

Hilltop United Methodist Church, Sioux Falls SD
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY and PROCEDURES

Last Reviewed 08/23/22

Statement of Purpose

Hilltop United Methodist Church (HUMC) in Sioux Falls, SD affirms the Book of Resolutions #1006, Sexual Abuse within the Ministerial relationship and Sexual Harassment within the Church, which states that sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church are incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. HUMC is committed to providing an environment that is safe for children and youth who participate in any HUMC ministry. Also, HUMC is committed to taking the necessary precautions to protect any person working in a HUMC ministry from unwarranted accusations or suspicions.

Definition

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, staff member, co-worker or volunteer. Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.

Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue.

Policy/Procedure Revision

This policy, and all procedures, shall be reviewed every 2 years by the Senior Pastor, the Youth Pastor, the Chair of the Church Council, the Chair of the Staff Parish Committee, all employees and selected volunteers working with the Sunday School and Youth Group programs. It can be modified subject to review and approval of the Church Council. Any such modifications shall be promptly conveyed to all HUMC persons affected by the modification. Regardless of the guidelines above; this policy can be reviewed at anytime as needed.

Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as those who work with them. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of staff. We will follow this policy in all programs, events, and camps. We will educate all our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of the policy. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Policy

HUMC adopts the following policy and procedures to provide a safe and secure environment within the church and for any event that is connected with ministries and operation of this church. While the primary reason for this policy is to prevent abuse and neglect of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, it has been adopted to protect all who enter our doors. "Youth" or "Child" shall be deemed synonymous and shall be defined as any person less than eighteen (18) years of age for purposes of these procedures. "Adult" shall be defined as any person at least eighteen (18) years of age for purposes of these procedures.

- While the following are the basic procedures to ensure a safe physical and emotional environment, there is a need for common sense procedures in dealing with every situation.

Approval/Certification Process

- A criminal records check will be made on all applicants and volunteers.
 - Confidential results will be given to the Safe Sanctuary Committee, made up of the Senior Pastor, the Chair of the Council, the Education Committee Chair, the Chair of the Staff Parish Committee, a Lay Leader and any other selected members.
- This records check shall be redone for each worker and volunteer on a yearly basis.
- Persons having a Criminal History of any of the following types of offenses shall not be approved and not be allowed to serve in any Ministry:
 - Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
 - Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
- Other offenses, depending on how recent, the frequency, and nature may also preclude an applicant or volunteer from serving in a Ministry. This will be determined on a case-by-case basis by the Safe Sanctuary Committee. In such cases, the determining factors will be the best interests, safety and well being of the children, youth, or vulnerable adult.
 - Any applicant or volunteer whose criminal history is such that the approval is subject to review by the Safe Sanctuary Committee will be given the opportunity to explain the circumstances of the record to the committee.
- Sunday School teachers and Youth Helpers shall be regular attenders of HUMC for six (6) or more months prior to beginning service. Exceptions will only be allowed if the applicant provides a recommendation letter from a pastor and/or relevant staff person at a prior church; or if written recommendations are received from 3 current members of HUMC who have been members for more than one (1) year.
- Drivers must be 25 years of age to transport others, and must have a valid South Dakota driver's license. If driving a personal vehicle, the driver must also have proof of insurance.
 - No driver may have a DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years prior.

General Procedures

- Training – All paid or volunteer teaching/supervising staff working with children/youth/vulnerable adults must be trained in the Safe Sanctuary Policy and procedures

before teaching or supervising. Thereafter, all should be re-trained annually. It will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor or their designee that the annual training takes place. All adult volunteers and staff shall sign a covenant to follow this policy prior to participating in activities with children/youth/vulnerable adults.

- Two Adult Rule – A minimum of two adults who are not related must be present in each occupied room/classroom for any church sponsored program or event involving children/youth/vulnerable adults.
 - If the Two Adult Rule can not be met an additional person must be designated as a Monitor. The Monitor must make unscheduled visits to check on each room/classroom.
- Three Year Older Rule – In addition to the requirement of an Adult being 18, they must also be at least 3 years older than the oldest person being supervised to lessen the likelihood of any situation that could have an adverse outcome. This procedure does NOT prohibit adults/youth that are less than three years older than the youth or children in an activity from participating as a “helper” for the activity, as long as they are not counted in the Two Adult Rule, or counted as the Monitor.
- The Buddy System – We encourage parents, teachers, and leaders of anyone under the age of 18 to make sure the child/youth always has a “buddy” who is close to their age so that no child is ever alone while in the church or while on activity, trip, or overnight.
- Communication – Parents should always be kept abreast of the programs in which their children and youth are involved and be given advanced notice and information regarding any activity which deviates from the routine program offered by the HUMC.

Other Procedures

- Permission Forms – Medical/insurance information and general travel permission forms must be completed and signed by the parent/guardian each year.
- If there is cause for one on one counseling/discussion between an Adult and a child/youth/vulnerable adult a permission slip must be signed by a parent or responsible party. This will need to be done for each occasion.
- When traveling off the church property drivers must be 25 years of age to transport others, and must have a valid South Dakota driver’s license. If driving a personal vehicle, the driver must also have proof of insurance.
 - No driver may have a DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years prior.
 - Only 1 adult is required in a vehicle, as long as there is more than one child/youth/vulnerable adult in the vehicle.
- Overnight Youth Retreats/Mission Trips – At least one counselor must be twenty-one (21) while other adults can serve as helpers for an activity. On an overnight retreat where there are both male and female youth, there must be both male and female counselors, and 1 of each sex must be 21. Youth will not share a bed with an adult. Where possible, a minimum of three people will be assigned to a room, males and females in separate rooms. Visitation between males and females in bedrooms is prohibited unless directly supervised in a group setting with the counselors for devotional or group discussions.
 - The Two Adult Rule must be followed with no exceptions for any off-site activities.

- Insurance – The church will provide adequate liability insurance for the facilities in case of accident or injury to anyone participating in a church-sponsored activity as well as coverage for sexual and other forms of abuse.
- Website Safety – Only approved staff or adult volunteers may have church website or other Social media responsibilities. The church website will not disclose contact information for any youth/child including phone number, home address, email information etc.
- Outside Groups: All outside groups using the church facilities in working with children must sign the covenant stating that they have read and will abide by the provisions stated in this policy.

Reporting Procedures

In all instances misconduct of a sexual nature should be reported to the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves a clergy person, it should be reported to the District Superintendent or the presiding Bishop.

- Any suspected or reported case of neglect or abuse that occurs in connection with the ministries or operations of the church should be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor or the chair of the Church Council. If the Senior Pastor is implicated, the chair of the Church Council must notify the chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent within 24 hours.
- The person to whom the incident has been reported must immediately complete an incident report with all available details. The District Superintendent must be notified by the next business day. It will then be the decision of the District Superintendent, Senior Pastor and Church Council chair as to the appropriate action to be taken. The District Superintendent shall have final local authority in the matter.
- In no event shall any of the above fail to report substantiated abuse or neglect to the proper law enforcement of social service agency as required by South Dakota law. Contact should be made with the Sioux Falls Police Department and/or the Minnehaha County Department of Social Services to communicate the complaint.
- The Senior Pastor or Church Council chair will be the spokesperson following reported cases of neglect/abuse. This person will be the only person authorized to convey information concerning the situation so as to avoid compromising any ongoing investigation and will convey only such information deemed necessary under the circumstances.
- Any person named as an alleged offender in a complaint shall immediately be required to cease any contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults through HUMC activities. The alleged offender may resume activities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults at such time as the district Superintendent, senior Pastor, or Staff-Parish Relations Committee deem it appropriate.

Congregation Care and Support

The Senior Pastor, or Church Council chair if the Senior Pastor is the accused abuser, will offer support to the victim and their family. They will send a letter to the congregation briefly explaining the incident and action taken by the church, taking every precaution to protect the identity of the victim and the accused abuser. The letter should include a statement of actions taken to ensure the safety of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults and to ensure the congregation's continuing ability to provide ministry to them. It is strongly recommended that the Senior Pastor, or Church Council chair if the Senior Pastor is the accused abuser, call a congregational meeting at which time those present will be informed of the action(s) taken. It is also recommended that the Safe Sanctuary

Committee be utilized in the planning of the meeting and that those present include the Senior Pastor, the Lay Leaders, the Church Council chair, the District Superintendent and a counselor who is not a member of the congregation.

Acknowledgement

I have read and agree to the terms of this policy. I will uphold the policy in my interaction with Hilltop United Methodist Church.

Signature _____ **Date** _____