

CHILD / YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY
TRINITY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, MOUNT PROSPECT, IL
Rev. September 2023

INTRODUCTION

Trinity United Methodist Church (TUMC) is committed to providing hospitality to all who participate in its ministries, programs, and activities. We recognize that children and youth have special care and safety needs.

We believe that scripture instructs us to care for the children/youth brought into the church. These children/youth may be regular attenders, or they may be the children/youth of guests, grandchildren of our members, or others. Regardless of how these children/youth come to us, we commit to their protection, and in doing so to represent God's justice and mercy in the world.

DEFINITIONS within the Trinity Community

Child/Student/Youth/Minor: Anyone under the age of 19.

Employee/Paid Staff: Any individual paid by the church.

Volunteer: Any individual not paid by the church but with leadership responsibilities.

Student Helper: an individual at least twelve (12) years of age and at least five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group with which they are working. Student Helpers shall not count towards the two-adult or leader-to-child ratios.

Designated Reporter: Pastor, Community and Family Ministry Director, Youth Ministry Director, Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC), District Superintendent

Ministry Leader: Paid staff and unpaid adults such as teachers, parents, and others who may interact with Minors in a supervisory, coaching, or guiding role.

Floater Adult: Ministry Leader who serves as the second adult with multiple groups of minors. The Floater observes and assists Ministry Leaders while moving from group to group at random intervals.

Abuse: The sexual contact, physical or emotional harm, or neglect as defined by the United Methodist Church or relevant statutes of the State of Illinois or other jurisdictions.

Sponsored event: an event where the church commits resources to the event, including promotional resources, except where it is clearly established that the event is sponsored by a community group not affiliated with TUMC or the United Methodist Church.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all activities within the Trinity Community regardless of location, both in-person and virtual/online. Community groups using church facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt equivalent policies according to a procedure determined by the Board of Trustees.

POLICY

As part of our commitment to care for and protect minors and vulnerable adults among us, we commit to the policy defined herein.

A. Training, Screening, and Selection of Staff and Volunteers

1. All volunteers and paid staff working with minors shall complete a background check prior to serving, or within 30 days after start date.
2. *Trusted Employees* shall be authorized to administer background screens for 7 preceding years. SPRC Chair shall authorize screens for paid staff. Community and Family Ministries Director or Director of Youth Ministries shall authorize screens for church volunteers. The following background information will be checked:
 - a. Social Security trace
 - b. State of Illinois criminal check + county criminal check
 - c. Federal Criminal Search
 - d. National sex offender registry check, if not included as part of another check
 - e. Motor Vehicle Registry (as needed)
3. Background checks shall be valid for up to 3 years from the date on which the screening is completed..
4. When transporting minors, all drivers shall complete a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of current insurance coverage.
5. Volunteers and paid staff working with minors shall complete the *UM Safe Sanctuaries training, the Safe Gatherings* online training and/or a Safe Sanctuary in the Trinity Community training presentation led by qualified staff. Volunteers and staff shall complete training in CPR and use of an AED. These trainings shall be completed every three (3) years. Additionally, volunteers and staff shall complete special training on the unique needs of the group(s) with which they are working, e.g., gender inclusive considerations and minors with special needs.
6. Volunteers and paid staff leading groups of minors must be at least nineteen (19) years old. Student helpers must be at least twelve (12) years old but shall not count towards the two-adult or leader-to-child ratios, and must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest member of the group(s) with which they are working.
7. Parents/grandparents/caregivers are invited to accompany their children at any time but will not be given supervisory responsibilities until they have completed appropriate training and screening.

B. Supervision of Minors

1. Volunteers and staff working with groups of minors shall be at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group(s) with which they are working.
2. Volunteers must have been regular attenders in worship for at least one (1) year prior to serving unless this requirement is waived by a Ministry Leader or the Church Council.
3. The following adult:child ratios shall be followed:
 - a. 1:4 maximum for children under the age of 3 years
 - b. 1:6 maximum for children under the age of 6 years
 - c. 1:10 maximum for school-age children and youth in 1st grade until age 19.
4. At all times where a group of minors is present there shall be two or more non-related and non-cohabitating adults. For purposes of this policy, a married couple or adults that are cohabitating may serve together but shall count as only one adult. On occasions when the scheduled adult is unavailable, a Floater Adult will serve as the second adult, moving between groups as needed.

C. Transportation and Off-Site Events

1. Volunteers and staff driving minors to off-site events shall be qualified as Ministry Leaders.
2. Chaperones shall be the same gender as the minors being supervised. Exceptions and accommodations will be made for persons who are not comfortable with binary gender identity. These exceptions and accommodations will be made with confidentiality and respect for individual needs.
3. Chaperones accompanying minors to overnight events shall be trained in First Aid and CPR.
4. Adults shall not share a bed with any minor including their own child.
5. Where possible, hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized for overnight events.
6. For any off-site event, the trip's leader must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and provide parents/guardians with a schedule and contact information.
7. Overnight sleeping accommodations: separate housing and accommodations for male and female students will be provided. Exceptions and accommodations will be made for persons who are not comfortable with binary gender identity. Families and young people are encouraged to work directly with Ministry Leaders to develop the best accommodation plan for each child or youth.
8. Additional requirements and procedures specific to a particular trip or event may be needed. These will be identified and addressed by parents and the appropriate Ministry Leaders on a case-by-case basis.

D. Digital Communication and Social Media

1. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff shall not submit 'friend' requests to minors.
2. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff shall avoid relationships with minors via social networking sites unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.
3. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff shall set strict privacy settings on any personal social networking profile, making every effort to prevent youth and children from being introduced to objectionable content.
4. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff shall not add or invite minors to any groups, events, pages, chat rooms, etc. that are not solely dedicated to activities directly related to the children or youth ministries or ministry activities.
5. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff shall not post photos or videos that identify children or youth on any online site or printed publication without written consent from parent or legal guardian.
6. Adult leaders, volunteers and staff who engage in social media and/or digital communication with minors shall first obtain parental permission. The sharing of any full name or contact information is prohibited. *We honor privacy, but not secrecy.*
7. TUMC may release or publish photographs or video recordings of minors that do not concern or directly relate to the minor, but where the student appears in the background or in a group. Parent authorization is not required for the release or

publication of such group or background shots in the media. This may include digital media such as the TUMC website (www.trinitymp.org), TUMC Facebook page, individual Facebook/Instagram accounts of Ministry Leaders and other adults working with minors, TUMC Facebook Group (closed group), TUMC Instagram, TUMC SnapChat, TUMC group email, TUMC e-newsletters and mailings.

8. Each church-related social media site, group or page shall have a minimum of two unrelated adult administrators. Administrators shall monitor sites frequently and respond quickly to inappropriate or urgent postings.

E. Gender Inclusiveness

We affirm the sacred worth of all children and youth, including those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, non-binary, or other identities that fall on the lgbtq+ spectrum. We understand our gender diversity to be a gift from God, intended to add to the rich variety of human experience and perspective. We recognize that persons who identify themselves as lgbtq+ are first and foremost children of God and should be afforded all the same opportunities for spiritual formation as non-lgbtq+ persons. We recognize that this minority group is often the target of specific and systemic forms of discrimination, and only focusing on inherent similarities would miss the fact that, especially lgbtq+ youth, have specific and unique needs.

1. **Restrooms.** Male, female and single-stall, gender-neutral restrooms will be provided for all church-related activities occurring within the church building
2. **Confidentiality.** We are committed to maintaining the dignity of all persons. We recognize that as a church we are invited into sacred places of trust. We pledge to uphold the highest level of confidentiality possible and will train all staff and volunteers on procedures related to interacting with sensitive information.

RESPONSE AND REPORTING

When abuse within the Trinity Community is witnessed or suspected *by anyone*, prompt reporting to Trinity Designated Reporters, the UMC Northern Illinois Conference, and the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services shall be completed as follows:

1. Report suspected abuse to the pastor and another Trinity Designated Reporter
2. Complete a Trinity Protection Incident Report with the Trinity Designated Reporter
3. Share information with no other person or group
4. If the pastor is suspected of abuse, contact the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations Committee. (SPRC) With *the SPRC Chair*, contact the District Superintendent.

Mandatory Reporting

Trinity Designated Reporters are required to call the IL Child Abuse Hotline when they have reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them in their professional or official capacity may be an abused or neglected child. The Hotline worker will determine if the information given by the reporter meets the legal requirements to initiate an investigation.

1. Follow guidance on pages 16 and 17 of the United Methodist [Safe Sanctuaries Comprehensive Abuse and Prevention Policy Development Guide](#).
2. Follow guidance provided on page 2 of the Illinois State [Manual for Mandated Reporters](#).

[Children's Justice Task Force, September 2020.](#)

3. Emergencies - Call the Child Abuse Hotline: 800-25-ABUSE (800-252-2873)
4. Non-emergencies - File a report online at Illinois State [DCFS Online Child Abuse Neglect Reporting](#)
5. Complete a [Trinity Report of Suspected Abuse](#) as soon as possible.

C. Media Response

If an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Senior Pastor and District Superintendent. If approached by the media, all others should endeavor to help the media find the authorized spokesperson(s).

VERIFICATION, SCREENING, PERMISSIONS, TRAINING AND REPORTING

1. Trinity Employment Application (SPRC)
Find guidance regarding interview questions and reference checking in Appendices II and III of the [UMC Safe Sanctuaries Comprehensive Abuse and Prevention Policy Guide](#)
2. Trusted Employees Background screen report
3. [TUMC-Family Covenant](#) (to be signed by parent/legal guardian)
4. Youth Trip Emergency Medical Release template (may be customized)
5. Trinity UMC training
6. Safe Gatherings online training certificate (staff)
7. [Trinity Report of Suspected Abuse](#)
8. IL Online Child Abuse/Neglect Report: <https://dcfonlinereporting.dcf.illinois.gov/>
9. IL State Manual for Mandated Reporters:
https://www2.illinois.gov/dcf/safekids/reporting/Documents/cfs_1050-21_mandated_reporter_manual.pdf
10. UMC Safe Sanctuaries Comprehensive Abuse and Prevention Policy Guide:
<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/safe-sanctuaries-a-comprehensive-abuse-prevention-policy-development-guide>.
11. Community Group/Facilities Use Covenant (Trustees)
12. Emergency Contact Information (staff)

REVIEW OF POLICY

The Church Council shall be responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis for adherence to the guidance and requirements established by the Northern Illinois Conference of the United Methodist Church, the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the State of Illinois, and the federal Center for Disease Control (CDC) and making appropriate changes.

Adopted this _____ day of _____, 20_____

Church Council Chair(s) print name and sign:
