

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Linden Heights United Methodist Church
9914 Harford Road
Baltimore, Maryland 21234
May 13, 2009 (effective September 1, 2009)

1. Purpose of This Policy

1.1. Purpose

The people of Linden Heights want our church to be a place where everyone feels welcome and safe, especially our children and youth. We want parents to know that we are doing everything we can to protect their children, and to provide a rich variety of activities and experiences for them in a loving, Christ-centered atmosphere. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy has been established to ensure the physical, emotional and psychological safety of all children and youth who participate in programs sponsored by Linden Heights United Methodist Church, whether conducted on, or off, church premises, by safeguarding them from inappropriate behavior by the adults who supervise them

Additionally, this policy has been established to protect the church and its leaders, paid and volunteer, if allegations of inappropriate behavior are brought against them.

1.2. Definition of “Inappropriate Behavior”

Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to, neglect or physical, emotional, sexual or ritual abuse. (Types of child abuse are described in detail on pages 12 and 13 in *Safe Sanctuaries – Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* by Joy Thornburg Melton. Copies of this manual are available in the church office.)

2. Preventive Measures

2.1. Background Checks

Background checks will be performed on each paid staff member and any volunteer who works with children or youth. As part of this process, Linden Heights UMC will require all such individuals to submit the following:

- Volunteer Application (**SSVA Form**) – completed by each person covered under this policy
- Volunteer Questionnaire (**SSVQ Form**) – completed annually by each person covered under this policy
- Background Check Permission (**SSBP Form**) – completed by each person covered under this policy
- The Reference Feedback (**SSRF Form**) – submitted if additional reference information is considered appropriate.

Linden Heights United Methodist Church will use a reputable company to do any, or all, of the following checks:

- National Criminal History Database Search, including a check of Sexual Offenders Registries
- Social Security Verification which provides name of individual, date and state of issue, and address history
- County Criminal Records Search
- Motor Vehicle Reports

If any causes for concern, such as those cited in 2.1.1 below, appear through the background check, all references for the person under scrutiny will be contacted and interviewed with more detailed questions by the appropriate staff person. After all references are interviewed, a determination will be made as to the appropriate action.

Volunteers who have valid background checks performed as part of their occupations (e.g., police, school systems, etc.), may substitute demonstrated proof of occupation and/or applicable background check policies

All documents will be securely stored. Access to the information will be strictly limited. Only the pastor, the chairperson of the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Committee, and the designated staff employee (or designated member of the Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee assigned to coordinate this function) will have access to this information.

2.1.1 Causes for Concern

Causes for concern include, but are not limited to, abrupt terminations of previous work with children or youth, past allegations of abuse, sexual misconduct or inappropriate behavior, or civil or criminal court actions involving children or youth.

2.2. Ensuring Driver Responsibility

Any paid staff or volunteer who may be driving children or youth for an activity sponsored by Linden Heights UMC shall submit proof of car insurance and their driver's license number for the purpose of obtaining a Motor Vehicle Report. If any violations appear on the Motor Vehicle Report, the Pastor and Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee chairperson both must agree that the person will be allowed to drive children or youth for a Linden Heights program. Motor Vehicle Reports for those who transport children or youth should be obtained and reviewed every two years.

2.3. Discipline

Volunteers and staff shall be advised on the best Age Appropriate Discipline Methods. The behavior of a protected person who is a continuous disruption shall be discussed with the person's parents and the director of the program ministry. Parents shall be asked to attend the Ministry to observe or control the problem behavior. A protected person who is a danger to him/herself or others shall be removed immediately by the worker. The parents and the applicable ministry director shall be promptly notified.

2.4. Parent or Guardian Policies

- Parents are welcome to observe in the classroom at all times.
- Parents must pick up their respective protected person no later than ten (10) minutes after the Ministry is over unless special arrangements have been made with the workers involved with the activity.
- Parents shall complete a registration, emergency or other form that identifies who may pick up the protected person and where the parent(s) is likely to be found while the protected person is participating in the Ministry.

2.5. Additional Policies

- Prospective volunteers for working with children or youth must have regularly attended Linden Heights UMC for at least six months prior to assuming such duties. Alternatively, the volunteer must have been known to at least two (2) congregants for at least six (6) months prior to assuming such duties.
- Workers should attempt to keep open lines of communication with parents.
- Any interaction with children or youth will be done with the doors open unless there are windows in the door.
- Windows in the classrooms shall not be covered for any reason.
- The person responsible for the class or program must be at least 21 years of age or at least five-year than the oldest child/youth..
- On Sunday mornings someone designated by Linden Heights UMC staff will make random classroom checks.
- Parental Permission Forms (**SSPP Form**) will be required for any church-sponsored activity involving their children outside of routine classroom and/or organized Sunday School activities (e.g., youth choirs, holiday pageants, etc.).
- There must be at least two unrelated adult leaders chaperoning any church-sponsored child/youth activity.
- Parents shall be advised to report suspected abuse or other concerns to the Pastor or the Staff-Parish Relations chairperson. If someone other than the parent(s) of the protected person file the report, the parents shall be notified. If one parent is reporting another parent, neither parent is to be contacted until an initial investigation is completed or it is determined that an investigation is not warranted.

2.6. Training

All children and youth workers and leaders will be educated in the content and intent of this policy, how to identify the signs of inappropriate behavior and the proper reporting of such suspected behavior. The Staff-Pastor Parish Relations committee will conduct annual training sessions for new staff and volunteers.

3. Plan for Responding to Allegations of Inappropriate Behavior

As required, the Pastor, Staff-Pastor Parish Relations Committee Chair or the Chair of the Administrative Council shall meet to determine which of these persons will be the designated church spokesperson. Only this designated person will be authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the congregation, stating the church's policy for the prevention of child abuse, concern for the safety of the victim and all children.

The congregational plan for responding to allegations of inappropriate behavior shall follow the guidelines provided in Chapter Five of *Safe Sanctuaries – Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* by Joy Thornburg Melton.

4. Policy Administration

4.1. Safe Sanctuaries Administration and Coordination

The Linden Heights United Methodist Church senior pastor will delegate administration and coordination responsibilities required by this policy to a member of the office staff or to a designated member of the Staff-Pastor Parish Committee. Duties of this person will include:

- Notifying persons covered under this policy of forms they are required to submit
- Obtaining and filing necessary forms on each volunteer covered under this policy and ensuring that all forms are properly secured.
- Ordering background checks
- Receiving all **SSRF Forms**, as required, and following up with volunteers to ensure that all other forms are returned.
- Maintaining records of necessary renewals of background checks and motor vehicle records and notifying persons covered under this policy of the requirement for such record updating.
- Scheduling training sessions during August as practicable, arranging for speaker(s), and notifying all persons covered under this policy of dates and time of the annual training. Church coordinators of all children's programs shall assist in this effort.
- Ensuring the safe and secure storage of all documentation required in this process.
- Volunteers and/or staff members who provide misleading or inaccurate information on their applications may be removed from service in a Ministry, as well as, those who refuse to comply with this Policy or repeatedly fail to follow it.

This policy can be amended as needed and approved by the Linden Heights Administrative Council. The forms used to administer the policy may be amended as required by consent of the Staff-Pastor Parish Relations committee.