

Campus Grounds Use Policy

Grace United Methodist Church of Merritt Island
(321 452-2420)

Grace United Methodist Church (GUMC) affirms that every person is created in the image of God and is worthy of dignity, compassion, and respect. When individuals experiencing homelessness or other hardships are encountered, church representatives will seek, when appropriate and safe, to provide information about local shelters, food programs, and community assistance. This policy is intended to balance Christian hospitality with the church's responsibility to steward its property and provide a safe environment for worship and ministry.

1. Purpose

This policy establishes guidelines for the use of GUMC grounds to ensure the campus remains a safe, welcoming, and sacred place for worship, ministry, fellowship, remembrance, and community service.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all outside grounds (including: all parking lots, gardens, grass areas, sidewalk, fenced and open playgrounds, mulched/ dirt areas) owned or maintained by GUMC. It applies to all persons entering GUMC property.

3. Hours of Use

Church grounds have no physical barricades to deter entry access is available to all. Occupied use is considered to be during worship activities, normal church office hours, and church sponsored activities. All other times are considered after-hours.

4. Prohibited Activities on Church Grounds

The following activities are prohibited on church property:

- Smoking, vaping, or use of tobacco products (illegal near school)
- Consumption of alcohol or illegal substances
- Loitering after-hours (Includes sleeping in vehicles)

Defined as - *The act of remaining in a public or private place without a clear, lawful purpose or the permission of the property owner*

- Sleeping, camping, or establishing temporary shelter (trespass/loitering)
- Disorderly, threatening, or disruptive behavior
- Littering (including human and animal waste), vandalism, or damage to property
All items left behind including food, clothes, sleeping items will be removed to the trash
- Open fires or grills for non-church sponsored activities
- Commercial solicitation without approval

5. Safety

Individuals on property during occupied times or after-hours will be asked, by the church member/authorized property user, to leave if any Prohibited Activities are witnessed.

If the church member/authorized property user feels threatened, leave the area and contact the church staff or law enforcement for immediate action.

Any interactions with these individuals by a church member/authorized property user should be reported to the Facility Manager (by phone, email, work order) at the first opportunity. This information is used for determining trends.

The Facility Manager/Receptionist will also notify the members of the Lock Up Crew of any significant problems, as they are often at the campus after-hours.

6. Problematic Areas

Historically people have been found after-hours at the following locations:

Memorial Garden, behind bushes on north side of Sanctuary by air conditioners (sleeping and breakers have been turned off); Behind bushes on east side of Sanctuary by power transformers; Behind bushes on south side of Fellowship Hall (human waste); Out in the open by the stage; Behind preschool shed; Dumpster area; Hatfield lot - behind shed and in tree area.

7. Enforcement

Repeated or serious violations may result in physical removal of the individual from the property by the Sheriff. If the request to vacate is ignored:

1. Call the Brevard County Sheriff's Office non-emergency at 321-264-5100. Indicate the problem and request a "move along" or 911 in an emergency for immediate removal of the individual.
2. Pastor will be involved in determining if a "Trespass" warning will be issued against an individual by the Sheriff.
3. Facility Manager will collect information and follow up with Senior Pastor and Board of Trustees as well as maintaining written record of incidents.

From the Sheriff's office. - *Individuals experiencing homelessness may display belligerent behavior due to a combination of severe chronic stress, untreated mental illness, substance abuse, and trauma. Living on the streets is an extreme survival state where erratic reactions often function as defense mechanisms to protect personal safety and property. If individuals are illegally camping or trespassing, file a report so officers can formally issue trespass warnings and direct them to local resources like Daily Bread, Inc. or Matthews Hope Ministries.*

The church member/authorized property user may contact the Pastor, Facility Manager/Staff, Board of Trustees, or their designees to interpret and implement further actions.

8. Vehicles

People sleeping in vehicles is considered loitering.

An abandoned vehicle has no plates, has flat tires, and the owner has not contacted GUMC, or has not actively moved. A form letter is placed on the windshield by the Facility Manager with a copy to the Receptionist (so they know what is going on if they are contacted). After the time indicated on the letter has expired, the Facility Manager will call the county sheriff to report, they will sticker it and have a tow company remove the vehicle after 24 hours.

Vehicles in the green bumpered guest parking usually belong to people in the apartments. We do not encourage apartment tenants using this parking, and the vehicle cannot be abandoned. However, we do allow temporary parking (as in the car comes and goes) and does not interfere with GUMC operations.

9. Facility Maintenance

- Outdoor lighting and cameras have been added to many areas
- Light placement must not disrupt the neighbors
- Bushes close to the buildings and in the Hatfield lot are to be trimmed to discourage "hiding" spaces

Trustee Review: 9/21/2026

Trustee Basic Approved: 9/21/2026

Church Council Approved: 9/23/2026