

# VICTOR FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

## Protecting Our Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

Jesus said, *“Whoever welcomes [a] child . . . welcomes me”* (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. In response to this church-wide challenge the following policies reflect our church’s commitment to provide a safe environment for all: safe for the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in our programs and use our facilities; safe for the leaders and volunteers of church sponsored programs and activities; and, safe for the entire congregation.

The policies and procedures set forth below have been established by the Annual Conference for all ministries. They are an imperative and set minimum standards to protect children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. Without exception, these policies and procedures apply to Victor First United Methodist Church, Annual Conference ministries, and those who serve within.

### Definitions

**“Abuse”** means harm or a threat of physical or emotional harm to a child or vulnerable adult by a parent, guardian, or other person. Abuse includes: (a) the infliction of physical or emotional injury by other than accidental means; (b) the creation of a risk, or allowing the creation of a risk, to a child by other than accidental means; (c) committing or allowing to be committed an act of sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or prostitution upon the child.

**“Child”** or **“children”** or **“youth”** means any person who has not reached his/her eighteenth birthday.

**“Adult”** is any person 18 years old or older.

**“Exploitation”** means obtaining or using another person’s resources, including but not limited to funds, assets, or property, by deception, intimidation, or similar means, with the intent to deprive the person of those resources.

**“Sexual abuse”** includes, but is not necessarily limited to, any contacts or interactions in which the parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the use of the child or the purposes of sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or another person.

**“Sexual exploitation”** includes, but is not limited to, a situation in which a parent, guardian, or other person allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act which constitutes prostitution under New York law; or a parent, guardian, or other person having custodial control or supervision of a child or responsible for his/her welfare, allows, permits, or encourages the child to engage in an act of obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child as provided for under New York law.

**“Supervision”** means to oversee or direct a ministry or activity.

**“Vulnerable Adult”** means a person whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.

## **Responsibility**

The administration of this policy shall be the responsibility of the Pastor and Christian Education Coordinator. They will assure that all persons who are supervising and/or interacting with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a Victor United Methodist Church ministry, program or activity comply completely with both the spirit and intent of this policy.

## **The Minimum Standards**

The minimum standards set forth below have been established by Victor United Methodist Church, in accordance with The Upper New York Annual Conference for all ministries to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults from abuse and exploitation. Without exception, these standards apply to all those who serve the ministries, programs and activities of the Victor United Methodist Church.

### **Minimum Reasonable Safety Standards in Recruiting, Screening and Selecting Workers**

#### Recruiting Workers

1. A written position description that includes the essential functions of the job shall be provided for positions in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
2. Interested workers shall complete an application that includes identification, address, employment history for the past five years, volunteer work during the past five years, experiences and skills specifically related to the position, prior church membership (if any), personal references (not related to the applicant) with complete address and contact information, waiver of any right to confidentiality and of any right to pursue damages against the church/charge caused by the references; responses, certification that the information provided is true and correct, voluntary disclosure of past criminal convictions, and authorization to conduct a criminal background check.

## Screening Workers

1. References provided by the applicant shall be checked by the pastor or a designated Safe Sanctuaries committee/team member. The reference check shall include questions about the applicant's ability to work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults (depending on ministry) and leadership ability.
2. A personal interview shall be conducted.
3. A criminal background check shall be authorized by and completed for all clergy, paid workers, and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The criminal background check shall be performed after every seven (7) years of service and at the beginning of service and after a break in service of one or more years. Background check results shall be kept in a secure manner.
4. Adult volunteers shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church/charge for at least six (6) months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
5. Only workers that have successfully completed the application and screening process shall be eligible to be considered for selection to a ministry position with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
6. In the event that a criminal background check reveals a conviction or other cause for concern the pastor and/or another ministry leader shall consult with the applicant.
7. Adults convicted of child abuse or named as the perpetrator in a founded or indicated child abuse report through a designated state or county agency, or who are under investigation for, or who have charges pending for child abuse, shall not be accepted as paid employees or volunteers to have direct access to children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church sponsored activity or setting.

## **Procedures for Conducting Ministry Programs and Events for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

1. Adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall observe the "**Two Adult Rule**" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth or vulnerable adults at a church/charge, district or conference sponsored event or activity. The two adult rule requires that regardless of the size of the group, there shall always be two unrelated adults present ("unrelated adults" refers to the spousal relationship, parent/child relationship, and sibling relationship). This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms/ministry activities. No child, youth, or vulnerable adult shall be left unsupervised while attending a ministry program or event.
2. Adult staff and volunteers are those who are AT LEAST 18 years old and who are AT LEAST 5 years older than the oldest minor present, whom are leading,

ministering to or supervising. Youth (those age 13-17) are invited to assist adult volunteers but are not to be considered an adult for the "two adult rule".

3. Any child under age 12, when on church property will be escorted to the room or location of the ministry or activity by a parent, guardian or other responsible adult where responsibility for the child's safety will be turned over to the church staff or volunteer involved with the activity. Similarly, any child under age 12 will only be permitted to leave a Sunday School room or other activity when released directly to the care of a parent or guardian.

4. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy shall be observant for unusual behaviors and signs of child, youth, and vulnerable adult abuse and shall report them immediately to the appropriate supervisor.

5. All adult staff and volunteers and clergy working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall receive a copy of the applicable local church/charge, district or conference ministry or program Safe Sanctuaries policy before starting their service and shall agree to covenant with the Victor United Methodist Church, district or Conference ministry or program to fully cooperate with these abuse prevention strategies. Training in the policy is required before beginning ministry with children, youth and vulnerable adults. An annual review of the policy and its updates is also required.

6. All ministry activities should occur in open view. Each room or space where ministry events occur must be open to public view. This may require enclosed spaces, such as classrooms, having a viewing window, a glass panel in the door, and half door configuration or an open door.

7. Written attendance records shall be kept for all ministry events/activities involving children and youth. These records shall include, at a minimum, the date and names of all participants and shall be kept until Jesus returns (perpetuity).

8. Registration materials should be collected for every ministry program activity. Ministry activities involving transportation shall require written permission form/slip signed by a parent/guardian. Drivers of children, youth and vulnerable adults must be 21 years of age or older. The ministry supervisor shall be required to keep a copy of their current license and proof of insurance card on file with the appropriate ministry program.

9. Under NO circumstances will an adult be alone in a car with only one child to, from or during a church/youth activity, including worship services and regular youth group meetings.

10. During off site activities that require an overnight stay, every effort will be made to have two adults of the same sex in the room with the youth of that gender. However, if that is not possible, youth will be split by gender and their safety will be monitored by all adults present.

11. If a "one-on-one" counseling session is necessary, a roaming adult will be notified of the location in which the discussion is taking place and will monitor the meeting from outside the room.

12. Facilities shall be free from conditions that pose a safety or health hazard to the participants.

13. Appointed clergy shall regularly review and be familiar with public sex offenders registries maintained by New York State law enforcement agencies. This is done by accessing:

<http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/SomsSUBDirectory/searchIndex.jsp>

## Reporting and Responding

Reporting shall be required by any staff or volunteer who personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation, when an allegation of an event of abuse or exploitation is made to a staff member or volunteer by a third party and/or when a child or vulnerable adult discloses abuse or exploitation to a staff member or volunteer. It is crucial that reporting be immediate and the allegations dealt with as soon in time as possible to the incident or disclosure.

1. The staff person or volunteer who observes alleged abuse or to whom such abuse is reported or disclosed, or who suspects abuse is required to report the incident/suspected abuse **immediately** to the person in charge of the ministry/activity. Upon receiving the information, the person in charge of the ministry/activity shall **immediately** call the local authorities: (Ontario County Sheriff, NYS Police, Sheriff, etc.) and/or the New York State Child Protective Services Hotline at (800) 342-3720. Identification information for the alleged victim and the adult responsible for their care is required for the report. The pastor in charge and immediate staff supervisor are to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report. The person in charge of the ministry/activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information such as the name of the alleged victim and his/her address and family information.

2. If the accused is the appointed clergy, supply pastor or a member of his/her family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent shall immediately report to the proper authorities as set forth in paragraph one above. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to the established rules in The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against the pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop.

3. All clergy are included in mandatory reporting as required by The Book of Discipline (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church paragraph 341.5, All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law).

4. After the person in charge of the ministry/activity has reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy/supply pastors shall report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.

5. The person in charge of the ministry/event must keep a written report of the steps taken by the church/charge in response to the reported abuse. The report should be kept brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. This report should be kept in a secure place. It should be written or typed to prevent it from being changed.

6. **NEVER** discuss allegations with any other people except law enforcement or designated county investigators. To do so can cause irreparable harm to the victim, their family, the church/charge and community.

7. A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse there shall be cooperation with all official investigating agencies.

8. All media requests for statements should be directed to the Annual Conference Director of Communications.

9. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.

10. Immediately, and with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth or vulnerable adults and advise the accused there has been an allegation of abuse. Details of the allegations of the abuse should not be discussed with the accused at the time of the removal. In any removal of a staff person or volunteer from any activity/ministry, care shall be taken to handle the removal in a discreet manner, recognizing that there will be an investigation by either state or church authorities, or both.

11. When it has been alleged that a member of the church staffer volunteer has committed an act of abuse or exploitation, the staff member or volunteer shall be required to refrain from all ministry/activities with children, youth or vulnerable adults until the incident has been fully resolved by the appropriate state authorities and/or in accordance with The Book of Discipline.

12. Notify the parents/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child, youth or vulnerable adult until the parent/guardian arrives. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

13. The church/charge should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing may take place.

### **Exceptions**

Although exceptions to this policy will not normally be permitted, a parent or legal guardian may request that a specific rule be waived for their child or children. The request must be made in writing to the Pastor and the Christian Education Coordinator stating the exception to be made and the reason for it. This request, if initially approved by them, will then be reviewed by the Church Council for approval. If approved, those responsible for the ministries and programs the child or youth participates in will be informed of the exception for that child. Exceptions will be expire 12 months from the approval date.