offenses in question.

(D) Divisions (A) to (C) of this section apply regarding any criminal records check performed by the bureau of criminal identification and investigation pursuant to section 109.57, section 109.572, or rules adopted under division (E) of section 109.57 of the Revised Code, any criminal records check performed in any manner by the organization or entity or any of its officers or employees, or any criminal records check performed in any manner by any person upon the request of the organization or entity or any of its officers or employees.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001

#### 109.577 Immunity from civil liability.

(A) If an organization or entity uses a volunteer in a position in which the person on a regular basis has unsupervised access to a Child and if the volunteer has been subjected to a criminal records check performed by the bureau of criminal identification and investigation pursuant to section 109.57, section 109.572, or rules adopted under division (E) of section 109.57 of the Revised Code, the organization or entity, and its officials and employees, are immune from civil liability that might otherwise be incurred or imposed for any death or any injury or loss to person or property that is caused by any act or omission of the volunteer and that results from or is related to the volunteer having unsupervised access to a Child on a regular basis. This immunity does not apply to a person, organization, or entity that has immunity from civil liability in accordance with section 9.86, 2744.02, or 2744.03 of the Revised Code for the good faith compliance, attempted compliance, or failure to comply.

(B) This section does not create a new cause of action or substantive legal right against a person, organization, or entity and does not affect any immunities from civil liability or defenses established by another section of the Revised Code or available at common law, to which a person, organization, or entity may be entitled under circumstances not covered by this section.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001

#### 121.401 Adoption of recommended best practices when volunteers have unsupervised access to Children.

(A) As used in this section and section 121.402 of the Revised Code, "organization or entity" and "unsupervised access to a Child" have the same meanings as in section 109.574 of the Revised Code.

(B) The governor's community service council shall adopt a set of "recommended best practices" for organizations or entities to follow when one or more volunteers of the organization or entity have unsupervised access to one or more Children or otherwise interact with one or more Children. The "recommended best practices" shall focus on, but shall not be limited to, the issue of the safety of the Children and, in addition, the screening and supervision of volunteers. The "recommended best practices" shall include as a recommended best practice that the organization or entity subject to a criminal records check performed by the bureau of criminal identification and investigation pursuant to section 109.57, section 109.572 , or rules adopted under division (E) of section 109.57 of the Revised Code, all of the following:

(1) All persons who apply to serve as a volunteer in a position in which the person will have unsupervised access to a Child on a regular basis.

(2) All volunteers who are in a position in which the person will have unsupervised access to a Child on a regular basis and who the organization or entity has not previously subjected to a criminal records check performed by the bureau of criminal identification and investigation.

(C) The set of "recommended best practices" required to be adopted by this section are in addition to the educational program required to be adopted under section 121.402 of the Revised Code.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001

121.402 Educational program for volunteers having unsupervised access to Children.

(A) The governor's community service council shall establish and maintain an educational program that does all of the following:

(1) Makes available to parents and guardians of Children notice about the provisions of sections 109.574 to 109.577 , section 121.401 , and section 121.402 of the Revised Code and information about how to keep Children safe when they are under the care, custody, or control of a person other than the parent or guardian;

(2) Makes available to organizations and entities information regarding the best methods of screening and supervising volunteers, how to obtain a criminal records check of a volunteer, confidentiality issues relating to reports of criminal records checks, and record keeping regarding the reports;

(3) Makes available to volunteers information regarding the possibility of being subjected to a criminal records check and displaying appropriate behavior to minors;

(4) Makes available to Children advice on personal safety and information on what action to take if someone takes inappropriate action towards a Child.

(B) The program shall begin making the materials described in this section available not later than one year after the effective date of this section.

Effective Date: 03-22-2001