

Mountain Park United Methodist Church  
1405 Rockbridge Road  
Stone Mountain, GA  
30087

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY  
AND  
IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL

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

The Congregational Pledge to  
Baptized Children Taken from  
The United Methodist  
Hymnal, p. 44 UMPH,  
1989

Revised December 2022 by:  
Rev. Ellynda Lipsey, Senior Pastor  
Rev. Dr. Mike Owenby, Minister of Music  
Hope Lewellen, Director of Youth Ministries  
Amie Walsh, Trustee Chair  
Kasey Brady, Children’s Ministry Volunteer

## **MOUNTAIN PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

### **OUR CALLING**

Mountain Park United Methodist Church (UMC) is a sacred place where God's people of all ages come together for worship, study, service, and fellowship. The ministries of Mountain Park UMC seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ, that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

### **OUR MANDATE**

According to the Georgia Department of Family and Children Services, more than 37,000 children per year in the State of Georgia are reported to be abused or neglected. Over 50 percent of these children were alleged to be physically or sexually abused.

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. In 2004 the North Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church made it a priority to implement Safe Sanctuary policies on a Conference and District wide level.

### **OUR PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of Mountain Park United Methodist Church do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable adults, and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, vulnerable adults, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at Mountain Park United Methodist Church, Stone Mountain, Georgia. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as they grow in their relationship with God.

Although it is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every circumstance, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

### **OUR COVENANT**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudential operating procedures in our ministries; we will educate our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate procedures; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Georgia; and we will be prepared to respond to the media should such an incident occur. In all our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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, The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

# **MOUNTAIN PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY IMPLEMENTATION MANUAL**

## **DEFINITIONS**

- Child / Children - Any individual from birth through the fifth grade.
- Youth - Any individual from the sixth grade through the twelfth grade.
- Adult - Any individual who has graduated high school and is 18 years-old or older.
- Elder - Any individual who is 65 years-old or older.
- Vulnerable Adult - Any adult who is mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged to the degree they are unable to be responsible legally to make decisions about their welfare.
- Volunteer - An individual engaged in ministry at Mountain Park UMC who is not paid.
- Staff - An individual engaged in ministry at Mountain Park UMC who is paid.

## **GENERAL PROCEDURES**

1. Mountain Park UMC's Safe Sanctuary policy will be approved by the Church Council and available to all church members.
  - a. Staff and Volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults will receive a copy of Mountain Park UMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy.
  - b. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be available for pick-up in the church information area and available online at [www.mountainparkumc.org](http://www.mountainparkumc.org).
  - c. The Mountain Park UMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Implementation Manual will be reviewed every 3 years, or as needed at the discretion of the group, by a task force consisting of the persons who fill the following positions or represent that area of ministry:
    - I. Director of Family Ministries
    - II. Director/Associate Director of Youth Ministries
    - III. Director/Associate Director of Children's Ministries
    - IV. Preschool Director
    - V. Director of Children's Music Programs
    - VI. Director of Music Ministries
    - VII. Senior Pastor or Designee
2. Volunteers and staff (who are over age 18 and have graduated high school) who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults in any capacity in Mountain Park UMC facilities or grounds, within church programs or outside groups, will be required to review and abide by this policy and sign a Safe Sanctuary participation covenant (Appendix A for in-church groups, Appendix B for outside groups).
3. Volunteers and staff (who are over age 18 and have graduated high school) who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults within Mountain Park UMC programs will be required to complete Safe Sanctuary online training and submit to a background check through Mountain Park United Methodist Church.
  - a. Background checks for Mountain Park UMC employees and volunteers will be paid for through the church budget.
  - b. Only people as owners and administrators (Power Users) of the online

- background check tool will have access to background check and training results. Other staff/volunteers will be notified of who is cleared as needed.
- c. All background checks and results will be kept confidential. Any hard copies of background checks will be kept and locked in the appropriate staff office.
  - d. Background checks must be renewed every 5 years (60 months).
  - e. Persons who fail the background check will not be allowed to serve as teachers, leaders or helpers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults within Mountain Park UMC programs.
  - f. Volunteers with elders and vulnerable adults shall receive training in regard to the types of abuse for which elders and vulnerable adults are at risk.
4. Staff and volunteers who complete the necessary procedures outlined in items 2 and 3 will be hereon referred to as “screened adults.” Differences in what is required of participants of in-church groups and not those from outside groups will be denoted by the use of the term, “within Mountain Park UMC program(s).”
  5. All staff, leaders and other volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits and have telephone access for emergency medical assistance.
    - a. Church telephones are available in the Upper Lobby, Youth Room Office, Family Life Center, and Preschool Hallway.
    - b. First Aid kits are available in the Park, Youth Room, Gathering Room, Family Life Center, Upper Education Wing, and downstairs Music/Art Spaces.
  6. At least two non-related screened adults will be present at all Mountain Park UMC program preschool, children, and youth events, on or off campus, regardless of the number of participants.
    - a. When it is not feasible to have 2 leaders in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, an additional screened adult “floater” will check on each group.
  7. Screened adults who serve as teachers and leaders within Mountain Park UMC programs will be at least five years older than the oldest person they are teaching or leading. Youth of any age can be asked by a screened adult to volunteer with children as an additional helper to the appropriate number of screened adults.
  8. A minimum 1:8 ratio of screened adults to children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth at on-campus Mountain Park UMC program events.
    - a. A minimum ratio of 1:5 of screened adults to children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth at off-campus and overnight events.
  9. Children/youth attending a Mountain Park UMC program event may not leave before its end without previous contact between the parents and the staff person in charge.
    - a. Children will only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has

- occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.
- b. Parents should inform MPUMC staff of any changes in custody/guardianship and any potential legal issues that could affect who can sign out their child from a church-sponsored event.
10. Permission forms will be required for each off-campus and overnight Mountain Park UMC program event involving children and youth.
  11. There will be at least two non-related adults of each gender present at Mountain Park UMC program co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.
    - a. At overnight events, if adults are sleeping in the same room as children/youth, a minimum of 2 adults must be present.
  12. Hallway windows may not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.
  13. Liability insurance coverage: Mountain Park UMC's Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage for activities both on and off church property.

#### **PROCEDURES SPECIFIC TO CHILDREN WITHIN MOUNTAIN PARK UMC PROGRAMS**

1. Children will attend the appropriate grade/age level equivalent to the grade/age level they attend in school or preschool.
  - a. Preschool children should be placed in classes according to their birth dates. A child must reach the age-level of the class by September 1 of that year to be eligible for attendance. In other words, to attend the 2-Year-Old class that begins September 9, the child must have his/her 2nd birthday prior to September 1 of that year.
  - b. Any child in kindergarten or above should attend the same grade level of Sunday School as they attend in school.
  - c. If a child repeats or defers attendance of a grade in school, that child will also repeat or defer attendance of that grade in Sunday School.
  - d. Promotion occurs at the beginning of each school year. Children move to the next grade level at that time.
2. Children Birth through Grade 5 will be signed into and out of any activity by a parent, guardian, or trusted adult. Signing in and out should occur five minutes prior to and after an event. If a child is not picked up within 10 minutes of the close of Sunday school, that child will be signed into Worship in the Park or the Nursery.
  - a. Children Birth — Grade 5 may not be released to a sibling less than 18 years of age without written parental permission.
3. Children not currently signed into a classroom or event are the responsibility of their parents and must be attended to by their parents. Children must be supervised while on church property.
4. If parents do not remain on MPUMC property during a program, an emergency contact

number must be left with the staff or volunteer in charge.

5. Like other class rolls, the Kindergarten-Grade 5 Sunday School sign-in sheets will become a part of the Sunday School archives.
6. During all children's events, children Kindergarten-Grade 5 will use the nearest restroom; an adult will accompany them to the door and stay outside.

### **PROCEURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE**

1. According to the laws of the State of Georgia, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse. Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children or youth will be reported as soon as possible to the Senior Pastor or their designee.
2. The Senior Pastor/designee will either alert the appropriate MPUMC staff member or they themselves will report to either the State of Georgia (1-855-422-4453), the Department of Families and Children (1-678-518-5505), and/or the Central East District Superintendent of the North Georgia UMC Conference (470-817-1518), as appropriate.
3. The person reporting the incident, along with the Senior Pastor/designee or appropriate MPUMC staff member will continually document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and will document all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident using the appropriate forms (Appendix C).
4. The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

### **RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

1. Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.
2. The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted. As appropriate, the parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.
3. All procedures listed in the previous section on reporting will be strictly followed.
4. All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.
5. All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.
6. The Senior Pastor or their designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident at the appropriate time and in the appropriate manner.
7. The Senior Pastor or their designee will be the sole spokesperson for Mountain Park United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the

district as far as media inquiries are concerned.

8. Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

**APPENDIX A**

VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION COVENANT  
FOR PERSONS WORKING WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULTS  
WITHIN MOUNTAIN PARK UMC PROGRAMS

As a member of a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, I pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth as well as of other workers with children and youth, by committing to the following:

\_\_\_ I will receive training in regard to Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

\_\_\_ I will follow reasonable safety measures and Safe Sanctuary operating procedures.

\_\_\_ I will consent to and complete a background check through Mountain Park UMC.

\_\_\_ In all my ministries with children and /or youth, I will demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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, The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_



**APPENDIX B**

**ORGANIZATION COVENANT  
FOR OUTSIDE USERS WORKING WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULTS  
WITHIN MOUNTAIN PARK UMC FACILITIES**

As an organization cooperating with a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct our activities in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth as well as of other workers with children and youth, by committing to the following:

\_\_\_ We will read and follow Mountain Park UMC's Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

\_\_\_ We will follow reasonable safety measures and Safe Sanctuary operating procedures.

\_\_\_ We will make participating children, youth, parents, and vulnerable adults aware of these policies and procedures.

\_\_\_ We recognize that by signing this covenant, our organization accepts full responsibility for the care and safety of all participants for the duration of the program taking place on Mountain Park UMC grounds.

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Representative (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Representative \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date Received by Mountain Park UMC \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**

INCIDENT REPORT OF SUSPECTED CHILD/YOUTH/VULNERABLE ADULT ABUSE

1. Name of Worker (paid or volunteer) observing or receiving disclosure of suspected abuse of child or youth: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Suspected victim's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Suspected victim's age/date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Date/Place of initial conversation with, or report from, suspected victim: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Date/Place of initial conversation with, or report to Senior Pastor/designee:  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Suspected victim's statement (give a detailed summary here):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Name of person(s) accused of abuse: \_\_\_\_\_  
Relationship of accused to victim (staff, volunteer, family, other): \_\_\_\_\_

7. Call to Authorities  
Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_ Spoke with: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

8. Call to suspected victim's parent/guardian (if appropriate)

Parent/Guardian spoken with: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

9. Additional Information/Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Person Making Report:**

**Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Senior Pastor/Designee or Appropriate MPUMC Staff Member:**

**Name (printed)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_