

SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
LEOMINSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Updated March 23, 2020

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. Note: Elder Care Ministry and Nursing Home Ministry are listed under Safety/Reference Checks.

DEFINITIONS:

- For the purposes of these policies please refer the definitions at the end of the document.

SUPERVISION:

- A. When in the care of a parent or guardian on church property the following apply:**
- Children and youth are to be supervised at all times.
 - No child or youth is to roam the church alone at any time.
 - 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

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B. When in the care of church staff/volunteer the following apply:

- At least two unrelated caregivers shall be present at any church event in which children are participating.
- 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.
- 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 insure that all children remain under supervision. If the child refuses to remain under such supervision, then his/her parent or guardian shall be notified.
- Written parental/guardian permission shall be obtained for any church-sponsored events occurring off church property.
- 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.
- 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.
- When warranted in cases of injury or illness, all available means will be used to contact the child's parent/guardian.
- The use of alcohol or illegal drugs is prohibited. Tobacco use is prohibited in the building.

MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS:

- Mentoring relationships between an adult and a child may start when the parent(s) or guardian(s) meet the prospective mentor and give written consent for the mentoring relationship between mentor and child.

BATHROOM SUPERVISION:

- Caregivers should not be alone with a child in the bathroom. In instances when a child needs to use the toilet, needs cleaning up from a creative or sports activity, or needs to use the bathroom for care from an injury or illness, two (2) adults or one (1) adult and one (1) additional child shall accompany the child to the bathroom. In the event these conditions cannot be met, the bathroom door will be propped open. Children ages seven (7) to thirteen (13) may use the buddy system to go to the bathroom.
- Only parents/guardians shall care to the diapering needs of their children.

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TRANSPORTATION:

- Caregivers who transport children to or from any church-sponsored events must be 21 years of age or older.
- 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.
- When traveling to or from church-sponsored events off church property, there only needs to be one caregiver per vehicle provided the vehicles travel together.
- 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.

ACCEPTABLE DISCIPLINE:

- Children at church-sponsored events shall be treated in a manner which encourages mutual responsibility, respect, and cooperation.
- 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.
- 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.
- Sometimes it may be necessary for the caregivers or leaders to physically move or reposition a child for reasons which may include protecting other students, restraining undesirable or dangerous behaviors, or in situations when fast action is required.

APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES:

- 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.
- Appropriate activities will not force any physical contact and will not include any highly risky or violent contact activities.

ONLINE VIDEO CONFERENCING:

- The unique nature of video conferencing with children for ministry purposes (using services such as Zoom, Google Hangouts, etc.) calls for unique guidelines.
- 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.
- The rule of three: at no time should one adult and one child video conference alone. However, video conferencing is acceptable with only one adult caregiver present if there are at least two children present. Additionally, it is acceptable for two adults to video conference with one

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child. In other words, when video conferencing with children for ministry purposes, at least three persons must be present at all times (either 2 adults + 1 child, or 1 adult + 2 children).

SAFETY/REFERENCE CHECKS:

- All caregivers for children, youth, and vulnerable adults (including Elder Care Ministry and Nursing Home Ministry) 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.
- A designated staff person shall approve all background checks and determine whether a person's report is deemed acceptable.
- Trusted Employees Checks last for three years. Three years from the date of their last check, caregivers will be required to pass another check.

REPORTING:

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.

HOTLINES:

Hotline telephone numbers for reporting Child Abuse and Domestic Violence Abuse will be posted.

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.
- *Caregiver*: Any adult 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.
- *Mentor*: Any adult who has been designated by any church-committee or staff person to be involved in a one-on-one relationship with a child as part of a church-sponsored program or event.
- *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 (Minnesota Law 626.557). 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. (It is important to note that the term "event" does not mean that every group that is meeting at the same times constitutes a separate event requiring two adult caregivers. For example, on Sunday mornings there are many various activities going on at the church. For the purposes of providing care for children, Sunday morning may be considered as one event. This means that the minimum number of caregivers required would be that which would allow at least two adults to be aware of who is with each group involving children and where they are located.)