

Fayetteville First United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Introduction

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. This resolution was expanded to include vulnerable adults and now is included in the 2008 Book of Discipline, Paragraph 256. 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 state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse" (§ 162C).

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 within 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-2000, pp. 180-181. Copyright © 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.]

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Policy Definitions

- Children – Birth through age 12
- Youth – Ages 13 through 18
- Vulnerable Adult – May be a person age 18 or older who is mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged and is unable to make responsible legal decisions about his or her own welfare. May also be elderly, defined as age 65 and older.

Policy and Procedures

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 our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as those who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

We will:

- follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers
- 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)
- have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law
- implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events
- be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs

I. Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff

All staff applicants for age-level ministries will be required to:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Fill out, sign, and submit an application for a Criminal Background Check
- Fill out and submit an application form, including three character references
- Be interviewed by the Staff Parish Relations Committee or the appropriate ministry team

All volunteer applicants for age-level ministries will be required to:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be a member of this congregation for at least six months
 - Special arrangements can be made for those transferring from another United Methodist Church*
- Fill out, sign, and submit an application for a Criminal Background Check
- Fill out and submit an application form, including three character references
- Be interviewed by the appropriate ministry team

II. Education and Training of Paid and Volunteer Staff

Periodic trainings will be held for all staff and volunteer workers. These trainings will educate workers on all policies and procedures of the church's Safe Sanctuaries policy. It will also provide education on current abuse prevention measures and guidelines including but not limited to types of abuse, current facts about child, youth, and elder abuse, and useful references and resources.

First Aid and CPR training will be held at least once a year at the church. All paid staff that work with children and youth, including paid nursery workers, Preschool, and Mother's Morning Out staff will be required to have up-to-date certification.

A. Facts of Note

1. Child Abuse happens in our world, in our country, and in our community. Over 3 million reports of child abuse are made every year in the United States; however, those reports can include multiple children. In 2007, approximately 5.8 million children were involved in an estimated 3.2 million child abuse reports and allegations.
 - i. Studies estimate that 1 in every 3 girls and 1 in 7 boys are sexually abused by age 18. The numbers may be underestimated since many children are reluctant to report abuse.
2. Abuse of vulnerable adults is often committed by family members or caregivers. Over 1 million cases are reported each year, 67% of those are women. 53% of the abusers are women.

B. Why the Church Needs a Policy in Place

1. The church is at risk. Churches behave as relatively trusting organizations, trusting leaders to behave appropriately. In the past, churches have not properly screened volunteers and employees who work with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This creates windows of opportunity for abusers as the churches routinely provide and encourage opportunities for close contact and for close personal relationships with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
2. We must implement prevention strategies to keep children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe as well as to protect our workers from false allegations of abuse.

C. Types of Abuse

1. Physical – Deliberate or intentional bodily harm, non-accidental
2. Sexual – Non-sensual sexual contact between child and adult, or adults, such as fondling, intercourse, incest, pornographic exploitation or exposure
3. Emotional – Infliction of mental anguish by threat, intimidation, or humiliation-spoken and/or unspoken, violence or emotional cruelty
4. Neglect – Endangering an individual's health, safety, or welfare
5. Ritual – Regular, intentional physical, sexual or psychological violations of an individual to appeal to a higher authority or power
6. Financial Abuse or Exploitation – Unauthorized use of funds or property belonging to elder by force, illegal means, or misrepresentation
7. Bullying – Aggressive behavior that is intentional, repeated over time, and involves an imbalance of power or strength. Bullying can take on various forms, including:
 - i. Physical bullying
 - ii. Verbal bullying
 - iii. Non-verbal bullying
 - iv. Cyberbullying – the intentional and overt act of aggression toward another person by way of any technology
8. Physical Abuse

D. Indicators of Abuse

- i. Hostility and aggression towards others
- ii. Destructive behavior toward self, others, and/or property
- iii. Unexplainable fractures or bruises – particularly on upper arms (from being shaken) or around wrists/ankles (from being tied down)

- iv. Fearfulness of parents and/or other adults
- v. Burns, facial injuries, head trauma
- 2. Emotional Abuse
 - i. Depression and/or withdrawal
 - ii. Lack of self esteem
 - iii. Threatens or attempts suicide
 - iv. Speech and/or eating disorders
 - v. Extreme passive/aggressive behavior
 - vi. Excessively seeks adult approval
- 3. Neglect
 - i. Failure to thrive – malnutrition
 - ii. Inappropriate dress for climate
 - iii. Chronic hunger – begs or steals food
 - iv. Depression
 - v. Untreated medical conditions
 - vi. Poor hygiene
 - vii. Signs of being over- or under-medicated
- 4. Sexual Abuse
 - i. Advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior
 - ii. Depression
 - iii. Promiscuous behavior
 - iv. Difficulty sitting or walking
 - v. Bruising/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas
 - vi. Frequent headaches and/or stomach aches, extreme fatigue
 - vii. Sexually transmitted, diseases
- 5. Ritual Abuse
 - i. Disruptions of memory
 - ii. Unexplained mistrust and mood swings
 - iii. Flashbacks
 - iv. Fear of dark
 - v. Nightmares or sleep disorders
 - vi. Any of the sexual abuse symptoms
- 6. Financial Abuse or Exploitation
 - i. Evidence that assets are being mismanaged
 - ii. Evidence that financial access granted to an untrustworthy caregiver
 - iii. Person complains of home furnishings or check book missing or other items cannot be found
- E. Signs that Abuse Occurred at Church
 - 1. Unusual anxiety about going to Sunday School
 - 2. Reluctance to participate in activities that were previously enjoyed
 - 3. Comments that one does not want to be alone with a given person
 - 4. Nightmares of a frightening experience with a worker
 - 5. Unexplained hostility toward a worker

III. Reporting Procedures

According to the Georgia Law, the purpose of reporting child abuse is to “provide protection of children whose health and welfare are adversely affected and further threatened by the conduct of those responsible for their care and protection.” Mandated reporters include child service

organization personnel. Anyone making a report in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability.

A. Accident Reports

1. Accidents must be reported when an unintentional act occurs and an individual is hurt. Injuries that occur onsite must be documented on the *Accident Report Form*.
 - i. When injury occurs, provide first aid to the level necessary, including a call to 911.
 - ii. As soon as possible, complete an *Accident Report Form*, available from staff members or found online on the Forms page of our website.
 - iii. Give the completed form to a member of the church staff who will then submit it to the Administrative Director.
 - iv. Staff may follow-up with the parents within 24 hours, if appropriate.

B. Incident Reports

1. When an action is observed that does not require reporting to DFCS, but does require attention, an incident report is filed. Actions may include but are not limited to inappropriate behavior by adults, parents, or children. Although the behavior may not rise to the level of abuse, the behavior must be addressed by the church staff.
2. Anyone can fill out an incident report if they observe inappropriate behavior towards a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by a parent, caregiver, or worker.
3. *Incident Report Forms* are available from staff members or found online on the Forms page of our website.
 - i. Fill out form immediately following the observed incident and file with the appropriate member of the ministry staff stating observations and reactions.
 - ii. Ministry staff will contact the person on whom the report was filed and will follow up with support, alternative behaviors for future interaction, or warning. Further action will be taken if warranted and the resolution will be documented.
4. All incident reports will be kept on file so that if the behavior occurs again, additional steps, including contacting authorities or dismissal from position may be taken.

C. Suspected Abuse

1. When one sees, has been told of, or suspects a child, youth, or vulnerable adult has been abused, he or she must file a *Report of Suspected Incident of Abuse Form*.
 - i. Report suspicions and submit form to the appropriate member of the ministry staff.
 - ii. The ministry staff will contact his or her supervisor to discuss the appropriateness of a referral to Child Protective Services. The Senior Pastor will be notified.
 - iii. If a referral is made, the Senior Pastor will contact the District Superintendent and the insurance company. The reporter, with support from the ministry staff, will call the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse.
 - iv. If the decision is made that the incident does not rise to the level of abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.
 - v. The family shall receive immediate ministerial support from FFUMC. Support will also be provided for the abuser and the abuser's family if needed.

All information will be kept confidential and church staff, both paid and volunteer, will talk only with the appropriate authorities.

IV. Operational Procedures

The following procedures shall be in place to reduce the risk of abuse in programs for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

On Site Standards:

1. There will be two adults present in each classroom. If only one adult is available, the classroom door should remain open and a “floater” should pass by periodically.
2. Rooms where children or youth are gathered should have a window in the door or half-door open when children or youth are present. If there is not a window or half-door, the door should remain open.
3. All nursery workers, paid and volunteer, must be at least eighteen years old. Teens under eighteen years of age may assist in an activity but may not be in charge of a room. Two adults must still be present.
4. Workers should be at least five years older than the children or youth they are supervising.
5. Volunteers must have been active for six months in the church, have a reference from a staff member at the current church, have a reference from a staff member at his or her previous church, or be paired with a certified worker.
6. Age appropriate check-in and release procedures will be followed as designed by the ministry staff for each program area.
7. All adults will observe appropriate touch procedures. Never be the first to hug and always be the first to let go. If comforting a child by hugging, ask permission first. Touch only areas that would not be covered by a bathing suit.
8. When a last-minute substitute is needed, reasonable effort will be made to select one from a list of volunteers who have been cleared through Safe Sanctuaries.
9. Parents should receive advance information about the event that their child/youth is attending. This information may be given through handouts, mailings, emails, and/or the church website.
10. When working with vulnerable adults, it is necessary to have proper family contact information in case of an emergency as well as medical information including but not limited to medical conditions, medicines, living will, etc. This information can be kept confidentially in a sealed envelope only to be opened in the case of an emergency.

Off Site Standards:

1. Written permission must be obtained from a parent before the child/youth leaves with an individual or a group on a church sponsored event. Emergency contact information must be provided.
2. Adequate supervision must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc. The adult to child ratio will be 1:5 and the adult to youth ratio 1:8.
3. Gender ratio of leaders shall be in line with gender ratio of children and/or youth.
4. Trip information, including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure and return times, must be provided to the parents before departing.
5. If personal vehicles are used to transport youth to off-site location, at least two children/youth should be present, and the youth may not be permitted to drive.
6. When sleeping away from home, in a hotel setting, no adult may sleep in the same room as youth. Creative monitoring should be pre-planned and carried out. Two same-gender adults may sleep in a room with several children/youth in a bunk setting.
7. When working with vulnerable adults, it is necessary to have proper family contact information in case of an emergency as well as medical information including but not limited to medical conditions, medicines, living will, etc. This information can be kept confidentially in a sealed envelope only to be opened in the case of an emergency.

Diapering and Restroom Activity Standards

1. When a diaper is being changed, two adults should be present. Diapering should occur in a visible area.
2. When working with preschool children and a toilet adjoins the room in use, the teacher may supervise, and the door must be slightly ajar. If there has been an accident and the worker needs to assist a child with changing clothes, pull-ups, or clean up, two adults must be present and a parent notified if further cleaning is necessary.
3. When working with elementary age children, tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom. Take more than one child at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible. Inform the other adult when you have returned.
4. When taking children to a hall bathroom, inspect each bathroom before sending children inside. Women may check both the men and women's bathrooms, but men may only check the men's bathroom.

Discipline Standards

Under no circumstances should paid or volunteer staff administer corporal punishment.

V. Media Inquiries

There shall be only one designated representative from the church to talk with the media.

VI. Social Media Guidelines

In recent years, electronic communication and social media platforms have become increasingly popular. While these tools provide many benefits, they also present the potential for inappropriate behavior, increased access to the vulnerable, and privacy violations. Employees, volunteers, and others participating in this organization's programs, events, and activities shall adhere to the following Social Media Code of Conduct:

1. Do not engage in behavior or comments that are, or could be construed by any observer to be, harsh, abusive, coercive, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.
2. Do not engage in personal attacks, sexually oriented conversations, or discussions about sexual activity.
3. Be a positive role model by exhibiting professionalism in all interactions; portray an attitude of respect, loyalty, patience, courtesy, tact, and maturity.
4. Only program-related messaging may be communicated electronically between employees and volunteers, parents, and guardians. Such communication should generally occur during standard business hours.
5. Never reveal sensitive or confidential information, including identifiable details or photos without written consent from their parent or legal guardian.
6. Employees and volunteers may not post or share inappropriate photos or comments on photos of members.
7. Do not make pornography in any form available to anyone participating in the organization's programs, events, and activities or assist in any way in gaining access to pornography.
8. Employees and volunteers may not create web pages on behalf of the church unless they have prior approval to do so and may not misrepresent their work with the church.
9. Employees and volunteers engaging in social media and online communication become a public figure associated with the church and are responsible to help protect the church and its members. Always act in a professional and constructive manner and use sound judgement before posting or sharing content.

10. Rather than personally defend the church's reputation, employees and volunteers should notify their supervisor or an administrator of a negative comment or online representation or if any member of the media contacts them about any matter related to the church.
11. This Code of Conduct and associated policies and procedures shall be provided to parents/guardians of children and youth. It shall also be available on the organization's website for public view.
12. Parents/guardians may request in writing that a member not be contacted through any form of electronic communication or social media by an employee or volunteer of the church.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, 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, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).