



John L. Hopkins  
Bishop  
bishophopkins@umcnic.org

# The United Methodist Church

## CHICAGO AREA EPISCOPAL OFFICE

77 West Washington St • Suite 1820 • Chicago, IL 60602

Office (312) 334-0702

Rev. Arlene W. Christopherson  
Assistant to the Bishop / Director of Connectional Ministries  
achristo@umcnic.org

April 8, 2022

Dear Church Leaders:

I write today in partnership with our Director of Risk Management and Ministry Protection, Dwayne Jackson.

For decades the Northern Illinois Conference has been a Safe Sanctuaries Conference. We are proud of the ways we have incorporated this program into the life of our churches. It is second nature in many settings to have two adults present with children and youth. It is rare to be in a church that doesn't have windows in the classroom doors. We have made our cautions habit and have provided secure spaces in our buildings.

While these practices are engrained in our work, there are still vulnerable points in our protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults. No amount of training, background checks or practice can guarantee safety, but each of these steps gives us assurance that we are doing our best to care for our members.

Last year we began a concerted effort to identify the tools congregations are using to provide safe space. We learned that 254 of our churches have at least one person trained through Safe Gatherings and that 57 of our churches use other training approaches; and 1,430 trained leaders were identified. **This year our insurance carrier, Philadelphia Insurance, has asked us to double our efforts to ensure every pastor, employee and volunteer who works with children, youth and vulnerable adults is trained and aware of the latest best information we have to care for our faith community.**

In this regard, Philadelphia Insurance is once again requiring all pastors, employees and volunteers involved with children, youths and vulnerable adults who have not already done so, to complete Safe Gatherings training by August 31, 2022.

We can do this! We can step up and create a solid defense against harm. Please inventory your employee and volunteer pool today. Note who is trained, who needs to be enrolled in the Safe Gatherings training program and who needs to renew their training. The Safe Gatherings process is simple and doesn't require travel or even a great deal of time. Trained employees and volunteers undergo a background check and are certified for 3 years. Are all your employees and volunteers trained?

Persons may individually complete the 1.5-hour online training by August 31, 2022. All phases of training including background check is required. The fee is fee: \$35.75

You can learn more about Safe Gatherings on our conference website at: <https://www.umcnic.org/safesanctuaries>.



If this training doesn't work for some of your volunteers, we have set up a network of training events across the conference over the next 4 months. These will be offered by Zoom or in person and will be announced in late April. Please look at your employee and volunteer lists and be sure that any of your leadership not trained thorough Safe Gatherings participates in one of these events.

We can carry this important work forward and continue to be Safe Sanctuaries.

The basis for this stringent request centers upon the growing concern around the safety and well-being of children, youths and vulnerable adults as it relates to sexual misconduct. True, the safety and wellbeing of each and every person regardless of age has always and will continue to be our collective mission as we provide safe places of worship and fellowship.

Please do not hesitate to be in touch with either one of us if you have questions or concerns.

In Christ,

Dwayne Jackson  
Director of

Rev. Arlene W. Christopherson  
Assistant to Bishop and  
Director of Connectional Ministries