

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

1

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

I. INTRODUCTION

The Leominster United Methodist Church (LUMC) aspires to be a community of faith in which people grow in faith and discipleship as they participate in the life of the congregation. We recognize the need to provide for the physical and spiritual well-being of the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who come to our church and participate in its programs and activities. We are mindful of the need to provide them with religious education, to foster their spiritual development, and to maintain a safe environment in which they may grow in faith.

LUMC is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all who enter our facility. We are also committed to reducing any possibilities where a child, youth, or vulnerable adult may be harmed or abused in and around our facility. Therefore, we require that the procedures outlined below be followed by all that are associated with LUMC and those using the LUMC facilities.

These are the policies and procedures that we feel are important in helping to make the church a safe place for everyone. It is our hope that we will continue to explore the ways to offer a safe and nurturing environment that helps children, youth, and vulnerable adults to feel part of a faithful church community.

These safe church policies and procedures are not intended to prohibit people younger than 18 from helping to provide care for younger children, but we feel that persons under 18 should not be placed in a position of responsibility and liability that being a designated caregiver implies. Therefore, even if there are people younger than 18 available to provide care, there need to be at least two adults at the event.

This policy will be reviewed and updated as needed on an annual basis.

II. SUPERVISION

- a. Parents/guardians are solely responsible for their own children at all times on church property except for during Sunday School and Youth Group. This includes during, before, and after worship, coffee hour, trunk-or-treat, egg hunt, church picnics, potluck suppers, and any other church function outside of Sunday School and Youth Group. The church may occasionally inform parents/guardians in writing that the church is accepting responsibility for their children for a special event at a specific date and time (e.g. lock-ins).
- b. When in the care of a parent or guardian on church property the following apply:
 - i. Children and youth are to be supervised at all times.
 - ii. No child or youth is to roam the church alone at any time.

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

2

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

- iii. Children up to age 13 must have a buddy when leaving the sanctuary (for bathroom, etc.). For children up to age 7, the buddy must be a parent or guardian.
- c. When in the care of church caregivers the following apply:
- i. All ministries should occur in open view: window, half door, or door shall remain open.
 - ii. At least two unrelated caregivers shall be present at any church event in which children are participating.
 - iii. No caregiver shall place him/herself in a compromising situation by being alone with one child out of sight of other adults without proper notification being given to other nearby caregivers or other adults.
 - iv. All children participating in any church-sponsored event are expected to remain under the supervision of the caregivers involved throughout the event. It is the responsibility of the caregiver to ensure that all children remain under supervision. If the child refuses to remain under such supervision, then his/her parent or guardian shall be notified.
 - v. Written parental/guardian permission shall be obtained for any church-sponsored events occurring off church property.
 - vi. The safety policy for the church school outlines policies and procedures to ensure the safety of children in the church school. All parents/guardians of children enrolled in the church school are informed of the safety policy at the time of their child's registration.
 - vii. Caregivers shall administer first aid when necessary. Any such personal injury or property damage during an event or activity involving children shall be reported in writing to a designated person.
 - viii. When warranted in cases of injury or illness, all available means will be used to contact the child's parent/guardian.
 - ix. The use of alcohol or illegal drugs is prohibited. Tobacco use is prohibited in the building.
- d. For bathroom supervision when in the care of church staff/volunteers, the following apply:
- i. No child should travel from their classroom/ministry area to the bathroom alone. Children age 6 and under must be accompanied by two unrelated caregivers, who will remain in the hallway with the outer bathroom door open. Children ages 7-17 may use the buddy system to travel to the bathroom.
 - ii. Whenever possible, children will be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs, but should a child require assistance, the stall door will remain open while a caregiver assists the child, with an additional caregiver also being present.
 - iii. When caring for the diapering needs of children, two caregivers must be present.

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

III. TRANSPORTATION

- a. Caregivers who transport children to or from any church-sponsored events must be 21 years of age or older.
- b. Written parental/guardian permission shall be obtained for any church-sponsored events occurring off church property. A caregiver shall be aware of any arrangements made for each child's transportation home from events.
- c. When traveling to or from church-sponsored events off church property, there must be two caregivers per vehicle.
- d. Transportation of children participating in church-sponsored events off church property shall begin and end at the church. Following an event, no child shall be left alone or with only one caregiver while waiting for transportation home.

IV. OFF SITE AND OVERNIGHT MINISTRIES

- a. All caregivers on overnight lock-ins, retreats or trips must follow the same policies written in this document.
- b. At least 2 adult caregivers may sleep in a large room with multiple bunk beds.

V. VULNERABLE ADULT VISITATION

- a. When engaging in visitation with vulnerable adults, the pastor and/or caregiver should conduct the meeting in a room with a window and/or open door, or in a public space.
- b. When possible, it is recommended that two caregivers be present for vulnerable adult visitation.

VI. INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING

- a. Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner.
- b. The caregiver shall conduct the meeting in a visible space, meaning that the office door is cracked open or a window is visible and someone can reasonably see all persons in the room, or the meeting shall take place in a public place.

VII. ACCEPTABLE DISCIPLINE

- a. Children at church-sponsored events shall be treated in a manner which encourages mutual responsibility, respect, and cooperation.
- b. Caregivers are encouraged to listen to the child, communicate expectations of appropriate behaviors, and use non-abusive forms of behavior management. No form of hitting, slapping or physical punishment is allowed.

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

4

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

- c. Sometimes children continue to be disruptive after being disciplined and in these situations a caregiver may be sent to locate an appropriate supervisor, and/or the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the child may be contacted.
- d. Sometimes it may be necessary for the caregivers or leaders to physically move or reposition a child for reasons which may include protecting other children, restraining undesirable or dangerous behaviors, or in situations when fast action is required.

VIII. APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

- a. No caregiver shall initiate inappropriate and unnecessary physical contact with any child. Caregivers will not engage in any sexual contact with children. Sexual harassment of any kind is prohibited between caregivers and children and among all adults in the church.
- b. Appropriate activities will not force any physical contact and will not include any highly risky or violent contact activities.

IX. MINISTRY WITH TECHNOLOGY

- a. Video Conferencing
 - i. All children engaging in church-sponsored video conferencing should have a signed permission form from their parent or guardian on file with the church before logging onto a video conference. Permission forms will expire after 12 months.
 - ii. At least two unrelated caregivers shall be present on the video call in which children are participating at all times.
- b. Texting
 - i. When texting with children, two caregivers must be included on the text message.
- c. Social Media
 - i. Adult caregivers should not accept friend requests from children without parent/guardian permission.
 - ii. No adult should use Snapchat with minors.
 - iii. Parents/guardians must provide written permission prior to a child's image being posted on public or private church social media accounts.
- d. Livestreaming
 - i. Written notice of livestreaming should be given to all who attend a livestreamed worship service.

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

5

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

- ii. Off-camera seats should be designated for those who are concerned about appearing on livestream.
- iii. The camera image should be blurred at all times during the serving of Holy Communion and the Children's Message, so that individuals are not identifiable.
- iv. When worship service is livestreamed and prayer concerns are shared, only first names should be included

X. OUTSIDE GROUPS

- a. LUMC is blessed to share its building with many outside groups. LUMC will administer a copy of this policy to all outside groups and encourage them to follow it, but LUMC accepts no responsibility for the safeguarding of children from outside groups on church property. Outside groups are solely responsible for their own safeguarding procedures.

XI. BACKGROUND CHECKS

- a. All caregivers for children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to safely pass a Nationwide Criminal Record Search and Nationwide Sex Offender Registry Search administered through Trusted Employees prior to their assignment for providing care at any church-sponsored event.
- b. A designated staff person shall approve all background checks, determine whether a person's report is deemed acceptable, and maintain an up to date list of adults in the church who have been designated as approved caregivers.
- c. Background checks expire after three years and caregivers will be required to pass another check to continue in ministry.

XII. CHILD EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT

- a. All children enrolled in church programming should be trained in Safe Sanctuaries so they know what is okay and what is not okay.

XIII. REPORTING

- a. In case of a report of an Incident of Suspected Child Abuse, the pastor, or his/her designated person to act as the Mandated Reporter, will follow the instructions in the Massachusetts 51A Report.
- b. Procedure for reporting
 - i. When an incident or suspected abuse occurs, the adult aware should immediately report incident or suspected abuse to the person in charge of the ministry
 - ii. The person in charge of ministry should then inform the pastor immediately.
 - iii. If the incident or suspected abuse involves the pastor, contact the District Superintendent Immediately at (978) 682-7676 ext. 270 or CWDS@neumc.org
 - iv. Keep a written record of the event

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated: September 2024

- v. Immediately and discreetly remove the suspected abuser from all ministries involving children or vulnerable adults
- vi. Respond with compassion for all parties involved.

XIV. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of these policies, the following definitions apply:

- *Child*: Any person below the age of 18 years.
- *Adult*: Any person at least 18 years of age.
- *Two Adult Rule*: There must be 2 unrelated adults with children, no matter the size of the group.
- *Caregiver*: Any adult, at least five years older than the oldest child in their care, who has been designated by any church committee or staff person to care for and supervise children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults at church-sponsored events.
- *Vulnerable Adult*: Any person, 18 years and older, who because of physical or mental infirmity or emotional disability, or other physical, mental, or emotional dysfunction may be vulnerable to maltreatment. We also mean vulnerable adults to be: those adults who work with children and/or youth and can be in a position where accusations of child abuse could mistakenly arise; or adults who have been abused either as a child, youth, or adult.
- *Event*: A church-sponsored gathering or meeting on or off church property.