



**Manchester United Methodist Church  
Safe Gatherings Procedures  
Updated June 2025**

The Safe Gatherings practices of Manchester United Methodist Church are designed to help ensure the safety of minors and vulnerable adults as well as clergy, staff and volunteers.

All clergy, church and preschool staff as well as volunteers who want to serve with minors or vulnerable adults at church-sponsored programs are required to become Safe Gatherings Certified by Manchester UMC or the Missouri Annual Conference.

**A. Safe Gatherings Certification Eligibility**

To be Safe Gatherings Certified, a person should have been active with one or more ministries (e.g. worship, small group, ministry team, etc.) of Manchester UMC over the past six months.

If a person has not been active with one or more ministries of Manchester UMC over the past six months, then they may provide a reference from a clergy or staff member of Manchester UMC indicating their support of that person being permitted to serve with minors or vulnerable adults.

**B. Safe Gatherings Eligibility Limitations**

1. Any person under allegation or conviction related to any form of abuse, neglect or sexual misconduct, is not eligible to be Safe Gatherings Certified or serve with minors or vulnerable adults in any capacity.
2. Any person who is a registered sex offender is not eligible to be Safe Gatherings Certified or serve with minors or vulnerable adults in any capacity.
3. Any person currently under investigation for a formal Safe Gatherings complaint is not eligible to serve with minors or vulnerable adults in any capacity until the investigation is complete.
4. Any person who is denied Safe Gatherings Certification is not eligible to serve with minors or vulnerable adults in any capacity.

**C. Safe Gatherings Certification Process**

Any person wishing to become Safe Gatherings Certified by Manchester UMC must agree to a criminal background check and complete the following steps in addition to any other steps required by the Safe Gatherings Team:

**STEP 1:** Read and agree to abide by current Safe Gatherings Procedures

**STEP 2:** [Register online](#) (or login to your existing Safe Gatherings account)

**STEP 3:** Complete **Online Training** using a computer

**STEP 4:** Email recent **headshot photo** to [safegatherings@manchesterumc.org](mailto:safegatherings@manchesterumc.org)

Two adult references (who are not related or living with the applicant or each other) must be provided as part of this process. One of the references will typically be a pastor of Manchester UMC.

Once the above steps have been successfully completed (and any questions or concerns have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Safe Gatherings Team), the applicant will be notified whether they have been approved or declined. If approved, the person will be contacted by a staff member or ministry leader to discuss serving opportunities. Safe Gatherings information is stored in a secure online system.

Prior to serving, the applicant will submit a recent (within the past 3 months) headshot photo in order to receive a Safe Gatherings ID Badge. All Safe Gatherings Certified adults should wear their Safe Gatherings ID Badge whenever serving with minors or vulnerable adults at church-sponsored programs. This badge requirement does not apply to offsite camps or mission trips.

Safe Gatherings Certification must be renewed at least every three years in order for an adult to continue serving with minors or vulnerable adults. If a person's Safe Gatherings Certification expires, they will not be permitted to serve with minors or vulnerable adults until their certification is renewed. Persons will be notified when it is time to renew their Safe Gatherings certification (if actively serving at Manchester UMC).

#### **D. Refusing, Suspending and Revoking Safe Gatherings Certifications**

If clergy, staff or a ministry leader becomes aware of a situation that in their opinion could endanger the current or future well-being or safety of minors or vulnerable adults at Manchester UMC, that person will immediately notify the Safe Gatherings Administrator. The Safe Gatherings Administrator will decide if the person should be allowed to serve (or continue serving) with minors or vulnerable adults.

The Safe Gatherings Administrator may refuse, suspend or revoke a person's Safe Gatherings Certification at any time. Such an action will be communicated in writing to the person along with the reason for refusal, suspension or revocation. A copy of the letter will be sent to the Safe Gatherings Coordinator for the Missouri Annual Conference and a copy will be kept by the church.

#### **E. Procedures for Working with Minors and Vulnerable Adults at Manchester United Methodist Church**

Every reasonable effort should be made to ensure the following procedures are followed:

1. At least two Safe Gatherings Certified adults, who are not related or cohabitating, should be present during church-sponsored programs when children and vulnerable adults are participating without a parent or guardian. The following are guidelines when exceptions may occur:
  - a. When in a space with attached restroom, a Safe Gatherings Certified adult may enter the room to assist a child 2<sup>nd</sup> grade or younger or a child with special needs if necessary, but the door to the restroom must remain slightly open. This procedure also applies to the detached restroom in the nursery area when working with toddlers.
  - b. When in a space without an attached restroom, a child 2<sup>nd</sup> grade or younger or vulnerable adult may use the restroom after a Safe Gatherings Certified adult has ensured that the restroom is unoccupied by any adults. The adult will wait outside the restroom door, which must remain slightly open, and prevent any other adults from entering the restroom.

- c. Children 3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> grade are permitted to use the restroom on their own. A Safe Gatherings Certified adult should be available to supervise as necessary.
  - d. Children should be directed to use multi-stall restrooms unless none are available. Adult leaders should only allow as many children to use the restroom at the same time as there are stalls in the restroom (e.g. 3 stalls = 3 children at a time).
  - e. Children may use the restroom that corresponds with their gender identity with the consent of their parent/guardian. Whenever possible, accommodations, such as using a single stall restroom, should be made for any minors or vulnerable adults who request it.
2. If at any time before or during the event it becomes clear you will not be able to adhere to this policy, the event will be cancelled and parents will be expected to pick up their children. While waiting for parents, the group of children need to be within view of camera or outside the building.
  3. Check out procedures for children are as follows.
    - a. For programs that issue a child pick-up tag, children may only be released to the person presenting the matching pick-up tag. If the tag becomes lost (or is not presented), a parent, guardian, youth or an adult previously approved by the parent/guardian according to established procedures, must present a valid photo ID and sign a pick-up log before the child may be released to them.
    - b. For programs that do not use a child pick-up tag, children may only be released to a parent, guardian or other person who has been previously approved by the parent/guardian according to established procedures.
  4. At least two Safe Gatherings Certified adults, who are not related or cohabitating, should be present during church-sponsored programs when youth are participating without a parent or guardian.
    - a. For church-sponsored programs involving youth, at least two of the Safe Gatherings Certified adults must be 4 or more years older than the oldest youth participating in the program.
    - b. If a second Safe Gatherings Certified Adult is temporarily unavailable, one Safe Gatherings Certified Adult may temporarily be present with a group of two or more youth for up to 10 minutes.
    - c. During church-sponsored programs, youth may be in a space without an adult if they have obtained permission from an adult leader who has set specific location, time and activity boundaries and informed the youth how they can be reached in case of emergency. The time permitted without adults present in the space will not exceed 30 minutes. One or more Safe Gatherings Certified adults must be available onsite while the youth are gathered.
    - d. Youth are permitted to use the restroom on their own. No more than 2 youth should leave at the same time to use the restroom. This 2-person limit does not apply to offsite camps or mission trips.

5. Once a youth has checked in with an adult ministry leader at the start of a youth program or event, they are under the care and supervision of the church.
  - a. At the scheduled end time, or shortly thereafter, all youth will be released from the program to locate their parents, guardians, ride home or to drive home.
  - b. Verbal authorization from a parent or guardian must be provided to an adult ministry leader before a youth may leave early. The Director of Youth Ministry must be notified when a youth leaves early.
  - c. If a youth program concludes before its scheduled end time, Church staff and volunteers will continue to provide care and supervision until the scheduled end time.
  - d. Church staff and volunteers are not responsible for youth after the scheduled end time unless alternate arrangements have been made in advance.
6. In addition to the aforementioned procedures, the following also apply to all church-sponsored programs involving overnight events where youth are participants:
  - a. Whenever possible, different genders should not share the same sleeping quarters and should have access to separate bathroom facilities. If separate sleeping quarters are not available, different genders should sleep on opposite sides of the room.
  - b. In a hotel or dormitory setting, same-gendered minors will be assigned to rooms together; adults will be assigned to separate rooms.
  - c. When adults are present in a space where youth sleep (e.g., hotel room, dorm room, sleeping quarters, cabin, tent, etc.), two unrelated non-cohabitating Safe Gatherings Certified adults must be present.
  - d. If youth will be sleeping in a space without an adult, the adult leaders must set specific location, time and activity boundaries for the youth and inform the youth how they can be reached in case of emergency. At least two unrelated non-cohabitating Safe Gatherings Certified adults will remain onsite while youth are present.
  - e. Letters "a" to "d" apply to the self-identified genders of individuals with parental/guardian consent. Accommodations are also available for those who identify as gender non-conforming. Ministry leaders should seek to accommodate the sleeping requests of those who identify as gender non-conforming.
7. When related or cohabitating adults are serving together in the same space with minors or vulnerable adults, a third Safe Gatherings Certified adult, who is not related or cohabitating with either of the other two adults, should be present at all times.

8. Clergy, staff and ministry leaders reserve the right to refuse releasing a minor or vulnerable adult in church custody to any person who appears intoxicated, under the influence, or who otherwise seems to pose a danger to the child's wellbeing.
  - a. In such cases, clergy, staff and ministry leaders should contact local law enforcement to handle the situation.
  - b. Any such incidents should also be reported immediately to the ministry leader and the Safe Gatherings Administrator.
9. With advance approval from the ministry director, parents, guardians and prospective volunteers may observe the ministry programs (e.g. Sunday School, Nursery, Preschool, Children's Choirs, etc.) Manchester UMC offers for minors and vulnerable adults.
  - a. The ministry director is authorized to require a person to become Safe Gatherings Certified before observing the same program more than once.
  - b. Observers who are not Safe Gatherings Certified must sign in upon arrival and will be given a temporary ID Badge they must wear when minors or vulnerable adults are present. This requirement does not apply to published events where minors or vulnerable adults will be performing.
10. When transportation is provided as an official part of a church-sponsored program, at least two Safe Gatherings Certified adults, who are not related or cohabitating, must be present in each vehicle in which minors or vulnerable adults are located.
  - a. A current signed parental/guardian consent form must be on file with the church for each occupant prior to travel.
11. To help prevent any type of "grooming" behavior, adult volunteers must obtain permission from the parent/guardian before having 1-1 contact with a non-related minor or vulnerable adult outside of church-sponsored programs. Such contacts include, but are not limited to, text messages, email, social media, phone calls, giving gifts, and face-to-face meetings.
  - a. Any 1-1 meetings between an adult volunteer and a youth must occur in an open public space (e.g., coffee shop, restaurant, library, etc.) where both persons are easily visible by others who may be present.
  - b. Safe Gathering Certified adult volunteers will report such contacts within 72 hours to the clergy or staff member responsible for providing oversight to their ministry.
    - The report should include the date, time, location, names of those present/participating, and brief description of the contact.
    - A brief description may include, but is not limited to, a phone or in person conversation log, text messaging screen shots, or copies of e-mail communications or letters.
    - The clergy or staff member will keep all reports in a log. The log must be available for review by the staff person's supervisor, the Safe Gatherings Team or clergy upon request.

12. Clergy and staff who have 1-1 contact with a non-related minor or vulnerable adult outside of a church-sponsored program will keep a record of those contacts in a log. The log must be available for review by the person's supervisor or clergy upon request.

The aforementioned log requirements do not apply to the following:

- a. Contacts with clergy, staff or Safe Gatherings Certified adults that relate only to program logistics (e.g. timing, date, location, expectations, and other program specific details).
  - b. Brief incidental encounters that occur in public places (e.g. grocery store, library, mall, etc.)
  - c. Communications on official Youth Ministry social media platforms and messaging apps if they are visible to the group.
  - d. Gifts purchased and provided by the church to a minor.
  - e. Meetings or communications between Safe Gatherings Certified adults ages 18 to 20 and minors in grades 11 and 12 due to their closeness in age.
  - f. Contacts where a parent/guardian is included in the communication or within sight and sound of the meeting.
  - g. Contacts where another Safe Gatherings Certified adult, who is not related or cohabitating, is included in the communication or within sight and sound of the meeting.
13. Groups that rent/utilize church facilities, but are not a ministry of Manchester UMC, are not bound by this Safe Gatherings policy so long as they have executed a group liability waiver through the Office Manager of Manchester UMC. In that situation, Manchester UMC assumes no liability for anything related to the outside group. However, if an outside group chooses to utilize Manchester UMC volunteers or staff for an activity, they must follow this Safe Gatherings policy during the activity.
  14. Vendors and contractors who provide services or programming for Circle of Friends Preschool must be Safe Gatherings Certified. These persons will receive a Vendor ID badge that must be worn when minors and vulnerable adults are present. These persons must maintain their Safe Gatherings Certification.
  15. In the unexpected event that it is not possible for volunteers, staff members, or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry to follow the policy due to the ministry or safety needs of the children and/or youth, the individual will notify the Safe Gatherings Administrator by documenting the reason the policy could not be followed. If there were any occurrences (actual or perceived) that could infringe on the safety of the children and/or youth or the responsible youth or adult during the time they were with the children and/or youth this must be included in the documentation. This documentation should be given to the Safe Gatherings Administrator within 48 hours of the occurrence. Volunteers, staff members, or any person working in a church-sponsored ministry will make every attempt to adhere to this policy as written above.

## **F. Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

- 1. If you witness abuse taking place, call 9-1-1 immediately!**
2. Any person with the responsibility for the care of children is a mandated reporter under Missouri law. Missouri law states that if such caregiver has reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been or may be subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes a child being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would result in abuse or neglect, that person shall **immediately** report or cause a report to be made to the Division of Family and Social Services (DSS). The 24-hour toll-free hotline number is 1-800-392-3738.
3. Any allegations of abuse or neglect occurring or reported during a church-sponsored activity, event or program, must be reported immediately to the staff member or ministry leader (if no staff is present) responsible for the activity, event or program. Staff members and/or ministry leaders will then notify the Safe Gatherings Administrator.

The person making the allegation as well as anyone else with relevant knowledge should complete and submit a signed "Incident Report" form. Forms shall be acquired from and returned to the ministry leader and a copy provided to the Safe Gatherings Administrator and all members of the pastoral staff. The Lead Pastor will inform the District Superintendent as appropriate.

## **G. Limited Access Agreements**

### **Background:**

Manchester UMC is committed to being open to all who wish to participate in the life of this church. We are also committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment. In certain situations, clearly defined restrictions are necessary to help safeguard families, minors, vulnerable adults and others who participate in the programs and activities of Manchester UMC. These restrictions will be defined in a Limited Access Agreement. The following section establishes the protocol for such restrictions.

### **Required Uses:**

A Limited Access Agreement must be established in the following situations:

1. With any person known to currently be on a Sex Offender Registry
2. With any person currently under investigation for a formal Safe Gatherings complaint

### **Potential Uses:**

With approval from the Leadership Board, a Limited Access Agreement may be established in the following situations:

1. With any person under allegation or conviction of violent or sexual criminal behavior.
2. With any person whose threatening, violent, inappropriate or disruptive behavior has been determined by pastoral staff to pose a risk of harm to the church, clergy, staff, congregation or other participants.

**Not Intended Uses:**

1. Not intended for situations when any lesser form of confrontation or accountability would likely suffice. (Note: Persons on the Sex Offender Registry and persons under investigation for a formal Safe Gatherings complaint must have a Limited Access Agreement).
2. Not intended to substitute for pastoral support and care for those who desire help.
3. Not intended to curb awkward or socially challenging behavior, unless the behavior is threatening, violent, inappropriate or disruptive enough to interfere with the participation of others.
4. Not intended to address discomfort due to differences, appearances or interpersonal conflict.

**Process:**

1. A clergy person becomes aware that a Limited Access Agreement may be needed because the person is a registered sex offender, under investigation for a formal Safe Gatherings complaint or one of the other permitted reasons described in this policy.
2. The pastoral staff reviews the situation to confirm if it falls within the permitted reasons described in this policy.
3. The Safe Gatherings Administrator drafts the Limited Access Agreement to fit the circumstance.
4. The Limited Access Agreement must be signed by the pastoral staff, the Safe Gatherings Administrator, and the Leadership Board Chair before it is discussed with the person being limited.
5. When possible, the Limited Access Agreement should be delivered and discussed in-person with a staff member and pastor present. They should convey the seriousness of the matter while also explaining our desire to provide for the care and wellbeing of all parties. Pastors/staff should never have this conversation alone. During this conversation, the person being limited should sign their Limited Access Agreement acknowledging they have received the document and agree to its terms.
6. When an in-person meeting is not possible, the Limited Access Agreement will be sent through email (if available) and certified USPS letter. The person being limited will be advised that they must sign and return the document before they will be permitted to attend future church programs and activities or be present on church property.
7. If a person refuses to sign and agree to their Limited Access Agreement, they will be advised that this must occur before they may attend future Manchester UMC programs and activities or be present on church property.
8. If a person being limited feels their Limited Access Agreement is inconsistent with this policy, they may request a meeting with the pastoral staff, the Safe Gatherings Administrator, and Leadership Board Chair. This person may be present on church property for the purpose of attending this meeting. After the meeting, the group will review the situation with the Leadership Board. Following this review, the group will issue a written decision and copy the person being limited. This decision will be final.

9. Whenever possible, Limited Access Agreements should include a timeline and/or a path to dissolving the Agreement. In situations involving persons on the Sex Offender Registry, the Limited Access Agreement will remain in place as long as the person remains on the Sex Offender Registry. However, the terms of the Limited Access Agreement may be updated as necessary.
10. Signed Limited Access Agreements will remain on file with the Safe Gatherings Administrator.
11. Once a Limited Access Agreement has been delivered to the person being limited, copies will be distributed to pastoral staff, lead staff, Leadership Board Chair, and Leadership Board Lay Leader.
12. In providing for the safety and security needs of the church, a Limited Access Agreement is not considered confidential, but should only be shared with careful discretion.

## **H. Terms & Definitions:**

### **Abuse**

#### *Child abuse –*

Physical or mental injury, sexual abuse of a child or youth by an adult or adolescent caregiver responsible for the child's or youth's welfare.

#### *Emotional abuse -*

Abuse which results in impaired psychological growth and development, including belittling, rejection, constant unequal treatment, verbal assaults, excessive demands on a child's or youth's performance and isolation from normal social activities.

#### *Neglect –*

Failure or inattention on the part of the caregiver to provide for a child's or youth's basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care and supervision.

#### *Physical abuse –*

Non-accidental abuse which results in physical injury, including but not limited to bruises, burns, cuts, welts, fractures and internal injuries.

#### *Sexual abuse/misconduct –*

Includes but is not limited to any contact or interaction between a child or youth and an adult, or between a child and a youth, when the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult or youth, or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual behavior between a child or youth and an adult or between a child and a youth is always considered forced whether or not consented to by the child or youth.

### **Adult**

Any person age 18 or older. (If an 18-year-old is attending a church sponsored youth program or event as a participant and is not serving as an approved adult volunteer, then they shall be treated as a minor for purposes of Safe Gatherings requirements.)

### **Alone**

When two persons are in a space with no other person(s) within sight.

**Children/Child**

Any person 5<sup>th</sup> grade or younger.

**Children-sponsored Program**

A program that is led or coordinated by Manchester United Methodist Church.

**Cohabiting**

Living in the same home with another person.

**Leader**

A Safe Gatherings Certified adult.

**Minor**

Any person age 17 or younger. (If an 18-year-old is attending a church-sponsored youth program or event as a participant and is not serving as an approved youth volunteer, then they shall be treated as a minor for purposes of Safe Gatherings requirements).

**Parent/Guardian**

An adult who has legal custody or guardianship of a minor or vulnerable adult.

**Present**

Adequately able to supervise, generally this requires being within sight and sound of all participants.

**Relative/Related**

Spouse, fiancé, partner, parent, child, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling or cousin.

**Safe Gatherings Certified**

An adult who has successfully completed the required steps for Safe Gatherings Certification and is currently approved to work with minors and vulnerable adults by Manchester UMC.

**Vulnerable Adult**

Any person 18 or older who is not able to protect themselves fully from exploitation or give consent to sexual activity due to intellectual or physical impairments or other incapacities.

**Youth**

Any person in 6<sup>th</sup> grade through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Youth Volunteer**

Any youth assigned to assist in a ministry of Manchester UMC.

**NOTICE:**

This document is 10 pages in length and is effective June 2025 until otherwise replaced. This version supersedes all previous versions. It is the responsibility of all Safe Gatherings Certified adults to read and comply with these revised Safe Gatherings procedures to the best of their abilities.

**CONTACT:**

Please direct any questions, comments or concern related to Safe Gatherings to:

**Safe Gatherings Administrator**  
[safegatherings@manchestrumc.org](mailto:safegatherings@manchestrumc.org)