

A POLICY OF FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

for Creating Safe Sanctuaries



Developed by:

First United Methodist Church Council

May 23, 2016

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

First United Methodist Church

Norwalk, Ohio

Adopted May 23, 2016

INTRODUCTION

“People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.” And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” Mark 10:13-16 (NIV)

Our church strives to provide “Safe Sanctuary” for all God’s children. We are seeking ways to improve and better implement “Safe Sanctuary” guidelines to protect our children, youth and adults in order to make our congregation a safe place where everyone may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. This includes children’s check in/out procedures, training and background checks for those working with children and youth, and procedures that guide the interaction of children, youth and adults.

As much as we do not like to think about abusive and hurtful things happening in the church, it is clear that it is our duty as the Church to guard and protect the children, youth, adults, church staff, and volunteers who participate in our ministries.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse.”

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church - 1996*. [pp. 384-386])

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our annual conference.

PURPOSE

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries policy and the accompanying guidelines is to demonstrate our strong and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and adults.

STATEMENT OF COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to engage in the ministry of the Gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and adults, as well as all of the workers with children, youth and adults. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers. We will implement prudent operational procedures in our programs and events. We will educate all of our workers with children, youth and adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law. We will be prepared to respond to media inquiries in the event that an incident occurs.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries with children, youth and adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be "...surrounded by steadfast love...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal." (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44)

SAFE SANCTUARY GUIDELINES

First United Methodist Church

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DEFINITIONS

Abuse – The infliction of physical pain or injury or the willful deprivation of services necessary to maintain mental and physical health, by a caregiver or other person.

Adult - a person at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than those being supervised.

Caregiver – An individual who has responsibility for the care of a vulnerable person as a result of a family relationship, or who has assumed that responsibility voluntarily, by contract, or as a result of the ties of friendship.

Child or Minor - a person under 18 years of age.

Child Abuse - consists of any of the following:

1. Engaging in any sexual activity with a child as defined under Chapter 2907 of the Ohio Revised Code; or
2. Endangering a child, as defined under Section 2919.22 of the Ohio Revised Code**; or
3. Denial, as means of punishment, of proper or necessary subsistence, education, medical care, or other care necessary to a child for the child's health; or
4. Use of restraint procedures on a child that cause injury or pain; or
5. Administration of prescription drugs to a child without the written approval and ongoing supervision of a licensed physician; or
6. Providing alcoholic beverages or controlled substances to a child; or
7. Commission of any intentional act that results in any injury or death to a child; or
8. Infliction of physical or mental injury that threatens to harm a child's health, welfare, or safety.

** in its present form, this law defines "child endangerment" to include any of the following: (1) abuse; or (2) torture or cruel abuse; or (3) corporal punishment or other physical discipline (e.g. such as spankings) or prolonged cruel restraint, which is excessive under the circumstances, and which could likely physically injure the child; or (4) repeated, uncalled-for discipline which, if continued, would seriously impair the child's mental health or development; or (5) involving the child in any obscene, sexually-oriented, or nudity-oriented activity or conduct.

Emotional Abuse – The intentional or reckless infliction of emotional or mental anguish, or the use of a physical or chemical restraint, medication or isolation as punishment or as a substitute for treatment or care of any vulnerable person.

Exploitation – The expenditure, diminution, or use of the property, assets or resources of a vulnerable person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his or her legally-authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation – The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a vulnerable person’s property, with the intent to deprive the vulnerable person of that property.

Neglect – The failure of a caregiver or other person to provide food, shelter, clothing, medical services, medication or health care for a vulnerable person.

Ritual Abuse – regular intentional physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a vulnerable person to appeal to a higher authority of power

Staff Person – Any person employed by the church.

Volunteer – A person eighteen (18) years of age or older who assists in conducting activities for vulnerable persons.

Vulnerable Person– Any child or youth, as well as any adult whose behavior indicates that he or she is mentally or emotionally incapable of adequately caring for himself or herself and his or her interests without adverse consequences to himself or herself or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, is unable to protect himself or herself from abuse, neglect, exploitation, sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others.

Safe Sanctuary - a policy and guidelines developed to protect our vulnerable persons in order to make our congregation a safe place where everyone may experience the abiding love of God and fellowship within the community of faith. This includes children’s check in/out procedures, training and background checks for those working with vulnerable persons, and procedures that guide the interaction of children, youth and adults.

SELECTION AND SCREENING

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, volunteers working with vulnerable persons and all paid staff will be screened and will be trained on safe sanctuaries guidelines.

Current or new staff person should:

- receive a written job description
- complete a confidential application form with 3 reference checks including former employees. All references will be checked.
- complete a background check consent form
- receive appropriate clearances of all background checks
- undergo a personal interview
- attend yearly safe sanctuary training
- renew a background check every 3 years

Regular, Occasional, and Last minute volunteers should:

- complete a confidential application form
- provide 3 references. All references will be checked.
- complete a background check consent form
- attend yearly safe sanctuary training
- receive appropriate clearances on all background checks
- participate in an interview if one of the following indications is present:
 - the person wants to work alone
 - the person has indicated that they have been charged with a crime against children or youth. (persons who may pose a threat, have been previously convicted, plead guilty or no contest to a crime against vulnerable persons will not be placed in a position involving access to vulnerable persons).
 - upon checking references or completion of the background check, issues are raised which require clarification.
- complete an Annual Renewal Application each year

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee's confidential personnel file. All volunteers' records, forms and reports will be kept on confidential file by the Administrative Assistant at the local church.

SUPERVISION OF VULNERABLE PERSONS

Two-Adult Rule – Two non-related adult workers will be present with vulnerable persons during church-related activities whenever possible except in emergency situations.

Rule of Three – For the times when the Two-Adult Rule cannot be supported, at least three individuals (at least one being an adult) will be present with vulnerable persons during church-related activities. An adult supervisor acting as a “premises monitor” will make unannounced visits frequently, particularly when the two-adult rule is not feasible, and will patrol hallways and common areas within the church facility when vulnerable persons' activities are taking place.

Rest Room Guidelines – When using the restroom, vulnerable persons will be accompanied by an adult to and from the restroom. Before any vulnerable person enters the restroom, the adult will enter the restroom to make sure that it is safe. If assistance is required, the adult will assist the individual with the door propped open so that a second screened adult can visually monitor the assisting adult. It is recommended that two adults be present when assistance will be required in the restroom. When restrooms are directly accessible to vulnerable persons where activities are taking place and not accessible to the general public, vulnerable persons can be allowed to utilize the restroom alone. (The Brotherhood Mutual resource *Guidelines for Ministry Workers* suggests that only females assist small children in the restroom).

Five Year Rule – All persons working with minors must be at least five years older than the age group they are leading/supervising.

Six Month Rule - Any volunteers working with children must be a member or regular attender at church for at least six months.

Suggested Adult to Child Ratios

- a) 1:5 under the age of 5
- b) 1:8 for children aged 5 - 18

Windows/Open Doors -All rooms where vulnerable persons are meeting will have windows (in doors or walls), half doors or open doors for all teaching/learning activities.

Sign-in/Sign-Out Procedures - Persons responsible for children who are infants through third grade will sign in their child and indicate the pre-authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed out for both Sunday school and other children's activities. No child should ever be left unattended.

Attendance & Record Retention – All activities including vulnerable persons should have a written record of the names of participants, including the leaders/supervisors. Records should be kept for a minimum of three years.

Overnight Activities

- 1. Hotel Setting: No adults in the bed with a child. If possible, choose hotels with rooms opening to inside hallway.
- 2. Bunkroom Setting: At least 2 same gender adults may sleep in a large room with multiple bunk beds.
- 3. Off-site trips information exchange:
 - a. Parent must receive contact info to include:
 - i. start/stop times
 - ii. location of event
 - iii. program content
 - iv. lodging information
 - v. covenant rules expected of their child
 - b. Staff/volunteer/drivers must receive:
 - i. all contact information for parents
 - ii. signed parent/guardian permission/liability form
 - iii. health/emergency information

Transportation:

- 1. Driver must be known to the designated leader of the event;
- 2. Driver must be at least 21 years old;
- 3. Driver must have a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated;
- 4. Driver must have proof of insurance;
- 5. Driver must be accompanied by at least two children or youth; and
- 6. Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the policy has been read and will be followed. (See forms)

Outside Groups Meeting in Your Church Facilities

It is recommended that the local church's board of trustees and/or church council require that all outside organizations review and agree to comply with all of the church's safe sanctuary policy.

Social Media and Technology

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media policies that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for vulnerable persons. To this end, following are guidelines for the use of social media, technology and the internet:

- We will protect the privacy and identity of all vulnerable persons in online writings, postings and discussions.
 - Volunteers and staff must not post photos or video that identifies vulnerable persons by name, address, or other specific identification on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
 - All social media groups (Facebook, etc.) associated with preschool, children's or youth ministry areas should be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group's administrator(s).
 - All church-related social media groups (Facebook, etc.) and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
 - Photos of vulnerable persons may only be published or posted on social media (Facebook, etc.) after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. It is suggested that all permission slips contain a statement that approval to participate in the event includes approval for photographs to be used in church-related media. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitter pics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors without permission.
 - Photos may only be posted to the social media (Facebook, etc.) page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. "tag") themselves.
 - When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only "checkin" yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
 - In the case of clergy/professional staff and church member online connections, friend requests, follow requests, circle requests, etc. should be initiated by the church member, especially if the church member is a vulnerable person.
- We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.
 - No adult shall initiate social media (Facebook, etc.) contact with or "friend" a vulnerable person. When accepting the "friend" requests of a vulnerable person, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with vulnerable persons shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.
 - When emailing, texting, tweeting, posting or messaging a vulnerable person, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the "two adults present" Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (SnapChat, FacebookPoke, etc.) should be avoided.

- Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for counseling - especially with vulnerable persons. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation into an appropriate Safe Sanctuary model (i.e. office with windows, two adult rule, etc.).
- We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyber-bullying. Every children's ministry and youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training session is encouraged to include in its teaching a session on the types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it.
- We shall educate our congregation in the effective and safe use of social media and technology to live out their Christian witness in what they write, post, share, and view.
 - We all must understand, and teach to vulnerable persons, that once something is posted on web, sent via email or sent via text, it is impossible to fully recover or erase it. There should be no expectation of privacy or reasonable expectation that the information stops with the person for whom it was intended. The promises of *privacy* offered by apps (like SnapChat) are illusionary.
 - *A good rule of thumb:* If you don't want it posted on the church sign, website, or bulletin, do not text it or post it via social media.

RESPONSE TO INJURIES AND ACCIDENTS

In order to assure proper attention was given to any injury or accident, an incident report must be completed by the adult supervisor as soon as is practical, and always within 24 hours of the incident whenever a vulnerable person is injured.

RESPONSE TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place.

Be prepared to do the following:

PLEASE NOTE: MANY STEPS SHOULD BE DONE SIMULTANEOUSLY

- Secure any needed emergency medical help and address any needs the person may have. This may include calling 911 when needed.
- **IMMEDIATELY** notify the proper authorities (children services board, the county department of human services exercising the children services function, or a local law enforcement agency in the county in which the children/youth resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred). This is a requirement of the law. Reference section 2151.421 of the Ohio Revised Code. Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to the professionals who are familiar with these cases.
- Simultaneously notify the parents or legal guardian of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the children/youth until the parent(s) or legal guardian arrives. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) or legal guardian do not wish the incident to be reported.
- Note: if one or both of the parents or legal guardian is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.

- Take any allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Showing care and support help to prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the alleged victim and the victim’s family.
- After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church’s attorney, the church’s insurance company, and the district superintendent. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy member of the annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 363 and Paragraphs 2701-2719 of *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2012* must be followed.
- A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. Use the “Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse” form for this report. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The report shall be filed in the church office where it shall remain confidential.
- Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with vulnerable persons.
- Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the vulnerable person is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be temporarily relieved of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- Any contact with the media should be handled by the Communications Department as part of the Crisis Response Plan (in cooperation and coordination with the Director of Connectional Ministries). Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments would be premature.

TRAINING OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH VULNERABLE PERSONS

The church shall provide regularly scheduled training focused on issues of child protection for those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training or a district or conference sponsored training session shall be required of all adults and youth helpers who will have direct contact with vulnerable persons in the church’s ministry.

The training may include:

1. The definition and recognition of abuse
2. The church’s policies on reporting abuse and appropriate forms.
3. The purposes of the policy as protection for children/youth and for church staff/volunteer workers.
4. The meaning and importance of confidentiality.
5. The maintenance of a positive learning classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
6. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.