

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH PANAMA CITY

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

OUR CALLING

First United Methodist Church (FUMC) is a sacred place where God's people of all ages come together for worship, study, service and fellowship. The ministries of FUMC seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ; that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

OUR MANDATE

In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church.

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.

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." (Paragraph 162C)

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children, youth and vulnerable adults. 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.

OUR PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of FUMC do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, vulnerable adults, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at FUMC, Panama City, FL. By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth as they grow in their relationship with God. Although it is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every

circumstance, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

OUR COVENANT

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as of the workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults. We will implement reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operating procedures in our ministries; we will educate our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate procedures; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms with the requirements of the laws of the State of Florida; and we will be prepared to respond to the media should such an incident occur.

In all our ministries with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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, The United Methodist Hymnal*)

DEFINITIONS

Children: Persons Birth-5th grade

Youth: Persons 6-12th grade

Adult: Persons over 18 years of age who has completed high school or equivalent schooling

Vulnerable Adult: an adult with physical, mental and/or developmental disabilities

Intern/Assistant: Persons employed temporarily to assist with special ministry areas

Staff: Persons employed by FUMC

Volunteers: Members of FUMC who assist with special ministry areas involving children, youth and vulnerable adults but are not employed by FUMC.

Physical Abuse: abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child, youth or vulnerable adult

Emotional Abuse: abuse in which a person exposes a child, youth or vulnerable adult to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.

Neglect: abuse in which a person endangers the health, safety, or welfare of a child, youth or vulnerable adult through negligence.

Sexual Abuse: abuse in which sexual contact occurs between a child, youth, or vulnerable adult and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth).

Ritual Abuse: abuse in which physical, sexual or psychological violations are inflicted on a child, youth, or vulnerable adult regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the safety and welfare of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

1) FUMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy ("Policy") will be approved by the Church Council and available to all church members. The Policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure currency and will be amended whenever circumstances exist that require revision. Upon revision, the Policy will be approved by the Church Council.

a. Staff and Volunteers will receive a copy of FUMC's Policy.

b. Any member of FUMC may request a copy of the Policy.

c. The Policy will be included in Children's Ministries and Youth Ministries materials and be made available to all parents of children and youth, and will be available online at the FUMC website.

d. The Policy will be reviewed by a task force consisting of the following:

1. Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor
2. Children's Minister
3. Youth Pastor
4. Minister of Recreation
5. Minister of Music/Youth Choir Director/Children's Choir Director
6. Lay Representative of the Board of Trustees
7. Lay Representative of the Staff Parish Relations Committee
8. Lay Representative of the Children's Ministry Team
9. Lay Representative of the Youth Ministry Team

Any church member who is interested in participating in the review process is welcome to give feedback to the task force.

2) Volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must complete a background check, sign a Safe Sanctuary Participation Covenant (Appendix A), and attend initial and periodic training on FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures.

a. Background checks for FUMC Staff members and volunteers will be conducted through TRAK-1, utilizing the contract already in place with the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference. Costs for these background checks will be paid for by FUMC, as an expense of the annual budget.

b. All background checks will be kept confidential. Files containing background checks will be kept in a locked file with other personnel files in the Business Administrator's office.

c. Only the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor or Business Administrator will see the results of background checks. Other Staff members will receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children, youth and vulnerable adults.

d. Background checks must be renewed every two years.

e. Persons who have a negative background check will not be allowed to serve as volunteers with children, youth or vulnerable adults. This includes serving as teachers, group leaders, and helpers.

3) Prior to being assigned as a volunteer in any ministry program involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, volunteers will be interviewed by the Staff member in charge of the program. Volunteers who have not been attending FUMC for at least 6 months will usually begin as assistant leaders, rather than leaders in ministry programs.

4) Programs that are primarily sponsored by another organization (i.e. Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Upwards Sports programs, etc) but are being hosted at FUMC will be required to submit proof that all volunteers of that program have had a background check that is equivalent to the background check performed by TRAK-1. If volunteers have not had sufficient background checks, the organization must pay to have their volunteers screened before those volunteers can serve in the programs hosted at FUMC.

5) The FUMC Preschool will operate background checks and credentialing activities required by the Florida statutes. The preschool will maintain written operating procedures which will be reviewed by the Preschool Advisory Board to ensure Preschool policies are compliant with the FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy.

6). Classrooms or child care rooms should be open to visitation at any time without prior notice by staff, parents, or other volunteers. Classroom doors should have windows in them, be half-doors, or remain open while counseling or private meetings are ongoing.

7) A minimum of two non-related adults should be utilized in all programming with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. When it is impossible to staff activities with two non-related adults, there should be an additional adult serving as a floater with visual and physical access to all areas where programs involving children, youth or vulnerable adults take place. Additionally, all programs will strive to meet the following Florida State Codes for adult/child ratios, wherever feasible:

a) Birth – 1 year: 1 adult to 4 children

b) 1-2 years: 1 adult to 6 children

c) 2-3 years: 1 adult to 11 children

d) 3-4 years: 1 adult to 15 children

e) 4-5 years: 1 adult to 20 children

f) 5 years and older: 1 adult to 25 children

e) Mixed age groups: when children 2 years and older are in care, the adult-child ratio shall be based on the age group with the largest number of children within the group. In groups of mixed age ranges where children under 1 year are included, one adult shall be responsible for no more than 4 children of any age group.

8) The minimum age to serve as a primary leader of children's ministry activities is 18. To serve as a primary leader of youth activities the minimum age is 19, and the primary leader should be at least 4 years older than the youth for which he/she has primary responsibility. Assistants are those individuals who lend aid to a primary leader, and include camp counselors, vacation bible school helpers, Sunday school assistants, and children's church helpers. Assistants must be a minimum of 12 years old, must be competent to serve as an assistant (as judged by the supervising staff member); and must be at least four years older than the children or youth involved in the program area for which he/she serves as an assistant.

9) Children/youth attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parents and the staff person in charge.

a) Children will only be released to persons other than parents if the prior contact has occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.

b) Students who are old enough to drive to attend Youth Group activities will only be allowed to transport other students when prior contact has been made between the staff person in charge and the parents of the driving student and the passenger student.

10) Permission forms will be required for off-campus events involving children and youth. Blanket permission forms for on-going events, such as Wonderful Wednesdays and Thrillin' Thursdays are allowable, and will be kept with the staff person in charge of such events.

11) There will be at least two adults of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least two adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth. Adults will not share a bed with a student, and should not be alone in the room with a student at any time. For all overnight events, the following adult/student ratio should be followed as closely as possible:

- a) Grades 1-3: 1 adult to 8 students
- b) Grades 4-8: 1 adult to 10 students
- c) Grades 9-12: 1 adult to 12 students

12) When activities involve overnight stays at a motel/hotel, whenever possible a hotel with rooms opening to the interior (i.e. hallway) should be selected. If two adults can't be assigned to a room housing students, the students should be roomed separately from the adults, wherever reasonably practical.

13) When activities involve overnight stays in locations that involve open bunks, two adults of the same gender as the students may be housed in the open sleeping areas if there are not separate sleeping quarters available for the adults.

14) Hallway windows may not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.

15) At any counseling session with children, youth or vulnerable adults, any non-windowed door of the room used should remain open for the entire session. Counseling sessions should never be held in secret, even if the person being counseled makes that request. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

16) Staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults must be attentive to appropriate dress code, appropriate use of language, and appropriate demonstrations of affection and encouragement. Additionally, volunteers and staff should be aware of appropriate cyber conduct:

a) Maintain Christian principles when using social networking sites, especially when referencing FUMC events or communicating on social networking sites with children, youth or vulnerable adults.

b) When utilizing pictures and videos from FUMC events, no names should be posted for those under 18 years of age.

17) Any home visit of a child or youth should be conducted by two non-related adults unless the parents of the child or youth will be present during the visit. If a student drops by the home of an adult volunteer or staff member without a parent present, the visit should be conducted in the front yard, or moved to a public location. Any home visit of a vulnerable adult should be conducted by two non-related adults whenever reasonably practical to do so, if the adult lives alone and no family members or other caregivers will be present for the visit.

18) All drivers involved in programs for children, youth or vulnerable adults should be screened in the same manner as other volunteers. All drivers must comply with all requirements of FUMC vehicle usage established by the FUMC Board of Trustees. Wherever possible, two adults should be placed in each vehicle when transporting children, youth and vulnerable adults. Any staff member or volunteer transporting children, youth or vulnerable adults in his/her private vehicle must maintain appropriate insurance to cover any losses that may occur while he/she is transporting children, youth or vulnerable adults.

19) Sign-in/sign-out procedures are required for all ministries involving children. The Children's Minister will develop written procedures for handling sign-in and sign-out for the various activities involving children.

20) Children not signed into a children's program are the responsibility of their parents and must be attended by their parents. Children must be supervised at all time while on church property.

21) Parents who leave the church grounds while their children are signed into a children's ministry program must leave emergency contact information with the staff person or volunteer in charge of the program.

PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE

1) If a volunteer suspects that a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is the victim of abuse, that volunteer should report such suspicions to the staff member in charge of the program or to the Senior Pastor or Associate Pastor. All cases of suspected abuse must be reported to the Florida Abuse Hotline. Initial reports should NOT be made to the county/local branch of the Florida Department of Children and Families. The Florida Abuse Hotline may be reached at 1-800-96-

ABUSE. Reports may be faxed in, however, the preferred option for the FL Department of Children and Families is for persons to call the Florida Abuse Hotline and talk to a Hotline counselor.

2) The person reporting the suspected abuse will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances. The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will also make a written report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident.

3) The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

1) Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victim(s) and alleged perpetrator(s) while the allegation is investigated.

2) The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.

3) The parents/guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately, unless competent authorities (such as law enforcement/FL Department of Children and Families) direct otherwise.

4) All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.

5) All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.

6) All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.

7) The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the Church about the alleged incident.

8) The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will be the sole spokesperson for FUMC and the District Superintendent or his/her designee will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.

9) Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. The person accused will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

APPENDIX A

SAFE SANCTUARY PARTICIPANT COVENANT

This congregation is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by First United Methodist Church (FUMC). The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter.

*All volunteers who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults must complete a background check, sign a Participant Covenant and attend training on FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures.

*Persons who have a negative background check will not be allowed to serve as volunteers with children, youth or vulnerable adults. This includes serving as teachers, group leaders, and helpers.

* Prior to being assigned as a volunteer in any ministry involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, volunteers will be interviewed by the Staff member in charge of the program. Volunteers who have not been attending FUMC for at least 6 months will usually begin as assistant leaders, rather than leaders in ministry programs.

* Staff and Volunteers will abide by adult-child ratios adopted for various programs to the maximum extent possible.

* Staff and Volunteers will report suspicions of abuse to the Senior or Associate Pastor and abide by the Florida reporting requirements.

Please initial the following statements of covenant that you make as a Volunteer with FUMC:

- _____ 1. As a volunteer, I agree to observe and abide by all FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policies
- _____ 2. As a volunteer, I agree to submit to a background check, and attend training related to FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy
- _____ 3. As a volunteer, I agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to my supervising staff member, Senior Pastor, or Associate pastor.

As a volunteer, I pledge and covenant to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ at FUMC in ways that assure the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Name

Date