



Madison United Methodist Church Student Ministry Parent Handbook

Revised 07.18.16

Purpose Statement

The **Student Ministry Mission Statement** reflects the MUMC Student Ministry goal for our program:

Reach – Intentionally seeking students

Own – Challenging students to take ownership of their faith

Grow – Learning to be disciples

Unite – Connecting students with other believers

Engage – Encouraging students to engage the world around them

Student ministry is all about relationships, the student's relationship with Christ, each other, adults, and their parents. The MUMC Student Ministry strives to create a non-threatening environment and structured program to nurture the student's relationship with Christ. Programs and lessons are developed on a wide range of topics that will interest the students and teach them how to improve their relationships through Scripture and open discussions. Leaders are encouraged to build a personal relationship with the students in their groups and serve as a role model and minister to them.

The Sunday night program is structured to provide a combination of fellowship, worship, and learning. Parent volunteers provide a snack supper and the students have an opportunity to eat and visit with friends. There is a time of music where we raise our voices in song. Our programs are developed around a theme and are structured for "family groups" which have the same leaders and students so that a familiarity and comfort level is developed, and is where the students can have meaningful discussions. The evening closes with a time to worship, share prayer concerns, and pray at the altar.

Wednesday nights offer more of a larger group time. After the meal is over, the junior high students meet upstairs in the fellowship hall, and the senior high students meet in the chapel basement for Bible Study.

Retreats are a time where the students can get away from home and fellowship with students from other churches. These are often times of much fun, little sleep, and some very spiritual moments. The music, programs, and speakers always provide a meaningful experience. The year culminates with summer retreats for senior high, junior high and combined groups. These retreats are well worth the planning and effort to attend.

Student Ministry Team

At Madison UMC, we believe in a team approach to student ministry. There is a strong team of adult volunteers who provide primary leadership and vision for our student ministry program. The Student Ministry Team works with all aspects of student ministry including Sunday night student ministry, weekly Bible Studies, Sunday School, and Wednesday night Bible Study. We also consult with the music ministry staff with regard to student music opportunities.

The Student Coordinators chair the Student Ministry Team. The Student Ministries Director works closely with all aspects of the program and provides significant leadership. However, the success of the student

program lies within the strength of the adult volunteers and within the student leaders who give of their time to serve in countless ways to further the cause of Christ.

The Student Ministry Team meets monthly, usually on the 3rd Monday night of the month during the school year. (The Student Ministry Team meets on a less regular basis during the summer.) The Student Council meets at 5:30 pm and then with the Student Ministry Team at 6 pm during these meetings. In addition, the Student Council will meet separately as needed.

What follows are some of the big categories that parents need to know. Thank you for reading through these materials carefully. Please do not hesitate to ask questions of any team member or the Student Ministries Director.

Summer Trips

Each summer, we offer a couple of 'Big Trips' and many local trips. Our big trips are usually planned well in advance, but please note that many of our local trips are finalized as we progress through the summer. We provide a student summer calendar and look forward to a busy summer, filled with mission opportunities and fun bonding time for the students.

Spiritual Life Retreats

We typically take one or two spiritual life retreats per school semester. These are incredible times of worship away from home with students from other churches. These trips will be announced throughout the school year.

Communication

We do our best to keep parents and students informed. Our main strategy to communicate with parents and students is to send regular text messages via cell phones. To receive Student Ministry text updates, text "mumcstudent" to 955-77. The Messenger and Sunday Bulletin contain information on upcoming events. PLEASE read these each week. There is also an email distribution for parents which is used to quickly and efficiently communicate. We do special mailings and brochures about big events or retreats as they arise.

Concerns

How to handle concerns or problems about something that occurred at a student ministry-sponsored event:

If, at any time, you have a concern about the student program or something that was said, taught, or may have happened at a student group or at a student event, we want to know about it as soon as possible. It is important for the student ministry team to hear any concerns that you have so that we can make improvements or handle issues as they arise. While you are certainly free to skip any of these steps this is the preferred path we would like you to follow:

1. Talk directly with the adult who was involved with the incident (the Bible Study leader, Sunday School teacher, family group leader, etc.) If you are unwilling or uncomfortable talking directly to that adult, proceed to step 2.
2. Talk with the Student Ministries Director, Student Coordinators, or a Student Ministry Team member with whom you feel comfortable. Know that they will share your concern with the Student Ministries Director, Student Coordinators, and the adult involved (if applicable). If that does not settle the concern for you, then proceed to step 3.
3. Talk with the Senior Pastor.

For any issue directly related to the Student Ministries Director, follow this path:

1. Talk directly with the Student Ministries Director about your concern. Schedule an appointment by calling the church office, his cell phone, or email him.
2. Talk with the Student Coordinators, Cathy Cauthen or George Taylor.
3. Talk with the Senior Pastor.

Remember that because we function as a team, we also share concerns and handle problems as a team. We have a covenant of confidentiality within the team so that issues are held within the team and not discussed beyond those who need to know.

Please note: Under no circumstances will an "anonymous" concern be heard or considered. If it is serious enough to bring to our attention, then it is serious enough to attach your name to it.

Confidentiality

“What is said in family group stays in family group.” In order to create an atmosphere of trust and growth within the student program, confidentiality is important. Students must be assured that what they decide to share with their family group and the adult leader remains confidential.

There are four important exceptions to the confidentiality rule. First, if a student shares information that indicates that he or she intends to harm him/her or others, then we will inform parents and possibly other authorities to make sure the student remains safe. Second, if a student reports to an adult that they are a victim of abuse, then we are legally obligated to report it to the proper persons. Third, if in the judgment of a team member, a student begins moving down a path of drug or alcohol use, a team member will consult with the Student Ministries Director who may then offer a strong suggestion to the parents to be on guard and/or to have their student drug tested. Parents please take this suggestion to heart, knowing that we cannot discuss details. Fourth, adults on the team may share confidential information with the Student Ministries Director or Senior Pastor in order to be certain they are handling the matter appropriately.

Student Council

In the fall, the student council is elected for a one year term (beginning at election and ending in August). Each grade elects one representative and then the Student Ministry Team appoints one representative for each grade. In addition, a minimum of two representatives will be elected to serve on the Church Council. Elections are held by preferential ballot, which means that all candidates are ranked in order from first choice to last choice and the person with the most 'points' wins. All students who regularly attend student ministry or are church members are eligible to vote. Vote only for your class, but you may nominate across classes. Nominations are held over a two week period of time, voting on one Sunday night.

Any student who holds a district or conference office is automatically on the student council with full voice and vote as an ex-officio member.

The student council functions as the voice for the students, and meets on a semi-regular basis by themselves for planning, visioning, and spiritual development. The student council meets on a regular basis with the Student Ministry Team, to make and carry out the monthly planning and decision making.

Each student council will decide for themselves whether or not to elect officers, how many, etc.

“But I don’t fit in...”

How to respond to your student when he or she says, “I don’t fit in”:

- Try the easy solution: get them to create their own peer group by bringing one or two friends. This is the first step we recommend to anyone who feels left out.
- Evaluate: is this an excuse or a legitimate situation? Remember that spiritual formation is as important (or more important) than academic or athletic opportunities and commitments. Don't let them off the hook so easily. The students who get the most out of student ministry are often the ones whose parents have said firmly: “You will attend student ministry every week, period.”
- Any actual harassment, inappropriate teasing, or mean-spirited put downs will not be tolerated. We will deal quickly and firmly with such behavior to insure that it does not happen again. (Be certain you have an accurate and complete story before we confront someone about their alleged behavior.)
- Remember that there is only so much the adult team can do to provide a welcoming environment. Ultimately, it is up to the students themselves to decide to be inviting and friendly and accepting.
- Ask yourself the hard questions: Is student ministry supposed to be comfortable? Is Christianity supposed to be easy? Are we supposed to baby-sit and entertain? We are called to challenge the student to examine their behavior and be obedient to God, to discover God’s call on their lives and how to live each day following Christ.

Transportation Policies

All students who attend church sponsored events in a church van will be required to wear a seat belt. Radio is tuned to Christian radio for short trips and wherever possible on longer trips. Under most

circumstances, students should ride in vans or be transported by parents to events that are outside of town. In situations where students drive to local events, students are not allowed to ride in cars with other students unless clear consent has been granted by both sets of parents.

Financial Policies on Trips and Retreats

Throughout the year, we offer students the opportunity to attend conference events, our own MUMC retreats, or lock-ins. We also have at least one major trip offered to all students each summer. All of our events have a 'sign up' list associated with it. When students sign up for an event, we make plans and reservations to get them to the event. There are financial commitments made for vans, resources, housing, and food when students sign up for an event.

For any event in which there is a deposit required in order to hold a space, that deposit is non-refundable (it can be transferred to another family member attending the same event.) This policy is not to punish anyone, but is to insure that you have double-checked calendars and agree with the plan for your student to attend the event.

For most events there is a "no-cancellation, full payment due" point. That is, for every event there is a date beyond which NO refund is possible and FULL payment will be expected. For conference events, full payment is required on all reservations made nine days ahead of the event. For summer retreats, we sometimes cannot cancel earlier than one month ahead of the event.

Parents, please do your part to support our calendar and our ministries. Help your student understand the commitment they have made and encourage them to follow through, just as you would a school or athletic commitment. Finally, all of our events are calendared well in advance. Please do not schedule a party or event at your house the weekend in which we have something going on for the same age group. Model for your students how to manage schedules and keep commitments.

Clothing

We continue to struggle with issues related to appropriate dress. There are students who come to Sunday morning church wearing outfits that are simply too revealing. Teachers are reporting that the clothing is so skimpy that the other students are distracted. Because we are representing the church, our families and God, we want to dress appropriately. Some of our fashion choices are not appropriate for a church trip. For example: men, do not wear t-shirts that have beer advertisements, Southpark characters, or crude sayings. Women: there are shorts, then there are shorts that are WAY TOO short. Shorts that cannot be seen under a t-shirt are too short (most cheerleading shorts). In general, it is not appropriate at church for us to see your belly button or bare shoulders. Please stick to t-shirts and other outfits that keep bellybuttons covered. **Swim suits** – we are asking for women's swim suits to have "**full coverage**". At least one inch of fabric on each side is required for the bottom portion of the swimming suit. Wear a swim suit for rafting or swimming, not for tanning. We reserve the right to make a young lady wear a t-shirt over her swimsuit if it is deemed inappropriate. When in doubt, put on a t-shirt and blue jeans. Parents, PLEASE help us out on by watching what your student wears to church and by modeling appropriate clothing yourself to church functions.

The Honor Council

The honor council is a small group of students (usually one or two persons from each grade) and one or two adults that meet to deal with **serious infractions** of our honor covenant. A new honor council is named by the Student Ministries Director in consultation with the Student Ministry Team each time there is a serious incident and they disband after the incident is resolved. Most of the time, these behaviors occur while we are at an event or on a trip. But an honor council would also be formed to deal with inappropriate behavior that occurs on church grounds. Examples of honor code infractions are: possessing and/or consuming illegal drugs or alcohol, sexual harassment, behavior that endangers the health or safety of a teen, repeated failure to abide by the rules at the event, or blatant disrespect of adult authority.

The honor council is named by the Student Ministries Director in consultation with the available team members as situations arise and would remain the same for the duration of that event, trip, etc. A senior is named as chair and runs the meeting. Adults remain present, but are very much in the background.

There is a dual purpose of the honor council. First, we want our stronger students who have leadership skills to realize that their example really does make a difference. The students who serve on the honor

council suddenly realize the tremendous responsibility they have with the entire group. Second, we believe that when students are accountable to their own peers the lessons they learn are more profound and long lasting. It is easy to apologize to an adult; it is hard to apologize to your peers. Listening to an 8th grader explain how they really looked up to you until this happened is hard to hear, but very real.

When the honor council is convened they first hear from the person brought forward (both sides if there is more than one party). Then after each person has asked questions and expressed their disappointment, the council meets alone to determine the consequences. There are different levels of consequences, depending on the situation, the offense, and the level of remorse by the person brought forward. Consequences can and have included one or more of the following examples: an apology to the group, informing parents, suspension from overnight events for a period of time, if on a retreat immediate removal from that event.

Honor council proceedings are confidential. Moreover, we endeavor to complete the honor council process (from hearing to consequences) as quickly and fairly as we possibly can, so that the infraction can be put behind us and we can move on.

Safe Sanctuaries

Madison UMC follows the safe sanctuaries policy (policies in place to prevent sexual abuse) written by the General Board of Discipleship and adopted by the Mississippi Annual Conference. This policy requires all adults who work with student to be informed of the safe sanctuaries policies and to sign a disclosure statement each year to that effect.

1. On overnight events in hotel accommodations, adults shall not sleep in the same room as students whenever possible. Under no circumstances shall adults sleep in the same bed as students.
2. An 8 to 1 adult to student ratio shall be followed on all overnight events (at a minimum).
3. Adults shall follow the 2 adult rule at all times, meaning that no adult shall be alone with a student for an extended period of time. If one-on-one counseling is required, adults shall leave a door open or have another adult periodically come by and noticeably check in on the situation.
4. In general, there should be at least a five year difference between the age of adults and the student under their primary care.
5. Under no circumstances are adult members of the Student Ministry Team allowed to date or otherwise be romantically involved with a student ministry member. (This rule applies to all but is particularly geared toward our college aged interns).

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