



# Hickory Grove United Methodist Church

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## Safe Sanctuaries Policy

### Hickory Grove United Methodist Church Introduction

HGUMC believes that scripture instructs us to care for the children and vulnerable persons brought into the church. These children and vulnerable persons may be regular attenders or guests. Regardless of how they come, we covenant to commit to their protection, and in doing so to represent God's justice and mercy in the world.

### POLICY

As part of our commitment to care for and protect the minors, defined as anyone under the age of 18, as well as the vulnerable adults among us, we commit to the following:

1. All volunteers and paid staff working with minors and vulnerable adults shall complete a background check that includes a State of North Carolina criminal check, National (Multi-Jurisdictional) criminal check, and national sex offender registry check if not included as part of another check. These must be completed within 90 days or at the time new volunteers begin serving, and not less than every 3 years thereafter. A qualifying letter will also be accepted as clearance.
2. All volunteers and paid staff working with minors or vulnerable adults shall complete Safe Sanctuaries training led by a member of the Administrative Council not less than every 2 years. We will offer this either as a church or in cooperation with other local churches. Additionally, volunteers and staff working with vulnerable adults shall complete additional training on the unique needs of the group(s) with which they are working.
3. Volunteers and paid staff must be at least eighteen (18) years old, and at least 5 years older than the oldest member of the group(s) with which they are working. Additionally, they must have been regular attenders in worship for at least six (6) months prior to serving unless this requirement is waived by the Administrative Council.
4. Volunteers and paid staff shall be responsible for no more than ten (10) minors or vulnerable adults at any given time, and at all times where a group of minors is present there must be two or more non-related and non-cohabitating adults. If two non-related adults are not available, the "least-related" adults should be used (for instance, cousins

are preferable to siblings). At no time shall a husband and wife serving together be counted as two adults for purposes of this policy.

5. Volunteers and staff driving minors and vulnerable adults to off-site events shall be qualified as leaders, and additionally shall complete a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of current insurance coverage. Chaperones shall be the same gender as the minors or vulnerable adults being supervised, and shall not share a bed with any minor including their own child. Where possible, hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized for overnight events. For any offsite event, the trip's leader must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants, and provide parents/guardians with a schedule and contact information.
6. HGUMC mandates reporting of observed or suspected abuse in a church setting. In the event that abuse is observed or suspected, the ministry area leader shall report it to the Senior Pastor, who will report it to the Department of Human Resources and local law enforcement. In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against the Senior Pastor, the report shall be made to the chairperson of the Administrative Council.

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

*This policy will be reviewed and signed annually*

**Hickory Grove United Methodist Church  
Safe Sanctuary Policy**

*“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” - Matthew 18:1-5*

Psalms 20: 1-2; 27: 4-5 provides examples of how sanctuary is to be a community protective nurture and harmony. As Christians we are called to create and provide a safe sanctuary in our church to ensure that it is a holy, safe and protective place, provided for all of God’s children, regardless of age or ability. The following policy is not based upon a lack of trust for those within, but is intended to protect our children, youth, employees, volunteers and the whole church body. To accomplish this, careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information, as needed, and to have accurate record in case of an incident. This policy should be posted in the nursery and any room utilized for children and/or youth ministries.

**Standards**

In order to ensure a high standard of protection for the members of Hickory Grove United Methodist Church, rules and standards concerning conduct of operations and standards for the church will be enacted.

**Review and Revision**

The Administrative Council shall review this policy annually and will revise if needed.

**Screening Process**

- A background check that includes a State of North Carolina criminal check, National (Multi-Jurisdictional) criminal check, and national sex offender registry, must be completed before a volunteer or paid staff begins in a position. Volunteers working with children (birth to 18) must regularly attend Hickory Grove UMC for 6 months (unless waived by the Administrative Council) before they are eligible to work in an area where they will have direct contact with children.
- No one shall serve if s/he is known previously to have been convicted of, pled guilty or non-contest to any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving sexual abuse, or any act or guilty conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive, or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. This includes, but is not limited to, crimes involved pedophilic behavior (molestation of a pre-adolescent child), incest, rape, assaults involving adults with special needs, murder, kidnapping, pornography, and the physical abuse of an adult with special needs.

- No one shall serve as a care provider who has had a verdict or judgment rendered against him or her in any civil action arising out of any personal act of conduct related to sexual abuse of an adult with special needs or child.
- All groups meeting at Hickory Grove UMC will be asked to sign a statement acknowledging receipt of this Safe Sanctuary policy and will provide their own background checks to all persons working with minors and vulnerable persons. This signed copy will be kept in the office.

#### **Screening Responsibilities**

- The Senior Pastor and/or a member of the Administrative Council will be responsible for screening and overseeing all paid staff employees and volunteers.
- Outside groups not screened by Hickory Grove UMC are responsible for ensuring their staff and volunteers are in compliance with our Safe Sanctuary policy.

#### **Screening Procedures**

- The persons noted above will be responsible for receiving, reviewing, confirming, and processing employment or volunteer applications.
- References will be requested for all paid staff positions and contacted.
- A background check for arrest and convictions records will be made for all potential employees performed by the person noted above.
- The maintenance of such documents shall reside in a locked filing cabinet in the church office or other more secure facility such as a safe deposit box within a licensed financial institution.

#### **Supervision**

- Orientation/Training is a requirement for all staff and volunteers in charge of children's activities and youth. This training will cover church policies to prevent child abuse, appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse, and details of state laws regarding child abuse. The Administrative Council shall coordinate the training. New volunteers in charge of children's and youth activities shall be trained, as the need arises.
- All volunteers and staff shall have basic CPR and First Aid training made available, including AED training. Each member of the staff working primarily with children is *required* to complete this training.
- Whenever reasonable, the "two-adult rule" shall be used during any church sponsored program, event or ministry involving children or youth. This indicates that no matter the size of the group, there will be two supervising adults (or one adult and one youth 5 years above the younger ) present. When this is not possible, the minimum supervisory standard shall be an adult in a visually-open room with a "roamer."
- Persons under the age of 18 may be partnered with an adult. A youth care-giver cannot be supervised only by an adult "roamer."
- An adult in a leadership role with a youth must:
  - o Be over 18 years of age;

- Be five years older than the oldest youth with whom he/she is working;
- Be 21 or older to drive with youth as passengers (unless there is an emergency).
- No worker under the age of 18 will have sole responsibility, nor be alone with any children.
- No child under the age of 18 should be wandering the church grounds without the knowledge or attendance of an adult.
- Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have an eyelevel window in the door or the door shall be left open. All activities should occur in a visually-open view.
- Registration materials for activities in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed permission forms that include media liability and release, general health, and emergency contact information in order to participate. All information will be kept confidential.
- The church nursery, toddler, and elementary-aged rooms will require all parents, guardians, or person designated by the parents/guardians to sign their child in and sign their child out.

**The North Carolina law involving reporting situations of possible/suspected child abuse**

**GS 7B-301.** Duty to report abuse, neglect, dependency, or death due to maltreatment.

*Any person or institution who has cause to suspect that any juvenile is abused, neglected, or dependent, as defined by G.S. 7B-101, or has died as the result of maltreatment, shall report the case of that juvenile to the director of the department of social services in the county where the juvenile resides or is found. The report may be made orally, by telephone, or in writing. The report shall include information as is known to the person making it including the name and address of the juvenile; the names and ages of other juveniles in the home; the present whereabouts of the juvenile if not at the home address; the nature and extent of any injury or condition resulting from abuse, neglect, or dependency; and any other information which the person making the report believes might be helpful in establishing the need for protective services or court intervention. If the report is made orally or by telephone, the person making the report shall give the person's name, address, and telephone number. Refusal of the person making the report to give a name shall not preclude the department's investigation of the alleged abuse, neglect, dependency, or death as a result of maltreatment.*

*Upon receipt of any report of sexual abuse of the juvenile in a child care facility, the director shall notify the State Bureau of Investigation within 24 hours or on the next workday. If sexual abuse in a child care facility is not alleged in the initial report, but during the course of the investigation there is reason to suspect that sexual abuse has occurred, the director shall immediately notify the State Bureau of Investigation. Upon notification that sexual abuse may have occurred in a child care facility, the State Bureau of Investigation may form a task force to investigate the report.*

The provisions of this law will be adhered to at all times.

If any incident of child abuse is alleged, it is crucial that it be addressed immediately and in a clearly outlined manner. The person who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the activity, who shall notify Children's Protective Service, law enforcement AND the Senior Pastor or Administrative Council Chairperson as soon as possible. The Senior Pastor and /or the Chairperson will notify the District Superintendent by the beginning of the next working day.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the person in charge of that event or activity to notify Children's Protective Service and contact the Senior Pastor immediately.

Persons who are the objects of the report will be required to refrain from all children's activities until an administrative decision is reached by Children's Protective Services. Care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, all volunteers or staff involved in that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

This policy prohibits retaliation against anyone who, in good faith, reports allegations of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct or assists in investigating charges. Anyone found to have participated in retaliatory actions will be confronted by the Administrative Council and appropriate action will be taken, which may include termination as a volunteer or employee of Hickory Grove UMC. Likewise, anyone found to have made a malicious false report of allegations will be confronted by the Administrative Council and appropriate action will be taken, which may include termination as a volunteer or employee.

The Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, are the only person(s) authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. At no time will the name of the alleged victim or person alleging the abuse be given out. The name of the person who is named as the perpetrator may be given out only after criminal charges have been filed and that person has been arrested for the incident. Even then only the fact that the person has been arrested will be made public. At all times the Senior Pastor or his/her designee will present an impartial view and make no conclusion to the media or any other person or organization regarding the facts of the case. Any public release of information to be made will first be cleared with the investigating officers of CPS and/or the investigating law enforcement agency. If allegations are made against the Senior Pastor, Administrative Council Chairperson shall contact the District Superintendent, who shall act as the Senior Pastor's designee.

### **Appropriate Discipline**

Children and youth must be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all church and church-related functions. When dealing with children and youth, gentle reminders will usually be necessary. When these reminders do not work then discipline needs to move to the next step. When behavior has to be addressed, the designated leaders of the event will handle it. A reasonable response might include a "time out" and /or notification of the

parent(s)/guardian/custodian of the situation. In no case will physical discipline ever be an appropriate measure for dealing with any discipline problem. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to contact the parent (s)/ guardian or custodian and send the child home immediately with two adults or the parent (s) / guardian or custodian.

## Definitions

For this policy, the following definitions will apply:

**Abuse** means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of an adult with special needs, a child, or youth by any person responsible for the health and welfare of an adult with special needs, a child or youth that occurs through nonaccidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual contact, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.

**Adult** means any person at least 18 years of age.

**Appropriate** means conduct that one would reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.

**Custodian** is any non-parent who has physical custody of a child under a court order.

**Leader** means anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing the specific Church-related function, event or activity.

**Parent, guardian or custodian** means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent or guardian appointed by the court with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or adult with special needs.

**Response Team** means all persons, individually or collectively, who are appointed by the SPRC chairperson to serve for the purpose of investigating and responding to allegations or misconduct.

**Sexual abuse** means engaging in any sexual contact, sexual penetrations, sexual exploitations, sexual harassment of an adult with special needs, or children, or youth; or the dissemination, exhibiting, or displaying of sexually explicit material to an adult with special needs, or child, or youth, regardless of whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the adult with special needs, or child, or youth. This abuse may be violent or nonviolent. It includes any conduct that involves adults with special needs or children in sexual behavior for which they are not personally, socially, or emotionally or developmentally ready.

**Sexual exploitation** means allowing, permitting or encouraging an adult with special needs or child or youth to engage in prostitution or in the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer-generated images or other forms of depicting a child, youth, or adult with special needs engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct.

**Sexual harassment** means any advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive.

## **POLICY STATEMENT ON SEXUAL AND GENDER HARASSMENT, MISCONDUCT OF A SEXUAL NATURE, AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

### **I. Church Statement**

Hickory Grove UMC believes that sexual abuse and sexual misconduct within the ministerial relationship and sexual harassment within the church are incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. All human beings are created in the image of God, and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3: 26-29, states all are one in Christ, we support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, situation, age or gender. Hickory Grove UMC prohibits any form of sexual harassment of the staff or congregation and guarantees the staff and congregation an environment free from these behaviors. Each member of the staff and congregation of Hickory Grove UMC is responsible for establishing the parameters of his or her own social behavior.

### **II. Definitions**

- A. Sexual Harassment is a form of gender discrimination. Sexual Harassment shall be defined as the repeated deliberate, unsolicited, and unwelcome verbal and/or physical conduct of a sexual nature or with sexual implications by a worker, a supervisor, or a higher authority. Single overt acts which are intended to coerce sexual behavior to control influence, or affect the career, employment or salary of an employee or applicant are sexual harassment for the purposes of this policy. Sexual Harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. Sexual Harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a female because she is female or against a male because he is a male.

#### **Examples of Sexual Harassment:**

Submission is either an explicit or implicit condition of employment; Submission or rejection is used as a basis for an employment decision; The conduct has interfered with and affected a person's work performance or has created an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment; or, The conduct is sufficiently distasteful or repetitious as to cause embarrassment to the affected person.

- B. Sexual Abuse/Sexual Assault

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 the congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker, or volunteer. 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.

### III. Reporting

It is the policy of Hickory Grove UMC to provide a safe and secure worship environment. Sexual and gender harassment, sexual abuse and misconduct of a sexual nature within the life of the Church interfere with its moral mission. Hickory Grove UMC prohibits and will not tolerate these behaviors, which are sinful, demeaning, abusive and wrong. Hickory Grove UMC commits itself to fair and expedient investigation of any complaint of sexual and/or gender harassment, or abuse of a sexual nature within the church and to take action deemed appropriate and in compliance with the Book of Discipline. Further, Hickory Grove UMC bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of hospitality for all persons, male and female, which is free of these sins and encourages respect, equality and kinship in Christ.

Some instances of harassment can be resolved informally by conversation between the parties or facilitated mediation. In all other instances, the conduct must be reported immediately to the chair, co-chair or any other member of the Administrative Council and the pastor in charge. If the conduct involves the pastor in charge or another clergy person, it must be reported to the District Superintendent or the Bishop as soon as possible.

Nothing within this policy shall relieve the staff or congregation or any other person associated with Hickory Grove UMC of the legal responsibility to report child abuse allegations to the Department of Social Services without delay as required by the provisions of North Carolina General Statutes 7B-301 and 7B-302.

Hickory Grove UMC will not retaliate against any person who brings forward a complaint. All staff and congregation members are expected to immediately report any knowledge of harassment, abuse or misconduct to any one of the persons listed above. Prompt and appropriate investigation and corrective action will be taken, including discipline. Persons willfully making false allegations may be disciplined.

### IV. Confidentiality

In cases of sexual harassment, Hickory Grove UMC cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. The church will make every reasonable effort to maintain confidentiality by disclosing information on a "need to know" basis and as necessary to promote God's call for justice, reconciliation and healing.

In cases of sexual abuse or sexual assault, no public disclosure of information will be made regarding the victim, witnesses or person(s) making the complaint. No disclosure of information regarding the accused will be made until after the accused has been formally charged with a crime by the courts.

Violators of the confidentiality rules will be disciplined by the church, and may subject the person making the violation to civil liability.

## V. Domestic Violence

North Carolina law provides for the establishment of a protective order by the courts to prevent a partner in a domestic relationship from becoming a victim of violence by another partner in that relationship. These orders are signed into effect by a judge and are referred to as 50-B orders. 50-B orders prevent a partner in personal relationship from harassing or coming into the presence of the other partner.

In a 50-B order the following definitions apply:

Plaintiff: The person seeking the order for protection against the;

Respondent: The person whom the order protects the plaintiff against.

Hickory Grove UMC is committed to providing a worship environment that is violence free. When it is known that such an order exists, any violations of that order will be reported by the church to the appropriate law enforcement agency immediately. The report may be made by any staff member or congregant of the church. A violation occurs when the respondent comes upon any church property and includes the lawn, parking lot and all structures on the property when prohibited by the order.

Persons attending Hickory Grove UMC who are under the protection of a 50-B order and wish for the church to assist in providing a safe place of worship should provide a cop of the order to the Office Administrator. The Office Administrator will notify the Senior Pastor who will ensure that the Administrative Council and staff are informed and the ushers at the Sunday worship services are also made aware of the existence of the order. Ushers and staff observing the respondent entering church property will inform the respondent that his/her presence may be a violation of the order and that they are required to report the violations. They will not engage in any physical confrontation with the respondent. They will report the violation to the appropriate law enforcement agency without delay.