



Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures

Introduction

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution directed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the Church. Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in First United Methodist Church of China Grove.

Purpose

The First United Methodist Church's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuaries with Children and Youth Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

Statement of Covenant and Policy

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, First United Methodist Church pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as of all the workers with children and youth. First United Methodist church will follow reasonable procedures in all programs and events; will educate all of those who work with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policy, procedures, and methods; will have a clearly-defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident should occur. It is the policy of First United Methodist Church to provide all children and youth a safe and secure atmosphere to encourage the spiritual growth of children, youth, and those adults who are called to work with children and youth.

SAFE SANCTUARIES PROCEDURES

In furtherance of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, First United Methodist church adopts the procedures detailed below. These procedures are intended to provide a safe environment for youth, children, and adults and to protect all persons from unfounded allegations of misconduct. “Youth” or “Child” shall be deemed synonymous and shall be defined as any person less than eighteen (18) years of age for purposes of these procedures. “Adult” shall be defined as any person at least eighteen (18) years of age for the purposes of these procedures.

Procedures to Protect Children, Youth, and Adults during Church Activities

- “Two Adult” Rule - No fewer than two adults, one of whom may be a Roamer, shall be present during any church-sponsored program event, or ministry (activity or activities) in which children or youth participate. Roamer shall be defined as an adult who visits on a frequent and random schedule the area in which an activity is being held. It is preferred, but not required, that the two adults present at any activity be unrelated by blood or marriage. This procedure shall be followed during Sunday school classes, nursery activities, Bible study groups, youth fellowship, and all other youth and children’s activities.
- “Five-Years-Older” Rule - All adults who supervise activities for youth and children shall be at least five years older than the oldest child or youth supervised. This procedure DOES NOT prohibit adults who are less than five years older than the participating youth or children from participating as counselors or helpers for the activity. This rule DOES require the Two Adult Rule to be met by persons at least five years older than the children or youth participating in any activity.
- “Visibility” Rule - Windows shall be placed in doors of all rooms where youth or children’s activities are routinely held or are likely to be held. Windows shall be at least ten inches by ten inches. If a youth or children’s activity is held in any room not having a window in the door, the door to the room shall then remain open during all aspects of the activity.
- “Notice and Permission” Rule - Parents shall always be given advance notice and information regarding any activity in which their child will be participating other than ordinary Sunday School. Permission shall be required for any youth or children’s activity, including Sunday School class, that involves travel or is held other than in the First United Methodist church building or on its grounds. Parents may give a single “blanket permission” for standard activities of programs such as Vacation Bible School and United Methodist Youth Fellowship so long as the permission lists the anticipated activities of the program. It is recommended for any youth event that requires overnight travel to follow the Conference policy and procedures found on the web at:
<https://www.wnccumc.org/files/tables/content/12240479/fields/files/87be1f5c7b204491be6fd4f5c78ffa1d/wncc%2bsample%2bchurch%2bpolicy.pdf>

- Volunteers - All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been a member or active participant (i.e. involved in worship and a small group) of the church for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
- Accidents with Injuries: Any accident resulting in injuries to a child or youth shall be reported to the Senior Pastor and or/ the Chair of Trustees and an appropriate accident report form should be completed. Forms will be available in the church office.
- Other Individuals/Organizations: Individuals and/or organizations that use the facilities of First UMC are expected to follow the procedures when children are present on the property. The Trustees may choose to add additional restrictions to any of the above to provide additional protection to the property and/or assets of First UMC. Any individual and/or organization meeting on/in the facilities will be provided with a copy of this policy on request. Failure to follow the policy may result in that individual and/or organization no longer being able to use the facilities. The individuals or designated leaders of any organization using the church facilities are encouraged to attend any training event held for Safe Sanctuaries.

Procedures to Protect Children, Youth and Adults during Counseling

- “Privacy” Rule - A window has been placed in the door of the Pastor’s study and should be present in the door of any other room where pastoral counseling or consultation are common. It is recognized that there may be times when the Senior Pastor or staff member serving First United Methodist Church will find it necessary to protect the identity of the person or persons being counseled. Under these circumstances, the furnishings and seating shall be arranged so that the Pastor is visible through the window in the door but the youth, child, or adult being counseled may avoid visibility through the window in the door.
- “Open Door” Rule - Open doors shall be utilized for non-pastoral counseling of youth and children. It is preferred that such sessions take place where other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance. Pastoral counseling is expected to be confidential in nature so it is anticipated that such counseling will take place behind closed doors. It is preferred that a Pastor insure that pastoral counseling take place where and when other people are nearby even though not within hearing distance.
- Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries- All staff members and volunteers working with children and youth shall establish appropriate interpersonal boundaries between themselves and those they supervise. This includes communications using current communication technologies such as e-mails, cell phones, and texting and *social media*.
- Cyber Technologies: All staff members and volunteers shall monitor any access of children and youth to church internet usage, church computers and other technologies. This will include any new technologies that the church may add at later dates. The church website shall be monitored so as to protect children and youth identities from online inquiries.

Procedures for Background Checks for Staff Members and/or Volunteers

- Background Checks - All staff members and volunteers in a position that involves supervision of youth and children's activities shall submit to criminal record checks as permitted by the North Carolina General Statutes. Within ninety (90) days following the date of adoption of these procedures, the Senior Pastor shall ensure that criminal record checks have been obtained for all such current staff members and volunteers. Thereafter, the Senior Pastor shall insure that a criminal records check is obtained on each prospective staff member and volunteer prior to his or her approval for any staff or volunteer position involving supervision of youth or children's activities. Background checks for all staff and volunteers shall be renewed every 3 years.
- ~~Application - All prospective staff members and volunteers shall complete an appropriate application form approved by the Staff Parish Committee and Senior Pastor.~~
- References - All prospective staff members who will supervise youth or children's activities shall provide references to the Senior Pastor. The Senior Pastor shall ensure that the references are provided to the Staff-Parish Committee. The Staff-Parish Committee shall be responsible for checking the references and reporting the results to the Senior Pastor. References may also be obtained for volunteers as needed or deemed necessary.

Procedures for Training Staff and Adult Volunteers

- First Aid/CPR Certification - The staff and volunteers of the church who supervise children or youth shall be strongly encouraged to obtain and maintain First Aid/CPR certification from the American Red Cross or similar organization.
- Pledge Covenant Form - Each staff member and volunteer shall be provided with a copy of the "Safe Sanctuary Policy" and shall sign a pledge covenant form to follow this policy and these procedures prior to being permitted to supervise any activities for youth and/or children. In the event of policy or procedure changes in this document, all staff and volunteers will within 30 days of the adoption of such changes be given training that incorporates such changes. It will be the responsibility of the Senior Pastor to arrange such training.
- Periodic Training and Educational Program - The Senior Pastor shall ensure that a training program is offered as needed to staff members and volunteers who work with children and youth. Additionally, each year volunteers who work with children and youth will be given a current copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy (if needed) and asked to sign a statement that they have read and agree to follow the policies and procedures outlined in it.

Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse

All persons, as an employee or a volunteer of children and youth HAVE a responsibility to REPORT any actual or suspected abuse or neglect, past or present, anywhere in the person's life including at church, home, school, the park, or in the community. North Carolina is a mandatory report state. We will report to the state authorities and local authorities any case of SUSPECTED child abuse toward a minor/vulnerable person.

We radically love others, because our Lord loved us first, therefore our procedure for reporting and our plan of response is designed to promote safety for all children of God.

- Receipt and Communication of Allegation - Any person who receives a complaint alleging that a child or youth has been subjected to physical, sexual, emotional, or other abuse by a First United Methodist Church volunteer or staff member, other than the Senior Pastor, shall immediately communicate the complaint to the Senior Pastor. If the Senior Pastor is named as the offender in the complaint, then the complaint shall be immediately communicated to the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee. The Senior Pastor or the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall communicate the complaint to the District Superintendent as soon as practical after the complaint is received. A "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form shall be completed by the person who received the complaint or observed the incident to ensure that as much correct information is shared as possible with the correct persons.
- Notification of Department of Social Services - The Senior Pastor or Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall communicate the complaint to the Rowan County Department of Social Services as required by the North Carolina General Statutes.
- Media Releases - If any complaint comes to the attention of the media, then only the Senior Pastor, District Superintendent, or their designee will make releases of information to the media.
- Notification of Insurer - The Senior Pastor or Chairperson of the Staff Parish Committee shall communicate the complaint to the insurance carrier providing liability insurance for First United Methodist Church as soon as practical after any complaint is received.
- Cessation of Contact - Any person named as an alleged offender in a complaint shall immediately be required to cease any contact with children or youth through First United Methodist Church activities. The alleged offender may resume activities with youth and children at such time as the District Superintendent, Senior Pastor, and Staff-Parish Committee shall deem it appropriate.