



LEXINGTON UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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SAFE GATHERINGS POLICY FOR CARE AND PROTECTION FROM ABUSE OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

Adopted by the LUMC Administrative Council on Monday, October 21, 2024

Jesus said, *“Whoever welcomes a child, welcomes me.”* (Matthew 18:5). He also said, *“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones, 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.”* (Matthew 18:6)

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to those who cannot protect themselves. We affirm this responsibility at each person’s baptism by our congregational response, pledging: *“With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this person, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”* (Book of Worship, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge, 11).

Lexington United Methodist Church, as a member of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church, is committed to providing safe places of worship and fellowship to everyone they serve. As part of that commitment, they are offering, **Safe Gatherings**, as a resource for staff and volunteers in this important area.

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 serve in ministry with and to them. As such:

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the screening and selection of leadership, both paid and volunteer.
- We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, events and ministries.
- We will educate all our leadership – both paid and volunteer – with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure to reporting an observed or 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.

Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected reported or confirmed violations of any Missouri criminal laws.

Safe Gatherings is an online abuse prevention program that screens and educates staff and volunteers to help prevent abuse of **children, youth and vulnerable adults**. When employees and volunteers, who are trained about the best practices when working with vulnerable populations, know the behaviors of potential abusers, recognize the signs of abuse and know how to handle reporting, they are better equipped to prevent abuse.

Upon successful completion of the Safe Gatherings application, background and reference checks, and online training programs, each applicant will receive documentation of **approval valid for three years**, and will have continued access to the online training program for one year.

The price per applicant for the individual church programs is \$45 and paid for by Lexington United Methodist Church. This includes:

- Processing of two electronic references.
- National criminal background check.
- 7-year multi-county of residence background check.
- National and state of residence Sex Offender Registry check.

- Applicant tracking for church administrators.
- 1.5-hour online abuse prevention and boundary awareness training.

The program is accessed at: safegatherings.com. Applicants will then “click” on “New User” – register/sign-up and then begin the process.

Scope: This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Lexington UMC, regardless of location. This policy and its provisions shall apply to all staff persons, volunteer or paid, lay or clergy who have any direct contact with children and/or youth and/or adults from vulnerable populations in any activities or events sponsored by Lexington United Methodist Church.

Policy:

“Let the children come to me and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” (Matthew 19:14)

The church shall have adequate liability insurance for all ministries including sexual abuse or misconduct coverage.

The social Principles of the United Methodist Church states, “...In particular, children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (§162.C *The 2016 Book of Discipline*, pg. 121)

The Book of Resolutions encourages all conferences to become involved in the prevention of the physical and sexual abuse of children (#3084.B *2016 Book of Resolutions*, pgs. 182-184). *The 2016 Book of Discipline* names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct including the use or possession of pornography, and harassment, including but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment, racial or gender discrimination, as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members. (§2702, *The 2016 Book of Discipline*, pg. 789).

Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of Lexington United Methodist Church, a member of the Missouri Conference of the UMC, to prohibit and work to prevent physical or sexual abuse against children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations involved in any ministry sponsored by Richmond UMC. Further, we are called to minister to those persons who are experiencing abuse and to those who have been victims of abuse in the past. To that end, we covenant to be aware of our responsibilities and to act justly in the best

interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

Activity Procedures:

- There shall be two unrelated adults present at all times. When two unrelated adults are not able to be present, two related adults shall be present so long as they are not in a marital relationship.
- If it is not possible to have two adults present at all times, the activity must take place in an open space – indoors or outdoors – where other adults are able to witness the activity and interactions of all involved.
- It is **NOT** acceptable to have only one adult present with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a private space or any space where other adults are not able to witness the activities and interactions of all involved.
- There shall be at least one adult present at all activities who is trained in first aid and CPR. Note: Lexington UMC has an AED machine located on the wall in the hallway outside the church kitchen.
- There shall be a roving monitor during high-volume ministry and class times, such as VBS.
- At no time shall windows be obscured or doors locked to areas where children, youth or vulnerable adults are meeting. The exception to this rule is if there is an active shooter (or drill) or incident.
- All leaders assisting with diaper changing, toilet time and clothes changing of young children or of children, youth or adults with special needs, shall follow guidelines set forth in Safe Gatherings training.
- All leaders supervising or assisting with recreational or playground activities shall follow guidelines set forth in training.
- All leaders shall follow appropriate boundary guidelines set forth in training, for example: appropriate boundary setting for all leaders engaging in ministry with vulnerable adults. Appropriate boundary setting for youth leaders, especially focused on small group ministry, overnight retreats and transportation to and from activities.
- Appropriate boundary setting for clergy and leaders regarding counseling and confidentiality.

Individual Counseling:

Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner.

The clergy person, staff person, or lay leader shall conduct the meeting in a visible space – with either the office door cracked open or a window is visible, such as in the door, where someone can reasonably see all persons in the room.

Suspected abuse or neglect uncovered in counseling shall be reported in accordance with Missouri law.

Internet and Social Media:

Images and names of children, youth and vulnerable adults shall not be utilized on any website or application without explicit consent.

Off-site and Overnight Events:

- All activity procedures shall be adhered to.
- Adults and children or youth who are unrelated shall not share beds.
- Leaders must obtain medical information and a liability release form for all participants and keep those records on-hand throughout the off-site activity or overnight event.
- Leaders shall provide parents or guardians with specific information regarding the schedule, sleeping arrangements, leader-to-participant ratios and emergency contact information.
- Missionary/Mission work: Whether domestic or globally, missionaries are intrinsically put in a place of power over the persons they serve. Due to these power dynamics, all persons participating in mission work shall follow the screening selection, training, activity, counseling, transportation and off-site/overnight event regulations as set forth above.

Screening and Selection: All persons serving in leadership with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be:

- An active member of the local ministry for at least six months.
- At least 18 years of age.

- At least five (5) years older than the oldest person they are supervising/leading (Exception: This does not apply to adults in ministry with vulnerable adults).
- Applicants must submit an application and supply clergy and personal references to Safe Gatherings.
- Applicants must take the Safe Gatherings certification online abuse prevention and boundary awareness training.
- Applicants must consent to a National Criminal Background Check, through Safe Gatherings.

Any conviction involving abuse of or harm toward children, youth or vulnerable adults will disqualify the applicant from participating in ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults. All other convictions will be reviewed by PPR and the pastor to ensure the safety of all involved.

All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to the PPR Chair, Pastor, Council Chair and Safe Gatherings Administrator.

Definitions:

Direct Contact: With children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations direct contact is defined as the care, supervision, guidance, transportation or control of such persons or routine interaction with children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations.

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse means unwanted physical conduct of a sexual nature, sexual contact or sexualized behavior and may include, by example, touching, fondling, sexual intercourse and other exploitation or use of another person for purposes of sexual desires. Sexual abuse includes, but it not limited to: rape, sexual battery, aggravated sexual battery, lewd and lascivious behavior, enticement of a child, indecent solicitation of a child, aggravated indecent solicitation of a child or indecent liberties with a child.

Staff: Staff includes any clergy, any paid employee of Lexington United Methodist Church, any staff members of the Missouri Conference of the United Methodist Church or district and any outside group such as Boy

Scouts, who have the care/supervision of participants in any activities or events sponsored by Lexington United Methodist Church.

Volunteer: Any non-clergy, lay worker who has the care/supervision of a participant at a Lexington United Methodist Church event. This includes staff members of another church or outside group such as Boy Scouts.

Participants: These are children and youth or vulnerable adults who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise participating in an activity, event or school (such as VBS) sponsored by Lexington United Methodist Church, the Missouri Conference of the UMC or District.

Adults from Vulnerable Populations: Persons, 18 years of age or older, who are unable to protect their own interest due to a substantial mental or functional impairment, or for whom a guardian has been appointed.

Certification Authority: This will be the **Safe Gatherings Coordinator – currently, church administrator Liz Johnson**, the Director of Congregational Excellence, a designated District Superintendent and a Conference Chancellor.

Crisis Management Team: This is made up of the current pastor of Lexington United Methodist Church, the Bishop of the Missouri Conference of the UMC, the North-Central District Superintendent, the Director of Communications for the Missouri Conference of the UMC, the Conference Chancellor and the Director of Congregational Excellence.

Training: The Missouri Conference of the UMC has partnered with Safe Gatherings (safegatherings.com) to implement training procedures for all individuals who work with children, youth and adults from vulnerable populations at Lexington United Methodist Church, and in church activities and events outside of the church building. No individual shall have any direct contact with children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations until they have completed the Safe Gatherings training program. Certified individuals must be at least 18 years of age and at least five years older than anyone in their care who is under the age of 18.

Screening: Prior to certification, applicants will complete an online application (safegatherings.com) and consent form. By completing the form

online, the applicant will give permission for a background check and reference check to be completed. A lay reference and clergy reference will be provided by each applicant. Clergy will provide a reference by the North-Central District Superintendent – or current Lexington UMC pastor. References must have known the applicant for at least one year and not be related to the applicant.

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If **Safe Gatherings** does not approve an applicant for any reason, the LUMC Safe Gatherings Coordinator will notify the Lexington UMC pastor. Lexington United Methodist Church reserves the right to turn away individuals for volunteer or paid service who do not pass the background and reference checks and/or the online training.

If the applicant is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth or adults from vulnerable populations shall disqualify the applicant. A person who has been convicted as a sex offender will not be certified. Affirmative responses to the following questions relating to crimes, will prompt a personal review of an application:

- Crimes against children,
- Rape, sexual or physical assault,
- Possession or use of drugs, and
- Suspension of a drivers license within the last five years.

Certification: Certification is valid for three years from date of approval. Applicants must be 18 years or older to be certified to serve at Lexington United Methodist church. Certified applicants will be notified of his/her approval by email, as will the pastor and Safe Gatherings Coordinator. If not approved, the applicant and the pastor will be notified by email.

Revocation of Certification: The pastor of Lexington United Methodist Church and/or the chairperson of the Pastor Parish Relations (PPR) reserves the right to revoke an individual's certification at any time, same as does the Missouri Conference Safe Gatherings certification authority.

Reporting of incidents: Any staff member or volunteer of Lexington United Methodist Church who has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or who observes circumstances which would result in abuse or neglect, must immediately report such facts to the **Pastor**. If the pastor is unavailable, the report must be made to the chair person of the **Pastor Parish Relations (PPR)**. The person receiving such report must document the report.

A call to the hotline is required to be made by staff or volunteers if there is reasonable cause to suspect that the abuse of a participant has occurred. When the necessity of reporting occurs, the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults is paramount. Reporting should occur in the following order:

1. The State of Missouri through the Division of Family Services through the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline at: 1-800-392-3738.
2. The Missouri Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church through the North-Central District Superintendent at: 573-441-8878. and through the office of the resident bishop at: 573-777-1290.
3. The church's insurance agent: Derek Savage: 816-795-5108.
4. The church's attorney: call the North-Central District for this number: 573-441-8878.

Notification of abuse or neglect must be made as immediately as possible. Notification of sexual abuse must be made to the State of Missouri within 24 hours of receiving the report of such sexual abuse.

Statement to the Media: If an alleged incident occurs, the pastor or his/her designated individual will serve as spokesperson for all media requests (preferable: the North-Central District Superintendent).

Lexington United Methodist Operational Procedures:

1. The rules and procedures of the Missouri Annual Conference of the UMC always prevail over the church's stated policies if they should come into conflict.
2. There are **never** to be one-on-one meetings between staff/volunteers and children/youth/vulnerable adults.

3. Individual programs will develop and implement sign-in procedures to provide additional security measures for those children third grade and younger.
4. At least **two adults must be present** at all events utilizing Lexington UMC facilities that involve children, youth and vulnerable adults. In addition, at any church event off-site involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, at least two adults must be present. **Adults are defined as those individuals 18 years of age and older.**
5. When on field trips, young children will not be identified with name tags. Tags can be worn that identify the group only.
6. When an event requires that children/youth travel with an adult other than their parent or guardian, written permission must be obtained in advance for each child/youth. An **EVENT PERMISSION FORM** must be signed, dated and collected for the specific event. All children/youth who regularly participate in our church's ministries must have an **Emergency Treatment Permission Form** on file in the **church office and in possession of the adults in charge.**
7. When a traveling group contains members of both genders, supervision must be also provided by both genders.
8. Drivers must be at least **21 years of age** and ***copies of their drivers license and proof of insurance must be on file in the church office.*** In addition, **all passengers** (including the driver) are expected to **wear a seatbelt. Two adults are always required when transporting children/youth.**
9. There will be separate sleeping areas for males and females. No adult may share a hotel/motel/cabin room or tent with a youth or child unless the adult is the parent of the youth/child with whom he or she shares the room/tent.
10. The use of alcohol or illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs at any Lexington UMC sponsored event involving children, youth or vulnerable adults is prohibited. Nonetheless, the use of alcohol, illegal drugs or abuse of prescription drugs is forbidden on church property.

In summary, the completion of Safe Gatherings background check, reference check and online course and approval will serve as staff member and or

volunteer's record and acknowledgement of the policies and procedures, standards and reporting objectives of the Safe Gatherings policy of Lexington United Methodist Church.

Signed: Phillip Davis
Administrative Council Chairman

Signed: Rev. Andrew Sanders
Rev. Andrew Sanders, Pastor of Lexington United Methodist Church