

**BELFAST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SAFE SANCTUARY PARTICIPATION COVENANT**

**Biblical teaching tells us that Jesus was an advocate for all people of all ages and means. Jesus asked that his disciples care for and protect those persons who did not have the power, the voice or the means to protect themselves. The church of today can do no less.**

**The congregation of the Belfast United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe environment for all who participate in worship, missions, ministries, programs, and events sponsored by the church. By reading and signing this covenant, you agree to help provide a safe place for all, including those who do not have the power, the voice or the means to protect themselves.**

- 1. **I agree to follow church policies as set forth in the BUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy in working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.** YES NO
- 2. **I agree to provide 3 personal references and give BUMC permission to contact those references.** YES NO
- 3. **I will consent to a background check.** YES NO
- 4. **I agree to participate in training provided by the church as related to my work with children, youth and vulnerable adults.** YES NO
- 5. **I agree to report abusive behavior or suspected abuse to the Pastor and the Chairperson of SPRC.** YES NO
- 6. **I will inform the Pastor and/or the Chairperson of SPRC if I have ever been convicted of a felony offense.** YES NO
- 7. **I will inform the Pastor and/or the Chairperson of SPRC if I have ever been convicted of child abuse or any other crime against a child.** YES NO
- 8. **My fingerprints are on file with a local, state, or federal agency, due to employment requirements, previous criminal conviction (s), or for other reasons.** YES NO

**If yes, please specify reason:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I have read the BUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy, and I agree to follow the procedures set forth within the document. In signing this covenant, I enter into partnership with the Belfast United Methodist Church in providing a holy place of safety for all.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date**

**Please Print:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**BELFAST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

“The mission of the Belfast United Methodist Church is to be a community of disciples in service for Jesus Christ, sharing God’s love with all.”

**PURPOSE:**

The congregation of the Belfast United Methodist Church affirms its responsibility to provide a safe environment for all people. We recognize that some individuals are more susceptible to the possibility of abuse due to age, physical, mental, emotional, or developmental limitations, or life circumstances. The purpose of the Safe Sanctuary Policy is to demonstrate our commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth for the children, youth, vulnerable adults, volunteers, and employees who participate in the programs, activities, events, missions, and ministries sponsored by the Belfast United Methodist Church.

**PREVENTION PROCEDURES:**

The following procedures are established for all activities, programs, ministries, and events connected to the Belfast United Methodist Church, in order to provide a holy place of safety and to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth, and vulnerable adults; and to protect staff members and volunteers, whether lay or clergy, from unwarranted accusations by implementing conscientious, intentional **screening** and **supervision**. Activities, programs, ministries, and events include but are not limited to: Sunday School, Youth Group, Vacation Bible School, Choir, Nursery, and any/all programs to be created in the future.

**SCREENING:**

*(The term vulnerable persons will be used to indicate children, youth, and vulnerable adults.)*

- \* All activities, programs, ministries, and events involving vulnerable persons must be supervised by adults who are 18 years of age or older.
- \* All volunteers/employees who work with vulnerable persons must be 16 years of age or older, be at least 5 years older than the children/youth who are being supervised, and must be supervised by at least one adult. *Youth under the age of 16 will not serve in supervisory positions but may serve as ‘helpers’. A Permission to Participate form must be signed by a parent guardian.*
- \* All persons in a supervisory position will attend annual training, which will include information regarding the Safe Sanctuary Policy, procedures for supervision and *behavioral consequences*, and information for identifying and reporting suspected incidents of child abuse.
- \* All volunteers seeking a position that includes the supervision of vulnerable persons will complete a Volunteer Application Form, a Safe Sanctuary Participation Covenant, and agree to a confidential background check, to be reviewed only by the Safe Sanctuary Team and the Pastor.
- \* All persons seeking a paid position that will include the supervision of vulnerable persons will complete an Employment Application Form, a Safe Sanctuary Participation Covenant, and agree to a confidential background check. All letters of reference and information gathered from a background check will be included in the personnel file. In the event that a reference follow-up is accomplished by telephone, detailed notes of the conversation will be included in the personnel file and locked in the church safe. *Background checks will be revisited every ( ) years.*
- \* Should the situation arise that a congregant is known or suspected to be a convicted sexual offender, the Pastor and/or the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee should be notified. In the event that the offender will be directly involved with vulnerable persons, the leader/supervisor of the program will be notified. It will be at the discretion of the Pastor, SPRC Chair person, and the program leader as to the level of involvement. *Per DHHS, such a person can never assume a perceived or real role of authority with vulnerable persons. At no time will a convicted sexual offender be allowed to work alone with children or vulnerable adults.*

**SAFE SANCTUARY MINISTRY PROCEDURES:**

- \* All volunteers/employees will be attentive to appropriate behavior in attire, language, and demonstration of affection towards each other and those they are supervising.
- \* All adult volunteers/employees will follow the 2-Adult Rule at all times, so that no adult is left alone with vulnerable persons. The 2-Adult Rule applies to all activities, programs, ministries, and events sponsored by the Belfast United Methodist Church, including those at sites or venues other than the church building or properties.
- \* *If at all possible, persons in committed relationships (i.e. husband - wife, boyfriend - girlfriend, significant others) or family members or persons residing in the same household will not serve together as part of a 2-Adult Team in Sunday School.*
- \* *It is strongly recommended that persons in committed relationships (i.e. husband - wife, boyfriend - girlfriend, significant others) or family members or persons residing in the same household will not serve together as part of a 2-Adult Team in the Nursery during worship.*
- \* There should be an adult “roamer” who moves in and out of rooms or areas where vulnerable persons are gathered.
- \* All activities involving vulnerable persons will occur in open areas or in rooms with doors having a window or an open door. Windows will not be blocked or covered in a way that the interior of the room is not visible. If the activity occurs in a setting that makes it difficult to comply with this policy, the leader/supervisor of the activity will take appropriate measures to ensure that the setting suits the activity and that participants are properly supervised.
- \* The Open Door Rule does not apply to the bathroom. We encourage staff to be present outside the door and not in the bathroom with a vulnerable person, if at all possible.
- \* All adult volunteers who transport participants to and from church sponsored activities will have a valid driver's license. The 2-Adult Rule applies to vehicles.
- \* An activity that requires an overnight stay (including, but not limited to, lock-ins, retreats, mission trips, choir trips, camping trips, and service projects), extra precaution must be taken in order to minimize the danger of strangers, possible danger from within the group, and to protect adult leaders from the possibility of false accusations. A written plan for sleeping arrangements will be submitted to the Safe Sanctuary Team and the Pastor prior to the event.
- \* Any adult who is asked to counsel a vulnerable person should determine at the first meeting if he/she is qualified to address the needs of the person seeking counseling. If not, the vulnerable person should be referred to another counselor.
- \* *Confidential conversations involving a vulnerable person should take place in a room with an open door and at a time when there are other people nearby.*
- \* *The guidelines for Pastoral Counseling will be determined by the Pastor and PPRC.*
- \* Physical and/or verbally abusive discipline will never be used. If a vulnerable person is disruptive, a “time-out” or “redirect” will be instituted. If disruptive behavior continues, the parent/guardian will be notified to remove the participant from the activity.
- \* Pictures of vulnerable persons posted on the church web site or other church publications will not identify specific individuals by name unless there is written permission obtained from a parent/guardian. Permission slips will be stored in the church office.
- \* All volunteers/employees should be trained in Red Cross First Aid/CPR.

- \* All activities in which vulnerable persons are outside the direct supervision of their parent/guardian will require advanced written notice to parent/guardian with full information about the activity. A signed permission form from a parent/guardian must be obtained before a vulnerable person will be allowed to participate in the activity. Permission forms must include pertinent health information concerning the participant. All permission forms will be saved in a file following the event.
- \* A signed Registration Form, as required by Sunday School and VBS, is considered a permission form for the vulnerable person to participate in all aspects of the program for which the participant is registered. Additional activities not usually considered part of the program will require a separate permission form. *All registration forms/permission slips will include a "Release Only To" section where parent/guardian can list persons allowed to pick up participants. Participants will only be released to the persons listed.*
- \* Parents/guardians will sign vulnerable persons into programs, such as Sunday School, Nursery, or VBS, when they are dropped off and will sign them out when they are picked up. *Participants who may sign themselves in and out will have to provide a note signed by parent/guardian*
- \* In the event that vulnerable persons are on church property, but not involved in a church sponsored and/or staff - supervised event, parents/guardians are responsible for their supervision.
- \* Any accident or injury to a vulnerable person occurring during a church sponsored event will be reported to the leader of the event and a written report will be completed and kept on file.
- \* All adult volunteers/employees will immediately *verbally* report any suspicion of abuse, including but not limited to physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, ritual, or mental to the supervisor of the event, the Chairperson of SPRC, and the Pastor. *The person to whom the report is made will complete a Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse form. A written report will be submitted within 24 hours to the appropriate authorities*
- \* A "Safe Room" will be designated within the church building. The room will be used in the event that an individual is in immediate danger of being physically or sexually abused. The room should have two doors that lock, a telephone, and no windows. Should a vulnerable person need to be protected, there should be 2 adults in attendance with the victim at all times. However, the immediate safety from abuse supercedes the 2-Adult Rule. The first priority will be to shelter the victim and to summon Law Enforcement. At this time, the Food Cupboard will be designated as our "Safe Room".
- \* Recognizing that all people are children of God, the Belfast United Methodist Church will provide a safe environment for all staff (volunteer or employee) who participate in the missions and ministries sponsored by the church. Disrespectful behavior or language, and/or verbal, physical, or sexual abuse towards a staff member is unacceptable. In the event that a staff person is assaulted or abused, whether by another adult or by a vulnerable person, there will be a written report submitted to the supervisor of the event, the SPRC Chairperson, and the Pastor. In the event that a vulnerable person is the offender, a meeting will be held with a parent/guardian to discuss the incident. An apology, written and/or verbal, must be made to the staff person involved before the vulnerable person will be allowed to return to the event.

#### 4 **DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE:**

##### **THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH DEFINITION OF SEXUAL ABUSE:**

The 1996/2004 Book of Resolution states that “sexual abuse within the ministerial (Pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or any other role of leadership within the church) relationship and sexual harassment within the church is incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing.”

- Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person in a leadership role engages in sexual conduct or sexualized behavior with a 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.
- Sexual harassment is 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 includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. (The Book of Discipline Social Principles Para. 161.I)

##### **STATE OF MAINE DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE:**

Citation: Title 22, S 4002

- Physical Abuse or neglect means a threat to a person’s health or welfare by physical injury or impairment, punishment inappropriate to the person’s age or physical or mental condition, any purposeful act that poses danger to the health of a person by someone in a position of authority or responsibility; jeopardy to health or welfare means serious abuse or neglect.
- Neglect means a threat to a child’s health or welfare by deprivation of essential needs or lack of protection by a person responsible for the child; jeopardy to health and welfare means serious abuse or neglect, as evidenced by deprivation of adequate food, clothing, shelter, supervision or care, including health care, when that deprivation causes a threat of serious harm.
- Sexual Abuse means a threat to a child’s health or welfare by sexual abuse or exploitation by a person responsible for the child. This includes, but is not limited to incest, rape, romantic involvement with a child, sexual contact or intercourse with a child, sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content, comments or innuendos of a sexual nature, inappropriate touching of a child or inappropriate kissing, displaying pornographic or sexually suggestive material, exposing the genitals or touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of a child, and prostitution.
- Emotional Abuse means serious mental or emotional injury or impairment that now, or, in the future, is likely to be evidenced by serious mental, behavioral or personality disorder, including severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, untoward aggressive behavior, serious delayed development, or similar dysfunctional behavior.
- Abandonment means any conduct on the part of the parent/guardian showing an intent to forego parental duties or relinquish parental claims. The intent may be evidenced by failure, for a period of at least 6 months, to communicate meaningfully or to maintain regular visitation with the child; failure to participate in any plan or program designed to reunite the parent with the child; deserting the child without affording means of identifying the child and his/her parent or guardian; failure to respond to notice of child protective proceedings; or any conduct indicating an intent to forego parental duties or relinquish parental claims.

##### **ADDITIONAL DEFINITIONS:**

Ritual Abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults or pretend to be.

Verbal Abuse refers to any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens a vulnerable person.

**5 *The Reporting Procedure and the first paragraph from the Response Procedure will be posted in any area where vulnerable persons gather.***

**REPORTING:**

The State of Maine requires that a report be made to the Department of Health and Human Services (1-888-452-1999) when a person knows or has reasonable cause to suspect that a vulnerable person has been or is likely to be abused or neglected. (2001, c.345, S 5)

- In the event that a volunteer/employee of the Belfast United Methodist Church witnesses, knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a vulnerable person, he/she will document the incident and notify the leader/supervisor, the Chairperson of SPRC, and the Pastor.
- In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against a BUMC volunteer/employee, the incident must be documented and the Chairperson of SPRC and the Pastor will be notified. Law Enforcement will be notified after the validity of the incident has been verified.
- In the event that there is an allegation of abuse against the Pastor, the Chairperson of SPRC will be notified. The Chairperson of SPRC will notify the District Superintendent, who will then contact the Bishop of the New England Conference.
- If a staff member (volunteer or employee) is assaulted or abused during a church sponsored event, a report will be made to the leader/supervisor of the event, the Chairperson of SPRC, and the Pastor.

**RESPONSE:**

Above and beyond the legal and organizational requirements of reporting allegations/incidents of abuse, we are obligated as Christians and as members of a family of faith to be prepared to respond to others regarding the allegations - the victim, the victim's family, the church's insurance agent, the New England Conference, news media, the congregation of the Belfast United Methodist Church, and possibly the alleged abuser.

In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against a BUMC staff member (volunteer or employee) or congregant, we will, faithfully:

1. Notify the parent/guardian of the victim and take all steps necessary to ensure the safety of the victim until the arrival of the parent/guardian.
2. Notify Law Enforcement and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.
3. Notify the District Superintendent, appropriate Conference authorities, the church's insurance agent, and the church's attorney.
4. Maintain written reports/records, including the documentation of the response procedures.
5. Prepare a statement to be given to the news media and to the congregation. The statement will respect the privacy of the victim and his/her family, give no unnecessary details, will not place blame, and will not violate confidentiality issues.
6. A spokesperson will be designated and he/she will be the only person authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the church. The spokesperson will answer questions honestly without offering unnecessary details. Cooperate fully with authorized Law Enforcement or the protective service agency investigating the allegation.

- 6 7. Treat the accused abuser and his/her family with dignity, without anger or hostility, and in a nonconfrontational manner. The individual will be immediately removed from further involvement with vulnerable persons in any capacity until the allegations are investigated and resolved. The future involvement of the accused individual in a position of trust will be at the discretion of the Pastor and leader/supervisor of the event or program.
8. Respond to the victim and his/her family with love, sympathetic concern, and respect for their privacy.
9. Respond to the needs of the congregation by acknowledging that anger, fear, a feeling of violation, and helplessness are bound to be experienced.

This Safe Sanctuary Policy is a covenant agreement between God and His children and between the church and its children. This document will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Safe Sanctuary Team. The Safe Sanctuary Team will be comprised of two (2) representatives from each of the following Committees: Staff Parish Relations Committee, Trustees, Finance Committee, Education Committee, and the Pastor. Revisions may be made in order that we offer a holy place of safety to all.

**BELFAST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY SOURCES**

Safe Sanctuaries - Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries. Melton, Joy Thornburg, Discipleship Resources, 2004

State of Maine Law, Title 22, 4002 Definitions of Abuse

State of Maine Law, Title 22, 4011-A, Reporting Suspected Abuse and Neglect

Belfast United Methodist Church, Child Abuse Protection Policy, adopted 2002

MidMaine District Superintendent's Office

## STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

The Belfast United Methodist Church recognizes the priority of protecting the children, youth, and vulnerable persons entrusted to our care and have set forth boundaries and procedures designed to protect them from abuse. As long as these boundaries are respected and procedures are followed, we will, in keeping with our Mission Statement and believing in the transforming grace of Jesus Christ, provide love, care, support, healing and accountability to all of our members, including sex offenders.

The level of involvement of an offender in the missions and ministries of the church will be at the discretion of the Pastor, the Chairperson of SPRC, and the leader/supervisor of the activity, program, ministry, or event and will be looked at on an individual basis. *Per DHHS, a convicted sexual offender can never assume a perceived or real role of authority with vulnerable persons. At no time will a convicted sexual offender be allowed to work alone with children or vulnerable adults.*

The following will be considered in discerning the level of an offender's participation:

- The safety of children, youth and vulnerable persons.
- Recognizing the potential anxiety of parents/guardians.
- Protection of the offender from the possibility of false accusations or misunderstanding of his/her behavior.
- The accountability of the offender; the level to which he/she takes responsibility for past actions.

We do not dismiss or minimize the seriousness of the offender's past actions, but we want to support the offender in his/her desire to grow in Christian faith, to seek to be in relationship with Jesus Christ, and in his/her determination not to re-offend.