MORNINGSIDE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

A. Policy Purpose and Statement

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to 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," United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

At Morningside United Methodist Church, we take our responsibility to care for children, youth and vulnerable persons very seriously. This policy is intended to facilitate a safe and nurturing environment in which children, youth and vulnerable persons can grow in relationship with Jesus Christ. This policy sets forth the procedures and guidelines for volunteers and staff members. The following policy, with procedures, are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth, vulnerable persons, workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

"What is a Safe Sanctuaries Policy and How Does it Affect Me?"

The short answers are:

- Safe Sanctuaries is a policy describing commitments and procedures that will help us reduce the risk of child abuse in our church.
- It affects all of us in the church body, as we support a safe and welcoming place for children, youth and at-risk adults.
- Specifically, it defines pro-active requirements for church staff and volunteers working with ministries in these areas.

This policy reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection, for all who enter, and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others. The focus of this Safe Sanctuaries policy is to create a welcoming environment for our children, youth and at-risk adults; an environment in which they can participate in worship, learn Bible truths, witness to their faith, and be treated with dignity and respect.

Jesus made the importance of children clear when he said "Let the little children come to me and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Because the tragedy of abuse of children, youth and at-risk adults is a reality in our world, and because we recognize our responsibility to ensure a safe and protected environment for our children, the Morningside UMC has developed this policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth.

This policy has been approved by the Morningside UMC governing Council. It will be administered by the Council and the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) of the Morningside UMC and will be reviewed on a regular basis. Copies of the active policy are available in the Morningside UMC office, in each Sunday School room, as well as on Morningside UMC's website.

Statement of Covenant

Thus in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all of the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures on all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.

Policy Objectives

The main objectives of the Morningside UMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy are:

- to maintain a safe, healthy environment for our children and at-risk adults;
- to make sure that all paid staff and volunteer workers have the necessary skills and judgment to work with children;
- to reduce the risk of the occurrence of physical or sexual abuse;
- to provide guidelines and support for our paid staff and volunteers;
- to follow the guidelines set down by the Greater New York Annual Conference;
- to follow the recommendations of our Church Insurance Policy; and
- to minimize the liability of our church and our church workers in a case of a lawsuit.

Policy Definitions

For the purposes of this document:

- "Church Worker" is defined as any volunteer or employee who works with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

- "Volunteer" is any unpaid church member who works with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

- "Paid Staff" or "Staff Person" includes all paid employees of the church.

These categories include, but are not limited to, the pastor, Sunday School teachers and assistants, and youth leaders.

B. Safe Sanctuary Procedures

Procedure Sections

Our Safe Sanctuaries Policy has 6 main parts:
1) Worker Selection
2) Worker Supervision
3) Reporting Obligations
4) Response to Allegations
5) General Health and Safety Guidelines
6) Annual Review of the Policy

1. Worker Selection

a. Requirements

All Paid Staff will fill out an Employee Information Sheet, complete an on-line background check and submit the results of that check to the Pastor or Chair of the SPRC to be kept on file. The church will pay the cost of the background check. Candidates will be interviewed by the Chair of the SPRC or his/her designee. References will be contacted.

All Volunteers will complete the Volunteer Information Sheet, complete an on-line background check, and submit the results of that check to the Pastor or Chair of the SPRC to be kept on file. The church will pay the cost of the background check. New volunteers will have an interview with a Staff Person, or the Chair of the committee on which they will serve, and be asked to give references. They must attend our church regularly for at least 6 months before they will be allowed to volunteer in a capacity covered by this policy.

All Church Workers will attend an orientation and/or training session on abuse prevention and must agree to abide by the policies of this church.

All Church Workers will receive a copy of the Morningside UMC Safe Sanctuaries policy. Copies will be available in all Sunday School classrooms and posted on the church's website.

b. Care of Documents:

All information received from or about applicants will be completely confidential. Volunteer and Employee Information Sheets, Reference Reports and results of Background checks will be reviewed by the Pastor or Chair of the SPRC. All records will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Pastor's office for the duration of the church worker's service, plus seven years. No other persons will have access to these records except in the case of an allegation of suspicious activity. In the case of a report of suspicious activity, the Response team (see D1) and appropriate legal authorities will have access to the files.

Church Workers who are working in a capacity covered by this policy at the time of its approval by the Council will not be required to undergo the selection process (interview) described in section 1) above, but will be subject to the remaining paragraphs of this section as well as the background check (which includes a driving-record check for anyone who might be driving

children or youth to/from activities).

2. Worker Supervision

a. On Site:

- In order to protect children, youth, vulnerable adults and the church worker, workers will not be left alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult out of sight of another adult.

- Whenever possible, there shall be at least two adult volunteers in the classroom at all times. There may be one teacher in a Sunday School room with a group of children if there is a supervisor that checks in on the classroom during the Sunday School hour.

- All rooms used by minors should have a window in the door, or remain open.

b. Off Site:

- Whenever practical, at least two adults shall supervise all groups of children and youth for off-site events. Exception: When transporting children and youth to events in private cars, there may be one adult with at least two children in the car except on return trips when dropping off the last child. Also, the two-adult rule does not apply in parent-child relationships.

- Permission slips, including a medical release form, shall be used for all off-site events. Adequate personnel will be provided for supervision. Off-site programs involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults will include the supervisory personnel according to the following ratios:

  - Children's ages
    - 0-2 1:4
    - 3-5 1:5
    - 6-11 1:6
    - 12-17 1:10
  - Vulnerable adults 1:10

- All persons riding in private cars must be wearing seat belts when transported to off-site events.

3. Reporting Obligations

- Church Workers will be made aware of state laws that govern the reporting of child abuse during the orientation/training session on abuse prevention.

- Church Workers will be made aware of church reporting procedures, and how to identify signs of physical and emotional abuse through receipt of this policy, and the training session.

- Lines of Reporting:

  - If a Church Worker suspects or is made aware of any physical or sexual abuse occurring in a child's home, or somewhere outside of the church environment, it should be reported to the Pastor and to the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). The police will be notified if instructed to do so by OCFS.

  - Any suspicious activity, observed abuse, or victim allegation within the church environment must be reported immediately to OCFS and two or more of the following:
    1) Pastor
    2) Children's Sunday School Director
    3) Youth Group Leader
    4) Council Chair
    5) Staff-Parish Relations Committee Chair
    6) President of the Board of Trustees

    A contact list will be attached to this policy.

  - The persons to whom the incident is reported will produce a written report on the appropriate form (copy attached to this policy) of abuse or suspicious activity and document what, when, where and how, date, time, and circumstances under which the report was made. This report will be provided to the Pastor and kept in a locked cabinet in the Pastor's office unless needed by legal authorities.

  - Upon receiving such information, the Pastor, or an appropriate person designated in this Policy, will notify:
    1) District Superintendent
    2) Police (if directed to do so by OCFS).
    If the Pastor is implicated in the incident, or cannot be contacted, the Chair of SPRC will be responsible for reporting the incident.

4. <u>Response to Allegations</u>

- A Response Team will be formed and will be assigned to take any further actions required. The Response Team will follow advice of legal counsel and bishop or bishop's representative.

- The Response Team will be made up of pastor in charge, two Council members, and the Parish Nurse.

- The Response Team will function as the church's liaison to outside local and state civil authorities. Documentation will be maintained on an ongoing basis and in follow-up to any communication pertaining to the incident.

- One spokesperson will be appointed from the Response Team, and this person alone will communicate with the press, the congregation, and authorities.

- A clear position statement regarding our church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be prepared and released when appropriate. This is our opportunity to influence public opinion positively by emphasizing our awareness of the problems of child abuse, our concern for the victim, and the procedures we have put in place to reduce the risk, and to the provide a safe environment for children.

- The privacy and confidentiality of all involved must be maintained. Details of the allegations are not to be discussed in any public interview.

- Do not engage in denial, minimization, prejudgment, or blame. Take all allegations seriously. Treat the alleged victim and the victim's family with respect and concern. Extend pastoral resources as needed. Offering care and support can help minimize the hurt, and decrease the possibility of litigation.

- Treat the accused with respect and concern. Extend pastoral resources as necessary. If the accused is a volunteer, that person should refrain from all youth and child activities until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid employee, arrangements should be made whether or not to suspend the employee, and whether or not to suspend income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

5. General Health and Safety Guidelines

- A registration form will be filled out by the parents of all Sunday School students. Information regarding allergies and/or specific health risks will be included on this form. Information about specifically which adults are allowed to pick up the child will be included on this form, as well as where the parents can be located during Sunday School.

- Sunday School teachers will be given copies of Registration Forms for all individual students in their class, and they will be made aware of any allergies or health risks.

- Basic CPR and First Aid training will be made available to all volunteers and staff. Paid staff members are required to complete this training.

- A first aid kit will be kept in all Sunday School areas, and church sanctuary.

- If any injury or illness occurs during Sunday School, youth group, or any other church event, an Incident Report will be filled out and given to the Pastor, Youth Leader, or Christian Education Director. Completed Incident Reports will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the Pastor's office, along with other confidential files. Blank incident reports will be kept in the Sunday School rooms, and will be made available to all Church Workers.

- If Church Workers notice, or are made aware of any safety hazards within a classroom or any other area of the church, they will inform one or more of the following people:
  a) Pastor
  b) Children's Sunday School Director
  c) Youth Group Leader
  d) Council Chair
  e) President of the BOT

6. Annual Review of the Policy

This policy shall be reviewed annually by the SPRC and any changes presented to the Council for approval.

APPENDIX

VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FORM

Morningside United Methodist Church

The information obtained on this form is for internal use by this local church only.

Name_____

Date of Birth_____

Address

_____

City, state,
zip_____

Home telephone _____

Business telephone _____

Driver's License # (state) _____

Registration # _____

Auto Insurance Carrier/Policy #

_____

List (names) of other houses of worship you have attended regularly during the past five years:

_____

_____

Please provide name and telephone or email of a pastor or religious leader; an employer and a personal reference who may be contacted:

- Pastor or religious leader:
- Employer:
- Personal:

Acknowledgment of Safe Sanctuaries Policy

I understand that under the Safe Sanctuary policy of Morningside United Methodist Church, if I am, or become, a regular volunteer in a ministry area involving children, youth or at-risk adults, I consent to a background check at the expense of the church, which will be held in a confidential file. I understand that I must supply my Social Security Number for this purpose.

I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information and this release may be sent to any reference.

I also agree to hold harmless the Morningside United Methodist Church and the officers, employees, and volunteers thereof, from any use of this application or information.

I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct; if it is found that the answers given are untrue, I understand it may be cause for dismissal.

Signature_____

Date_____

WRITTEN RECORD OF CONTACT WITH A REFERENCE
OF AN APPLICANT FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN/YOUTH/AT-RISK ADULTS

(Please complete one form for each reference contacted)

1. Name of Applicant_____

2. Reference contacted (if a house of worship or organization, identify both the church or organization and person contacted)

_____
_____

3. Date(s) and time(s) of contact(s)_____
_____

4. Person contacting the reference_____

5. Method of contact (e.g., telephone, personal conversation, letter (attached)
_____

6. Summary of conversation (summarize the reference's remarks concerning the applicant's fitness and suitability for work with children, youth or at-risk adults.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

_____ Signature

Position: _____ Date: _____

REPORT FORM FOR INJURIES

Injured's name Age Address

City State Phone

Parent/guardian of injured Date/time/parent/guardian contacted:

Location of accident

Date of accident Time of accident Staff person in charge at time of accident

Brief description of accident

Others involved in accident

Other adult or youth witnesses to accident

Action taken

Medical attention required

Treating medical personnel and/or facility

Follow up required

Insurance-related action

Report prepared by _____

REPORT FORM FOR SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

Staff person completing report

Victim's name

Parent/guardian of victim

Location of incident

Date

Brief description of incident

Age

Date/time/location of initial conversation with victim Notes of conversation

Time

Name of person accused of abuse or misconduct

Date/time/location of initial conversation with accused (if staff member)

Notes of conversation

Date/time/location of initial conversation with parent(s)/guardian(s)

Person spoken to

Notes of conversation

Date/time of call to OCFS Person contacted

Notes of conversation

Date/time/location of call to law enforcement agency Persons contacted

Notes of conversation

Report prepared by_____