

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY
MILTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
316 Dover-Milton Road, Oak Ridge, NJ 07438



From Scripture we read in Matthew 18: 5-7 (NRSV) "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, 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. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

Jesus clearly valued children when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Emulating his example, the churches and their organizations within the Greater New Jersey Annual Conference have grown to be an important place for nurturing children and youth in faith.

The Milton United Methodist Church affirms the significance of children and youth in its ministry while recognizing that we live in a world where young people and vulnerable adults must be protected from any form of abuse. Through this policy, the Milton UMC seeks to prayerfully and faithfully identify areas of risk and take proactive steps to reduce that risk. This policy is in compliance with the Greater NJ Conference Safe Sanctuaries Policy. This policy and the guidelines herein are to be followed by all persons, ministries and programs dealing with children, youth (under age 18) and vulnerable adults within the church. All non-church groups utilizing the facilities of the Milton United Methodist Church are expected to adhere to these policies and practices as well. The Safe Sanctuary policies are designed to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, but when followed, they will also serve to shield volunteer and paid staff from false accusation.

Scope of the Issue and Definitions:

When we think seriously about the promise we make in the baptismal service, we conclude that we are truly called to prevent child abuse in our churches. As Christians we are called to move beyond grieving about the issue to engaging in active efforts to eliminate the possibility of child abuse everywhere, and most especially in our church.

Types of Child Abuse: Physical (battery, shaking, kicking, choking, "non-accidental"), Emotional (spoken or unspoken violence or cruelty), Neglect (endangers child's safety, health, and welfare), Sexual (fondling, intercourse, incest, exploitation and/or exposure to pornography or prostitution), Ritual (regularly and intentionally inflicted, possibly done with an appeal to a higher power).

It can Happen Anywhere: The child, youth, or vulnerable adult victim is never responsible for causing abuse and is never to be blamed. The victim is never capable of consent to abusive behavior. Child sexual abuse is ALWAYS wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

Knowing the Facts: Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Estimates state that 1 out of 7 boys are sexually abused, but the actual number may be higher because of a reluctance to report occurrences.

The Church at Risk: The risk for churches is especially high because we're seen as a "trusting organization" and churches have been "notoriously INACTIVE when it comes to screening volunteers and/or employees who work with kids." Furthermore, churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact with children.

Indicators of Child Abuse: Children showing anxiety about coming to church or being left in a class or program, or reluctance to participate when he/she had previously been enthusiastic may be an indicator of abusive behaviors. Abused children may have fears of specific individuals, experience nightmares, or show hostility.

Abusers: Who Are They: Less than 20% are strangers. 93% of victims know their abuser. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs and schools.

How Does Abuse Happen: Children are vulnerable, the abuser is powerful; without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children or our workers with children. Strategies must be supported by the entire congregation and, applied to each worker involved in children's and youth ministries. The congregation needs to think carefully about the safety of any one-adult/one-child situations. Look for group situations whenever possible. Set an example by personally avoiding one-adult/one-child situations with children other than your own.

Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse: From a single act, many victims emerge, including the child, the child's family, the congregation, and often the family of the abuser. Of foremost importance is the child who has been harmed; he or she must be cared for. The congregation's wounds may continue well beyond litigation; that doesn't provide healing among the members. Litigation can go on for two or more years. Financial consequences are somewhere around \$750,000 if innocent/at least \$1-2 million if proven guilty. No congregation can afford financially, ethically, or morally to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of child sexual abuse.

Greater NJ Conference Insurance: All churches are covered through the GNJ Conference policy, and there is an expectation that every church (and its related programs), is implementing policies and procedures with regard to safe sanctuaries. As is true with most situations, the extent of coverage varies, depending on what the local church has done to proactively prevent abuse from happening.

Minimizing Opportunity for Abuse: If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child. Expect both church and outside programs utilizing church facilities to perform careful screening and background checks on all persons working with children. Youth-serving organizations from outside the congregation should have policies in place for dealing with suspicious situations and reports of abuse. Furthermore, these organizations should regularly train their staff to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Screening and Background Information:

Volunteer Application Forms

All staff and volunteers working in the church's children and youth programs will complete a screening form provided by the church. These forms are designed to assist the Milton United Methodist Church in gaining information on persons seeking to serve in church programs with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Their use is designed to enhance the protection of those who participate in the programs. This completed document shall be kept in a volunteer personnel file with completed Background Check reports.

Screening and Background Checks

Screening and background checks shall be required of all persons involved in the congregation's children's programs and ministries unless a more stringent check is required to satisfy the standards of a licensing agency. Persons screened elsewhere must provide information about when and where their last background check was completed, and if possible, provide a copy of this for the church's files. Anyone transporting persons in their personal vehicles must also have a motor vehicle background check as well. 3 The GNJAC approved service (Trak-1) shall be used for background checks for volunteers and paid staff who are working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A description is available on the GNJAC website (<https://www.gnjumc.org/protecting-children-and-youth/safe-sanctuaries/>). For those serving in ministries location only on church property, the Child Protection screening is sufficient. Please Utilize Child Protection Plus if you expect to be transporting children or youth as this will include the motor vehicle check. Volunteers will be reimbursed by the Milton United Methodist Church for the cost of the background check if done through Trak-1. A receipt for the background check plus a copy of the report itself should be submitted as soon as possible after the screening is completed.

Volunteer personnel documents (Volunteer Applications and Background Checks) are considered confidential and will be kept in a secure file by the pastor of the church. Information from these forms will only be used for screening persons who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Screening for Staff

Paid staff who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults are required to do the same background check as volunteer staff, with the exception of any appointed clergy who are required to do a more thorough background check through GNJ conference as a requirement for appointment. Other screening information will be handled as a part of the normal hiring process by the SPRC.

Use of Background Checks

If information shows that a potential volunteer was convicted of child abuse, child molestation, incest, or some other crime against a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, that person will not be permitted to serve in the capacity as a leader or helper with young people or vulnerable adults. If information indicates that charges were filed but there was no conviction, the pastor with one additional lay leader of the congregation will have a conversation with that person to determine how this was resolved. As always, these are confidential conversations.

Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults:

All church programs for and with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall adhere to the following basic procedural guidelines.

1. It is imperative that persons in the leadership roles as well as children, youth, and vulnerable adults mutually respect one another in all behaviors.
2. The "Two-Adult" Rule: Two adults should be present at all times. Avoid all one-adult-/one-child situations, such as closed-door bathroom breaks.
3. If there cannot be two adults present, there will be an adult who will serve as a floater who can rotate between classrooms.
4. Windows in classroom doors are to remain uncovered at all times, eliminating the opportunity for secrecy and isolation. If there are no windows in classroom doors or the windows cannot remain uncovered, the doors shall remain open. All doors of classrooms used by young people and vulnerable adults shall have uncovered windows insofar as possible.
5. The "Five-Years-Older" Rule: Adults should be at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group. Young people under the age of 18 may serve as assistants but are not to be counted as a responsible adult leader.
6. An Open-door policy will be adhered to when counseling children, youth, or vulnerable adults. The door may remain closed if the door has a window, and the counselor should take care to be seated in such a way that she/he can be seen from the window while maintaining as much confidentiality as possible.
7. Persons in leadership roles are responsible for the appropriateness of audio-visual, electronic, and written materials utilized within their classes/groups.
8. All computers within in the church are to be password protected and unavailable for use by any unauthorized person. All computers (including personal computers of leaders) used in ministry and should always be monitored when used by children, youth and/vulnerable adults. Church Computers should only be used for ministry related purposes and shall contain appropriate blocks from specific internet sites.
9. A six-month hospitality policy will be followed for adults invited to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. New persons coming to the church are not to be utilized as leaders until they have been a part of the congregation for at least six months.
10. Parent/Guardian approval is required for children and youth to participate in church activities which will include permission for use of pictures and videos, basic medical information (such as allergies) as well as a list of who is permitted to pick up children or youth from activities. Written permission for someone to leave with an adult not on the submitted list must be sent to the group/ministry's leader before a child or youth is released.
11. Advanced notice will be given to parents/guardians regarding any activity or event involving the participation of children, youth and vulnerable adults outside of regularly scheduled events such as Sunday 5 School or Youth Group. Parents/guardians must give written, signed and dated permission for their child or youth to participate in any activity that is not held on our church property.
12. New volunteers are to be trained in the congregation's Safe Sanctuary Policy when they begin to serve. There will also be an annual orientation/reorientation for all volunteer and paid staff. On-line training is available through Greater New Jersey Conference at

<https://www.smart-trak.com/gnjumc/default.aspx>. This can be completed on-line by individuals at home, or they can gather and go through the training together.

Building Compliance Requirements:

The following are basic assumptions made as they relate to both church and non-church operated children, youth, and vulnerable adult programs.

1. All buildings in which church sponsored programs are held shall have necessary certificates of occupancy, including buildings off property used for church ministries or activities.
2. All buildings used for ministry shall be in compliance with all local health and safety standards.
3. First aid supplies shall be available at all times for persons using church facilities. First aid supplies shall be available when programs are held off property as well. A "traveling" first aid kit should be brought with any group leaving the church property unless the remote facilities being used has available supplies.
4. All groups conducting programs which are not a part of the church's ministries shall have the necessary certificates of insurance for both liability and workers compensation (where applicable). They shall be displayed as required by law.

Congregational Plan for Responding to Allegations of Abuse:

Every individual in New Jersey, including clergy, is required to report child abuse to the authorities if there is a strong reason to believe that it is occurring. If you believe a child has been abused or neglected, you have a legal responsibility to report it. The Division of Child Protection and Permanency (formerly Youth and Family Services) in the Department of Children and Families of the state of New Jersey is required by law to investigate reports of child abuse and neglect and, if necessary, arranges for the child's protection and the family's treatment.

6 There is a 24 hour hot-line available. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911 as well as **1-877 NJ ABUSE (1-877-652-2873)**. A concerned caller does not need proof to report an allegation of child abuse and can make the report anonymously.

All complaints and allegations of child abuse occurring outside the church should be reported to the Abuse Hotline as a citizen of New Jersey.(1-877-652-2873).

All complaints and allegations of child abuse **occurring inside the church or during a church program or activity** should be directed to either the Children and Youth Ministry Coordinator or the Pastor who will contact the appropriate authorities. Should the complaint or allegation involve the pastor, it shall be reported to the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee who will contact the District Superintendent immediately. A written record (incident report) including the date and time of the call to authorities shall be made and kept in a secure file. ***Our job is not to try to investigate the suspected abuse, but to document the specifics that cause us to suspect abuse and to carefully report them. NJ Law does not require proof to call the hot line.***

The pastor shall notify the insurance company and conference authorities including the District Superintendent, the Resident Bishop, and other appropriate officials of GNJ as directed by the DS or Bishop. She/he is responsible for consulting appropriate legal guidance through GNJ as well as communications guidance from the Communications Team prior to making any statements to either the congregation or the media. No one else is authorized to speak on behalf of the congregation unless specifically requested by the pastor and all inquiries received by leadership in the church should be referred to the pastor who will discern how to proceed, including developing a plan to communicate with the congregation and beyond if necessary.

FAQ's Re Background Checks:

Who is authorized to review background information obtained from Track-1?

The local church pastor has the authority to designate him or herself, or someone in the local church to review content of the background checks. This person is charged with confidentiality and must take any concerns to the pastor. All clergy background checks are kept under the care of the Board of Ordained Ministry at the GNJ Mission and Resource Center. All background checks are to be kept in a locked file under the care of the designee.

What will happen after the background check is reviewed?

If the report has no discrepancies, a copy should be placed in a secure file and the applicant can begin work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults in the church setting. If the report has discrepancies, the report should be reviewed with the individual and the pastor. The District Superintendent may need to be included in the conversation. The pastor and the individual will work out what needs to happen to resolve the discrepancy and the individual must refrain from ministry with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults until such discrepancies are addressed.

How often do background checks need to be done?

It is recommended that background checks be done every 3 years for lay leadership and staff working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The pastor shall coordinate with other staff and leadership to see that background checks are done in a timely manner.

Do outside groups using our church have to perform background checks on their people?

Yes, if they work directly with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults. Outside groups such as scouts may use their own background check system for their volunteers provided that the group verifies to the church that these have been done.

If an outside group does not work with this age group, they shall be informed of the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy. If they meet on the same day or night that children, youth and/or vulnerable adults are in the church building, they should make every attempt to monitor their people and keep them separate from these church programs. The leaders of these groups should be the last to leave making sure all of their people are gone from the church building and grounds.