

Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures



First United Methodist Church
Warner Robins, Georgia



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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:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes (a) child . . . welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones. . . it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) 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 states 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 (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults or pretend to be) 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 litigations following allegations of child 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. Copyright 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House.]

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



1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to help First United Methodist Church provide a caring and safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as the adults involved in ministering to such persons in all phases of the Church's life. We express our unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all who enter our doors.

2. Statement of Covenant

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

3. Types of Child/Youth Abuse

- a. **Definition** - Child/Youth abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, caregiver, or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child/youth on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's or a youth's physical or mental health or a child's or youth's welfare.
- b. **Types of Abuse**
 - i. Physical Abuse - Abuse in which a person deliberately or intentionally causes bodily harm to a child/youth. (Examples: violent battery with or without a weapon, burning, shaking, kicking, choking.)
 - ii. Emotional Abuse - Abuse in which a person exposes a child or a youth to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child/youth of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved, but also undeserving of love and care. (Examples: confinement (as in a closet), lack of nurturing, extreme discipline, knowingly permitting such behavior as drug or alcohol abuse.)



- iii. Neglect - Abuse in which a person endangers a child's or a youth's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. (Examples: withholding food, clothing, medical attention, education, or even affection and affirmation of a child's/youth's self-worth.)
- iv. Sexual Abuse - Abuse in which sexual contact between a child/youth and an adult [or another older and more powerful youth] occurs. The child/youth is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts.
- v. Ritual Abuse - Abuse in which physical, sexual or psychological violations of a child/youth are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons, responsible for a child's or a youth's welfare.

4. Classifications

- a. **Children:** Infants to 5th grade. **Youth:** 6th to 12th grade. **Vulnerable Adults:** Those over 18 years of age who are developmentally or physical disabled.
- b. **Primary Workers:** Primary workers are staff and volunteers in roles with a greater responsibility or risk. Primary workers have responsibility for, more interaction with, and greater access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A primary worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age. Primary workers must have Safe Sanctuaries training. They must have read and signed the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures and have successfully completed a background check. It is strongly recommended that primary workers have current CPR and First Aid certification.
- c. **Secondary Workers:** Secondary workers are volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and are supervised by a primary worker or staff person. A secondary worker must be at least 18 years of age. Secondary workers must read and sign the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedure. It is strongly recommended that secondary workers have current CPR and First Aid certification.
- d. **Workers:** Workers are those under 18 years of age. Workers under the age of 18 will not be placed in charge of any groups of children or youth. Persons under the age of 18 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Workers may serve as assistants but cannot count as one of the two workers.



5. Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

- a. **Primary Worker Screening:** Before beginning the first year of service, each employed or volunteer worker in children's or youth ministries: (1) will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been arrested or convicted of a crime under state or federal law [excluding minor traffic offenses] nor had any such conviction expunged; (2) will be required to complete an application for a criminal records check; (3) will be required to have a motor vehicle check made if driving youth or children, whether using a church or personal vehicle; (4) provide references if a paid worker; (5) submit to random drug screening, if asked.

Short term outside leadership does not have to go through the screening process as long as they are not left alone with children or youth and leadership who have been screened are present.

All records from criminal records checks will be examined by two members of the Pastoral Staff. These staff persons will refer concerns to the Child Protection Committee for action. All information gained through the screening process will be strictly confidential and kept in a locked cabinet.

- b. **Five Year Older Rule:** Both of the two adult workers (primary and secondary) who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be at least five years older than the oldest member of the group that they are serving.
- c. **Six Month Rule:** Workers must be active at FUMC for a minimum of six months before assuming responsibility for a group, and then only after completing a background check. This rule does not apply to paid staff.
- d. **Background Checks:** Background checks shall be made of all clergy, ministry staff, and primary workers to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment or service.
- e. **First Aid and CPR Training:** Current first aid and CPR certificates are required for 100% of **PAID STAFF** who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Classes will be provided to encourage volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults to become first aid and CPR certified.
- f. **Orientation for Workers:** Prior to working with children or youth, volunteers and paid staff will be given copies of the Child Protection Policy and Procedures. Their signed consent and agreement form will be used to conduct a background check prior to their work beginning. These covenants will be renewed periodically.



6. Supervising Guidelines

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within First United Methodist Church, the following guidelines will be met:

- a. **Two-Adult Rule:** Where possible no fewer than two adults, who are not related and have passed the screening process, must provide supervision at all times during any program, event, or ministry involving children. Where it is not possible to secure two adults in each room, a floater will come in and out of the rooms to ensure safety. Invited guests who are not screened do not count as part of the two-adult rule.
- b. **Open Classrooms:** All classroom and office doors should have a window for visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows should be kept free from adornment that would obstruct clear view into the room. Floaters will be used to go in and out of classrooms at irregular time intervals. Classrooms may be visited at any time without prior notice by church staff, parents, and other volunteer church workers, such as children or youth coordinators.
- c. **Outings Away From Church Property:** All children, youth, and vulnerable adults participating in activities off church property must have consent by a parent /guardian. If the group outing stays overnight, two or more workers must provide supervision. If it is a mixed group, the workers must include two males and two females who are not related. If a group is of one gender, at least one worker must be of the same gender. If necessary leadership cannot be secured, the event cannot take place. When the youth group travels and stays in hotels, no adult will stay in a hotel room by himself or herself with a group of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- d. **Touch:** Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult. (For example, it is generally appropriate for a three-year-old to sit on a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.) Touching should not be initiated by an adult. It should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It is strongly recommended that side hugs, with only one arm, be used. Touching and affection should only be given in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry staff person.



- e. **One on One Counseling, Meeting or Training:** Counseling (meeting/training) with children, youth, and vulnerable adults will be done only while others are present in the same building. Counseling will be done in a room with a window in the door.
- f. **Notification to Parents:** Full information will be provided to parents regarding the event(s) in which their children or youth will be participating.
- g. **Community Groups:** Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility are required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgement form provided. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

7. Reporting Abuse

A Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Team will be appointed by the Chair of the Administrative Ministry Team in consultation with the Pastoral Staff. The committee shall consist of no more than five persons, which shall include the Minister of Education. The members of the committee will serve terms of three (3) years on a rotating basis. Should there be an allegation of child abuse at First United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

- a. Any allegation of abuse shall be treated as serious. Under Georgia law, all persons working with vulnerable populations are mandated reporters when abuse is suspected.
- b. Immediately notify the Senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor is the one suspected of abuse, immediately notify the Associate Pastor for Congregational and Community Care.
- c. The Senior Pastor or the Associate Pastor for Congregational and Community Care will immediately notify the District Superintendent, who will initiate a Conference investigation of the allegation and will notify any community and/or legal authorities.
- d. Persons who report allegations are not privy to any further details of the investigation. Persons who report allegations, however, may be interviewed by conference or legal authorities during the investigation. All measures will be taken to protect the confidentiality of those reporting allegations.
- e. No member of the church, including persons who report allegations, are to comment publicly on the allegations or investigation, on behalf of the church or otherwise. All persons are asked to refrain from personally discussing allegations, in consideration of the alleged victim and the accused.



8. Policy Review

- a.** Any alterations or exceptions to the Child Protection Policies and Procedures must be presented to and approved by the Administration Ministry Team of First United Methodist Church.
- b.** The Child Protection Policies and Procedures of First United Methodist Church Warner Robins, shall be reviewed annually by the Child, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Protection Team. A report of the review will be submitted to the Administrative Ministry Team at the Annual Charge Conference. Revisions would have to be approved by the Administrative Ministry Team.

This policy was adopted by the Education Ministry Team on November 17, 2004