

## **Hamline Church United Methodist Safe Sanctuary Policy**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“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 *Social Principles* of the United Methodist Church states, “...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.” (§ 161(I), *2012 Book of Discipline*) *The Book of Resolutions* encourages all conferences to become involved in the prevention of the physical and sexual abuse of children (#2004, *2012 Book of Resolutions*, p. 134) The *2012 Book of Discipline* names child abuse, sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, and sexual harassment as chargeable offenses for clergy and lay members (§ 2702, *2012 Book of Discipline*).

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Scripture and our United Methodist tradition inform us in our belief that God values all human life - perhaps children most of all. Jesus, time and time again, spoke of the importance of young people being included and provided for within the community of faith. Our hope and belief today is that the church is a place where children and youth will find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive.

Every 15 seconds, a child is abused or neglected. Abuse often happens in settings where children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be able to feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and most sadly, the Church. Abuse does happen in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real and appears to be increasing.

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the church. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough, practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do that for Hamline Church United Methodist ministries that deal with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

### **OUR COMMITMENT**

Therefore, it shall be the policy and covenant of Hamline Church United Methodist (“Hamline Church”) to do everything in our power to prevent physical, emotional or sexual abuse against children, youth, and vulnerable involved in any ministry sponsored by our church. 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 legal responsibilities; to comply

with those responsibilities; and go beyond those responsibilities when necessary in order to act justly in the best interest of those who have been abused or those who are most vulnerable to abuse.

Hamline Church will encourage participation in orientations and training seminars for clergy and others in a role of leadership with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Hamline Church will encourage all clergy and others in a role of leadership with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations to follow the best practices as attached to this document.

Hamline Church requires all those who serve in a role of leadership with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations to complete a criminal background check and complete the ©Safe Gatherings abuse prevention and boundary awareness on-line training program available through the Minnesota Annual Conference.

Hamline Church will be responsible to report instances of abuse as stated in Reporting Section.

## **SCOPE**

This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons working with children, youth, and adults from vulnerable populations, including volunteer ministry workers.

## **DEFINITIONS**

The policies and procedures herein draw upon the definitions contained in the *Conference Sexual Misconduct Policy* found in the Minnesota Annual Conference Policy and Procedure Manual, updated October 2015.

1. Adult: any person 18 years old or older.
2. Child: any person from infancy through 12 years old.
3. Youth: any person from 13 years old up to 18 years old.
4. Physical Abuse: any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. This definition includes any non-accidental physical injury caused by a caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child, youth, or vulnerable adults.
5. Sexual Abuse: includes criminal sexual conduct or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation that is in violation of the Minnesota Criminal Sexual Conduct statutes. As it applies to adult interactions with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, sexual abuse is the subjection of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for their care to any sexual act that is a violation of the Minnesota Criminal Sexual Conduct statutes. To uphold the moral standard of the United Methodist Church as defined by this document

and The Book of Discipline, no person less than 18 years of age or any vulnerable adult may give consent to sexual acts.

6. Sexual Harassment: defined by the United Methodist Church (BOD ¶ 161 section I) as “any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical which is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual issue. 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.” For the purposes of this policy, we acknowledge that sexual harassment may occur in any environment where the work of the church takes place.
7. Sexual Misconduct: is defined as an abuse of power through sexual contact or activity (not limited to sexual intercourse) which exploits the vulnerability of a parishioner, client or staff person, or causes/allows those persons to engage in sexual behavior with a person who is in a professional relationship (whether paid or unpaid) to the annual conference. It may also include any sexual contact or activity (not limited to sexual intercourse) between a person in a therapeutic or a counseling role/relationship with a congregant/client. It may include being asked to date the counselor or any representation by a counselor that sexual contact will help in dealing with the emotional struggles the client is having. (This is called “therapeutic deception.”) Consent by the complainant is not a defense. Such behavior is illegal under Minnesota law, as is sexual contact by a person who is, or claims to be, clergy with someone during private meetings for spiritual aid and comfort.
8. Persons in a ministerial role of leadership with children, youth, and vulnerable adults: includes all paid and unpaid staff, whether lay or clergy, who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Hamline Church.

## **SCREENING AND TRAINING FOR MINISTRY WORKERS OR STAFF**

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of persons who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment. It can be time consuming and expensive, but provides some assurance that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Prior to employment or acceptance as a ministry worker (regardless of compensation), the staff person in charge of an event or program, or his/her designee, shall direct each prospective worker to read this policy and complete the ©Safe Gatherings on-line training and criminal background check.

1. If any of the completed forms or reports raises questions about the fitness of the applicant, Hamline Church reserves the right to turn away any persons for ministry.
2. If the applicant, clergy or lay, regardless of being compensated, is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the applicant will not be hired/approved. Any conviction of a crime against children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall disqualify any applicant.
3. Results of screenings shall be kept confidential and maintained by Hamline Church within the limits of the law.
4. The staff person in charge of an event or program, or his/her designee, is responsible for review and approving each application before a person's service begins.

## **SUPERVISION**

Competent and trained adults are important to any event. The procedures described below are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unfounded accusations. Whenever possible, a team approach to ministry to children, youth, and vulnerable adults is most appropriate.

1. The "Two Adult Rule": No fewer than two volunteers and/or paid staff should be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children and / or youth. Risk will be reduced even more if the two adults are not related. In the event of a shortage of adults, a "roamer" may be assigned to drop in where children and/or youth are gathered, and classroom doors should be propped open.
2. CPR/First Aid Training: Paid child-care staff will be asked to complete children's first-aid and CPR training. Hamline Church will reimburse paid child-care staff for the cost of training.
3. Annual Orientation for volunteers and paid staff: All workers with children and /or youth, whether paid, volunteer, part-time, clergy, or lay will be encouraged to attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the following:
  - a. The reality of, and risk factors leading to, abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
  - b. The policies of Hamline Church for the prevention of the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults;
  - c. The procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults;

- d. Appropriate steps to report an incident of suspected abuse;
- e. Details of the state laws regarding the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The Church will maintain an updated record that it has informed all volunteers and paid staff about its policies. Volunteers and paid staff will be given the church policies in writing.

4. The “Five Years Older” Rule: At least one of the two volunteers or paid staff supervising children and / or youth at any church-sponsored event should be at least five years older than any of the children or youth with whom s/he will work.
5. “Eighteen Plus” Rule: Volunteers working with children or youth who are under the age of 18 should be accompanied by two adults who are over the age of 18.
6. Windows in All Classroom Doors: Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it, or a half door. If the door does not have a window, the door must remain completely open at all times.
7. Open-Door Counseling: At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used shall remain open for the entire session.
8. Advanced Notice to Parents: Parents or guardians will be given advanced notice and full information regarding activities in which their children will be participating. Parents must give written permission for their child’s participation in off-site activities.
9. No person who has been convicted of the abuse of children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a court of law [either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse] should work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
10. All persons involved with children, youth, or vulnerable adults of Hamline Church shall immediately report to the pastor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate. If the abusive or inappropriate behavior is committed by the pastor, the person involved shall immediately report to the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC).
11. Regarding Staff: Those seeking employment with Hamline Church shall complete the ©Safe Gatherings training and background check and shall abide by the policies set forth in this document.
12. Regarding Volunteers: Those volunteers who will have direct contact with children and/or youth should complete the ©Safe Gatherings background check and shall abide by the policies set forth in this document. At least one of the two adults supervising

any group of children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall have completed the © Safe Gatherings training and background check.

## **STATE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: CHILDREN & YOUTH**

If you are a professional who works with children and families, you are in a key position to help protect children from harm. Minnesota law requires professionals and their delegates who work with children to make a child protection report if they know of or have reason to believe a child: is being neglected or abused, or has been neglected or abused within the preceding three years. [Minnesota Statute 626.556](#) lists those who are mandated reporters in the State of Minnesota. To find out if you are a mandatory reporter, see page one (1) of the report: [Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: A Resource Guide for Mandated Reporters in English \(PDF\)](#) found at <https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lserver/Public/DHS-2917-ENG> or call 651-431-4661.

All clergy serving United Methodist churches in Minnesota are mandated to report incidences of child abuse. Mandated reporters are not only licensed individuals: babysitters, for example, are considered mandated reporters in Minnesota.

Anyone has the right to voluntarily report suspected abuse of children or youth. Call the county or tribal social service agency or the police where the child lives if you believe that a child is being hurt or neglected. For more details about reporting: [Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: A Resource Guide for Mandated Reporters in English \(PDF\)](#) <https://www.ramseycounty.us/residents/assistance-support/intervention-protection/child-protection/mandated-reporters>. If a child or youth is in immediate danger, call 911 without delay. If you do not suspect immediate danger to the child or youth, and the child or youth resides in Ramsey County, call 651-266-4500 as soon as possible.

## **STATE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS: VULNERABLE ADULTS**

If you are a professional who works with vulnerable adults, you are in a key position to help protect them from harm. Minnesota Law requires professionals and their delegates who work with vulnerable adults and have reason to believe that a vulnerable adult is being or has been maltreated, or who has knowledge that a vulnerable adult has sustained a physical injury which is not reasonably explained, to report the maltreatment of a vulnerable adult. [Minnesota Statute 626.5572 Subd. 16](#) lists those who are mandated reporters in the State of Minnesota. To find out if you are a mandatory reporter, see page four (4) of the Minnesota Department of Human Services Vulnerable Adults Mandated Training available at [http://registrations.dhs.state.mn.us/WebManRpt/Who\\_CEP4.html](http://registrations.dhs.state.mn.us/WebManRpt/Who_CEP4.html)

If a vulnerable adult is in immediate danger, call 911 without delay. If you do not suspect immediate danger to the vulnerable adult, call the Minnesota Adult Abuse Reporting Center at 844-880-1574.

Minnesota encourages good faith reporting of suspected maltreatment of vulnerable adults by any person. If you make a report, your identity is confidential and cannot be released without a court

order. For more details about reporting, see the Minnesota Department of Human Services Vulnerable Adult Protection and Elder Abuse web page: <http://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/seniors/services/adult-protection/>

## **INTERNAL REPORTING OF INCIDENTS**

At any Hamline Church event, if an adult suspects the abuse or neglect of a child, youth, or adult from a vulnerable population, that person must report his/her suspicions to the leader of the event and together they must immediately ascertain the details needed to make an accurate report. In the event the event leader is the suspected abuser, the individual must report his/her suspicions to the pastor. If the pastor is both the suspected abuser and the event leader, the individual shall report to the SPRC. This report should be drafted as soon as possible, and should include the following information, if obtainable:

1. The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
2. The name and address of the alleged victim's parent, guardian, or other person responsible for his/her care;
3. The grounds for belief that abuse or neglect has occurred;
4. The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
5. Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
6. The name, address, and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect;
7. Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.

A copy of this document shall be provided to the pastor. If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator, the document shall be provided to SPRC. All individuals involved in reporting the event will be reminded of his/her duty of confidentiality. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a church-sponsored children's activity, the entire staff – both professional and volunteer - of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

## **INTERNAL RESPONSE PLAN: CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of abuse of a child or youth is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously.

Upon receipt of a written incident report, the pastor (or SPRC) will:

1. Notify the parents of the victim, and assure the child or youth's safety;
2. With dignity, remove the alleged abuser from involvement with children and youth. The alleged abuser will be required to abstain from such involvement until the incident investigation is concluded.

3. Notify proper law enforcement or Child Protective Services, where required by law;
4. Notify the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church (“Minnesota Conference”), the Church’s insurance agent, and the Church’s attorney;
5. Create and maintain a written record of notifications and responses;
6. Prepare a brief and honest statement to the congregation without unnecessary details, without placing blame, and without interfering with the privacy of the victim, accused or other privacy concerns.
7. Cooperate fully with investigation by law enforcement and Child Protective Services.

All requests for further statement should be directed to the Minnesota Conference’s Director of Communications. The Director of Communications is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is often helpful.

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

Management of all provisions of this Policy is the sole responsibility of Hamline Church. In carrying out the duties and responsibilities of this policy, Hamline Church may utilize and rely on certain policies, procedures, and/or training courses recommended or endorsed by the Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth  
by Joy Thornburg-Melton

Safe Gatherings online training information available through the Minnesota Annual Conference:  
<http://www.minnesotaumc.org/safe-gatherings>

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Ray Faust, Council Chair