

Our Covenant:

As a Christian community, the United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay pledges to conduct the children and youth ministry in a way pleasing to God. We will do this in ways that will assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, volunteers and staff. We will follow reasonable guidelines, educate our staff and volunteers regarding the guidelines and best practices of Christian care.

Purpose and Accountability

This policy describes how the United Methodist Church of Whitefish Bay (UMCWFB) will work to reduce the risk of abuse and provide caring ministry for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. No policy can eliminate all risk. Staff, volunteers, and leaders share responsibility for following these safeguards.

When the policy applies

These procedures apply when UMCWFB staff or volunteers assume responsibility for supervising children or youth, from arrival through release, on church property and during off-site ministry. They include classes, rehearsals, lessons, childcare provided for church activities, mentoring, service projects, trips, and other church-led activities. An employee conducting church-related work with a minor must follow these procedures regardless of the ministry department involved.

A parent or caregiver being somewhere in the building does not suspend the policy. Church-led activities remain subject to required supervision even if parents are attending worship, a meeting, or another activity on site. A parent attending a lesson does not automatically become an approved second supervisor.

When parents retain direct responsibility for their own children during worship or a family event, they provide that supervision. General standards of appropriate conduct still apply. If church leaders take over supervision, the program requirements apply. Parents cannot authorize a routine exception to the Two Adult Rule.

Guests participating in church-supervised programs receive the same safeguards as enrolled participants. Being the guest of another family does not remove the church's responsibilities for its program. Outside groups using space for supervised ministry with minors must acknowledge the applicable facility-use and safeguarding requirements in writing. Separate arrangements must be documented, not assumed.

Licensed childcare and preschool

Light the Way Christian Childcare Center, formerly Carpenter's Shop Daycare, and Tree of Life Preschool must follow their applicable licensing rules, program policies, training, certification, fingerprinting, and background-check requirements. This church policy does not replace or reduce those obligations. Program directors coordinate with church leadership when responsibilities overlap.

Responsibility for implementation

• **Director of Family Ministries:** coordinates church-program implementation, orientations, signed covenants, screening status, and compliance checks; raises unresolved concerns with the lead pastor and appropriate governing leaders.

• **Lead pastor and governing board:** provide oversight, resources, accountability across departments, and responses to unresolved violations. They designate an alternate contact for concerns involving a pastor or supervisor.

• **Childcare and preschool directors:** oversee their licensed programs and required records. Each program or event leader confirms staffing, permissions, emergency information, and approved drivers before activities begin.

• **All staff and volunteers:** follow the policy, ask questions when unsure, and report unsafe conditions or suspected abuse promptly. Responsibility is not limited to Family Ministries staff.

Supervision and Daily Safety

The Two Adult Rule

At least two approved, unrelated adult supervisors must be present for church-supervised activities with children or youth. No adult staff member or volunteer may be alone with a single child or youth unobserved by another approved adult. A person elsewhere in the building is not sufficient unless the required observation and supervision are actually maintained.

Use open, observable spaces. Activities must be visible through an open door or unobstructed window, and leaders must maintain the required supervision. A window alone is not a substitute for the second adult. Individual lessons or conversations must be arranged so another approved adult can observe them without compromising appropriate privacy.

If staffing is inadequate, the leader must obtain approved coverage, combine groups safely, or delay the activity. Do not begin or continue a routine activity that does not meet supervision requirements. In a genuine emergency, protect the child, restore coverage as soon as possible, notify the supervisor and parent or caregiver promptly, and document the circumstances. Emergency notification does not create an ongoing exception.

Adult qualifications and age difference

Local standard: adults counted as supervisors must be at least 18 and at least five years older than the oldest youth they supervise. Younger assistants may help only under approved adult supervision and do not count toward the Two Adult Rule or required adult ratios. Current event-specific eligibility requirements must also be checked.

Minimum supervision ratios

Retain the existing local ratios below. The Two Adult Rule still applies even when a ratio would otherwise permit one adult. Use the more protective ratio at an overlapping age boundary. Increase staffing when participant needs, activities, or site conditions require it. Licensed programs follow their applicable requirements.

Age group from existing policy	Minimum ratio
0-1 years	1 adult to 3 children
1-2 years	1 adult to 6 children
2-5 years	1 adult to 8 children
6-18 years	1 adult to 10 children

Care, guidance, and release

Children and youth must not be left alone or unsupervised in the building. Staff and volunteers must not use physical punishment or verbal or emotional abuse. Use respectful, developmentally appropriate guidance and physical boundaries. Be alert to each child's physical and emotional wellbeing and report concerns in writing as required, without delaying urgent action.

When assisting a young child in the bathroom, use the least invasive assistance needed and remain within sight of another adult while protecting the child's privacy. Adults may not use designated children's restrooms for their own toileting. Preschool and nursery children may be released only to an identified, preauthorized adult; other programs must follow their documented release procedures.

Screening and Training

Before service begins

All compensated persons, nonmembers, and volunteers regularly supervising minors must complete the Application for Criminal Records Check and receive clearance before beginning duties. Checks may include national, state, local, and sex-offender records. Signing a covenant does not replace screening or authorize a person to supervise independently.

The existing local background recheck interval of five years is retained pending current conference and insurer review. A stricter requirement for a particular program or event controls for that activity. Licensed childcare and preschool screening is governed by its applicable rules and may require additional or more frequent checks.

The Director of Family Ministries or designated records custodian maintains a confidential screening roster with clearance status and renewal dates. Access to detailed screening records is restricted to authorized personnel. Program leaders verify clearance status rather than collecting or circulating sensitive reports.

New and occasional volunteers

An occasional member volunteer must sign a Participation Covenant and complete orientation appropriate to the role. An occasional helper who has not met the full supervisor requirements may assist only under approved supervision and must not be counted as an approved adult supervisor or placed alone with a minor.

The existing new-to-the-congregation pathway is retained: six months of regular worship participation, or two references and a background check. An approved transfer from a church with comparable safeguarding practices may satisfy the waiting-period requirement. No waiting-period exception waives required screening, training, or supervision.

Reference checks may be conducted and documented before prospective employees and lead volunteers begin duties. Personal interviews are required for higher-risk roles, including youth groups, overnight trips, and mission trips. No interview or approval authorizes unsupervised contact contrary to this policy.

Persons with criminal abuse violations will not be accepted for roles covered by the church's disqualification provisions. An adult known to have been convicted of, or pleaded guilty to, child sexual or physical abuse may not supervise children or youth. Registered sex offenders may not volunteer with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Orientation and ongoing training

Every new staff member and volunteer receives the policy, role-specific procedures, instruction on recognizing possible abuse, reporting procedures, and the names of reporting contacts. Before service, the person acknowledges receipt, understanding, and agreement by signing the Participation Covenant. Questions must be resolved before the person assumes the role.

Staff and volunteers complete a safeguarding refresher and review their covenant annually, and receive additional instruction when procedures or responsibilities change. Training records identify the participant, date, policy version, and training completed. Families and the congregation are informed of the policy annually.

Conference, district, and other sponsored events

The event sponsor's current requirements must be checked before registration and applied to that event. Do not assume local clearance alone satisfies them. The Wisconsin Annual Conference policy supplied from October 2018 requires a five-year chaperone age gap, annual background checks for volunteers and seasonal or single-event staff, and event training. It also contains specific transportation, lodging, restroom, and electronic-communication rules. These are historical reference points, not a verified statement of current conference requirements.

Trips Communication and Participant Care

Permission and emergency information

For activities when parents or caregivers are not directly supervising, leaders collect required permission and emergency information before participation. This includes guests. Families receive event details, meeting and release arrangements, and contact information. Leaders make supervision and emergency plans appropriate to the location and participants.

Transportation

A person transporting youth or adults for a church activity must complete the Driver Information Form before the event and meet its age, insurance, and safety requirements. Event leaders verify driver approval and vehicle supervision arrangements before departure.

The existing local requirements are retained: two adults must be present when traveling in a single vehicle. When multiple vehicles are used, leaders establish a coordinated itinerary, maintain communication, and stop together as planned. Drivers must obey traffic laws and must not use a phone while driving; communication is handled by a passenger or after safely stopping. No adult may be alone in a vehicle with a single unrelated minor.

Under the existing local rule, youth attending an event may transport only themselves or a family member unless written consent is provided. Any proposed additional youth driving requires written church approval and compliance with the Driver Information Form. A sponsor's stricter rule controls; the supplied 2018 conference policy prohibits youth driving during its events. Confirm current sponsor requirements before travel.

Overnight events and sensitivity

Leaders will use respectful terminology and communicate with youth and families to plan appropriate accommodations, privacy, supervision, and support. LGBTQ+ youth may choose a single-person restroom when more comfortable. Any accommodation must maintain safeguarding and applicable event requirements; arrangements must not be improvised by an individual adult.

Before overnight participation, the event leader reviews the applicable lodging, bathroom, and shower requirements and communicates the approved plan to leaders and families. For conference or district events, verify current sponsor rules rather than assuming the local policy covers every detail.

Electronic communication and photographs

Staff and volunteers communicate with parents and youth together or in group settings, never privately with just one child or youth. This applies to texts, email, social media, direct messages, and video communication. Use church-approved communication arrangements that make adult participation visible. If a minor initiates private contact, involve the parent or another approved leader as appropriate while addressing urgent safety concerns immediately.

Follow program permissions and privacy instructions for photos and identifying information. Conference and district events may have stricter rules on administrators and personal-page posting; check the current requirements. Online conduct must reflect the same respectful boundaries expected in person. Church computers and devices must not be used to access or download pornography.

Registered sex offenders

A registered sex offender seeking to attend must speak with a pastor. The existing policy permits worship only with another adult accompanying the person at all times in the building and at church-related activities. Access to child-exclusive areas while children are present is prohibited. Such a person may never volunteer with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Pastoral arrangements must be documented and must not override legal restrictions or required safeguards.

Reporting Concerns and Responding

Immediate safety and external reporting

Take every concern seriously. If someone is in immediate danger or needs emergency help, call **911** and take reasonable protective action. Do not wait to locate a pastor, obtain permission, or complete paperwork.

A person who has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect must act promptly under the reporting duties applicable to that person and circumstance. A mandated reporter must make the report to the appropriate child protective services agency or law enforcement as required; telling a supervisor or pastor is not a substitute. A person may report a concern to authorities even if not legally mandated. Church permission is not required, and no internal process may obstruct or delay a report.

For Wisconsin child-abuse reporting contacts, use dcf.wisconsin.gov/reportabuse. For information on mandated reporters, use dcf.wisconsin.gov/cps/mandatedreporters. Concerns involving vulnerable adults must be directed to the appropriate adult-protection or law-enforcement authority under applicable requirements. These links must be checked during adoption and annual review.

Internal notification and alternate routes

Immediately notify a pastor or supervising staff member of suspected abuse, neglect, or a significant safeguarding violation. Make the required external report without waiting for the internal response. The recipient promptly alerts appropriate church leadership so protective steps can be taken.

If a concern involves the supervisor or Director of Family Ministries, report to a pastor or the designated governing-board contact. If it involves a pastor, report to the designated governing-board or SPRT contact and the district superintendent through applicable conference procedures. If the usual contact is unavailable or implicated, use an alternate contact or report directly to authorities. Do not report only to the person whose conduct is in question.

Listening and documentation

Listen calmly, take the disclosure seriously, and do not blame the person or promise secrecy. Do not conduct your own investigation, ask leading questions, confront the alleged offender, or try to mediate an abuse allegation. Record promptly what was observed or disclosed, using the speaker's words where possible, and note dates, times, witnesses, protective actions, and reports made. Preserve relevant records and messages securely.

Share information only with appropriate authorities and people responsible for safety and the response. Confidentiality must never prevent required reporting or cooperation with authorities. Honest, good-faith concerns must not result in retaliation. Questions about ordinary policy compliance can also be raised through the reporting contacts.

Church response and care

An allegation involving staff or a volunteer requires immediate protective action. Retain the existing requirement that the person be suspended from participation and not allowed at UMCWFB while the investigation is pending. This is a protective measure, not a finding of guilt. Any reinstatement remains at the governing board's discretion after required review and resolution of safety concerns, with appropriate professional guidance.

Church leadership promptly notifies the insurer and obtains legal and conference guidance as appropriate. Such consultation must not delay reporting or required cooperation. Parent or guardian notification follows the direction of the responding authority, especially when a caregiver may be implicated. The wellbeing of the person harmed is the priority; provide pastoral support without assigning blame or pressuring silence. Church representatives cooperate with authorities and refer public inquiries to the designated spokesperson.

Review and Implementation

Implementation

Church leadership coordinates implementation across ministry departments and programs, confirms applicable conference, district, insurer, legal, and licensing requirements, and resolves any conflicts.

Reporting contacts

Maintain and circulate a reporting contact sheet with names, telephone numbers, and email addresses for the Director of Family Ministries, lead pastor, alternate pastor, governing-board or SPRT contact, district superintendent, and relevant child and adult protection agencies.

Training and records

Designate a confidential records custodian; train staff and volunteers; obtain required signed acknowledgments; and inform families and outside groups of applicable requirements.

Ongoing review

Review this policy annually and after significant incidents or changes to law, programs, licensing, insurer guidance, or conference requirements. Verify reporting contacts and agency links during each review.