

SAFE SANCTUARIES

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church

First United Methodist Church Huntington, West Virginia

OUR POLICY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN, YOUTH AND
VULNERABLE ADULTS

PREAMBLE

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the children come to me.” Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for First Church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected.¹ Often abuse occurs in settings where children, youth or vulnerable adults should have been able to feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and most sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.

The purpose of this policy is to protect all the children that come to us, to protect vulnerable adults, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of First Church.

Presented herein is our plan which includes, what we believe to be, all the areas of the issue: **Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan.**

These delineated policies are the MINIMUM necessary precautions for protecting children. First Church will endeavor to monitor updates and recommendations by The United Methodist Church and may modify these procedures. This policy shall be reviewed and updated by the Christian Education and Discipleship Ministry Team on a yearly basis.

This policy was approved, by the First United Methodist Church Administrative Council on July 29, 2007.

DEFINITIONS:

“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child abuse” as defined under West Virginia Child Protective Services Law means any of the following:

- i. Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age.**
- ii. An act or failure to act by a perpetrator, which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.**
- iii. Any recent act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator, which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.**
- iv. Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child’s life or development or impairs the child’s functioning.**

No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child’s welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.

“Child” means any person under the age of 18.

“Vulnerable adults” for the purposes of this policy will be adults whose mental or physical condition makes them susceptible to abuse.

“Children’s activities” means any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

“Ministry Team Leader” means any person who supervises a children’s activity. This person has regular and direct contact with children, must be 21 years or older and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Volunteer” means any adult, who assists in conducting children’s activities under the supervision of a staff person and/or Ministry Team Leader, has regular

and direct contact with children, is 18 years or older, and is counted in the 2-adult rule.

“Helper” means anyone who aids in ministry and is not counted in the 2-adult rule including a youth ages 11 - 17.

“Persons required to report child abuse” means persons, who, in the course of their involvement with First Church as ministry team leaders, volunteers, staff or administrators, come into contact with children or vulnerable adults.

“We”, “Us”, “Our” and **“Our Church”** means the First United Methodist Church of Huntington, West Virginia.

SCREENING PROCEDURES:

Careful **screening** is one way to prevent the abuse of children and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children.

- 1. All Staff, Ministry Team Leaders and volunteers who have regular and direct contact with children and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Volunteer Screening Form that shall include but is not limited to:**
 - a. Standard contact information**
 - b. Experience and qualifications for the position**
 - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history**
 - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church or non-church organization to secure the background checks necessary for the position being applied for**
 - e. Listing of three (3) non-related references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.**
 - f. A completed WV Request for Criminal Record Check dated less than one year prior to the application**
 - g. For First Church children’s ministries, persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with First Church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a any role in children’s activities. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the hiring supervisor will replace the six-month waiting period.**
- 2. Persons who have a break in service of one or more years shall submit to screening procedures. First Church reserves**

the option to repeat background checks of persons who have had five (5) or more years of service.

- 3. All forms and reference reports shall be kept in a secure location as a part of an applicant's confidential personnel file which the Pastor shall maintain. Detailed notes, on a designated form, shall be used for all reference checks, and shall be included in the personnel file. All applications and related forms must be completed prior to being allowed to supervise or assist in any children's activities.**
- 4. Upon written request of the Pastor, any non-church sponsored program, conducted at First Church, shall provide copies of all documents demonstrating adherence to the intent of this policy.**
- 5. The Director of Christian Education is responsible for reviewing this policy with each applicant during an interview prior to service.**
- 6. The Pastor and the Director of Christian Education reserve the right to withhold approval of volunteer status on a case by case basis.**
- 7. Volunteers not granted approval by the Pastor and the Director of Christian Education are eligible to appeal this decision through the Staff Parish Relations Committee.**

SUPERVISION:

Supervision procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children or vulnerable adults and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations. Again, these are MINIMUM standards and each children's activity may adopt more stringent requirements as necessary

- 1. Training is a requirement for all Staff persons, Ministry Team Leader and Volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults in church activities. An educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries Program will be part of the Application Packet and Interview. Thereafter, the minimum training would be an orientation that includes information regarding this Policy, procedures for supervision, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse.**
- 2. At least two unrelated adults should be present for each function and in each classroom or other enclosed area during any activity involving children, youth or vulnerable adults. When two adult workers are not available at all times in a room during church sponsored programs involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the interior door shall remain open unless there is an interior window allowing visibility into the room. Every effort should be**

made to ensure that at no time will a child, youth or vulnerable adult be alone with an unrelated adult.

3. The volunteers who will be present and assume primary responsibility for a church sponsored program involving children, youth or vulnerable adults, shall be at least 18 years old, Safe Sanctuaries trained, and have a completed background check on file. During Sunday Worship and Sunday School, adult workers must be present, and be at least 18 years old . For church sponsored programs involving youth, the adult worker, who will be present and assume primary responsibility shall be at least 21 years old.
4. All volunteers in Christian Education shall be a part of the First Church family and attend worship consistently for at least six months.
5. All adult workers shall attend a Safe Sanctuaries orientation, agree to a background check, and have completed Safe Sanctuaries forms on file in the church office prior to their program involvement. All workers shall participate in a Safe Sanctuaries workshop at least once each year.
6. All volunteers will receive appropriate annual training on the policies and procedures associated with Safe Sanctuaries as defined by First Church and the WV United Methodist Conference.
7. ALL volunteers will complete an annual renewal form during each year of active service in ministries involving children, youth or vulnerable adults.
8. To ensure children's safety, parents are expected to accompany preschool and elementary aged children into the building and to release them into the care of the adult leader of the program or activity. Children up to grade 5 will only be released from the event or classroom to a parent, guardian, or responsible relative with the parent's expressed permission. Children will not be released from a classroom or event to wait for transportation or to find a parent.
9. The parents of children and youth participating in church-sponsored programs will be given advance notice of all expected activities for those programs. Parents will be provided with advance notice of variations in usual schedules and activities.
10. Youth who participate in certain off-site (more than 50 miles one-way) or overnight activities are required to have a completed Emergency Medical Treatment Authorization on file, plus a parental permission slip specific to the event.

At least two screened and trained adults must provide oversight for any off-site activity.

- 11. Volunteers who regularly transport children, youth or vulnerable adults should have a good driving record and must agree to a DMV check. Under no circumstances will one child be alone in a vehicle with an unrelated adult. Two unrelated adults must be in each vehicle for off-site activities involving elementary age or younger children.**
- 12. Discipline will be in accordance with the policy sheet “*Discipline Procedures for Children’s Ministries*”. There will be no use of corporal punishment, or techniques intended to humiliate or frighten any child.**
- 13. In order to provide activities that are meaningful in a wholesome, orderly environment it is important for activities to be limited to the age group for which they are intended.**
- 14. When volunteers or staff are required to change diapers, they shall do so in an open area.**
- 15. When a child is being supervised in the restroom, the restroom door should be left open, even if just slightly. If a "potty" accident occurs which requires the assistance of an adult, a second adult must be nearby during the clean-up and a parent should be informed.**
- 16. All ministry team leaders and volunteers shall sign a participation covenant. This covenant can be in the form of clear, posted or printed rules that are explained to the participants at the outset of the program.**

REPORTING:

Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner.

- 1. The Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer, Helper, or Staff Person, who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported is required to report the incident immediately to the person in charge of the children’s activity.**
- 2. The person in charge of the children’s activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately attempt to obtain necessary information. That information shall include the names and personal information of the alleged victim and witnesses, and general information concerning the nature of the abuse. The person in charge of the children’s activity should not interview or question the alleged abuser.**

- 3. Upon receiving such information, the person in charge of the children's activity will immediately contact either the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education and relay all information to them.**
- 4. The Pastor or the Director of Christian Education shall immediately call Child Protective Services (CPS) to initiate the reporting process, according to CPS policy. This line of reporting shall be followed in all such incidents.**
- 5. Any person who is the object of the report will be contacted by the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education and directed to refrain from all children's activities until the incident report is resolved.**
- 6. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.**

RESPONSE PLAN:

A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies. In cases in which medical care may be needed, protecting the safety and health of the child will be of first priority. Proper response could include, but is not limited to, contacting emergency services or transporting the child to a medical facility.

- 1. Our Pastor, or his/her designee, is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor.**
- 2. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.**
- 3. In response to all allegations of child abuse, either the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education shall make the initial contact with Child Protective Services.**
- 4. If the allegation is against a Staff Person, Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer or Helper or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee shall be contacted immediately.**
- 5. In the event that the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to First Church related event or activity, then procedures according to West Virginia Code shall be followed. An example would be a child confiding in his Sunday School teacher that he had been abused by an adult in his neighborhood. In any case,**

the adult, to whom abuse has been reported has the moral, if not legal, obligation to report the alleged incident directly to CPS

- 6. When an allegation has been made, the custodial parent or guardian will be notified immediately by the Pastor and a face-to-face meeting will be scheduled.**
- 7. In either case, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.**

REFERENCES:

¹ Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998) Rev. Melton is an ordained deacon the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church who is both a Christian educator and a lawyer. Discipleship Resources. P.O. Box 840 Nashville, TN 37202-0840, www.discipleshipresources.org. Also available from Cokesbury Bookstores, www.cokesbury.com.

² Ibid.

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Discipline Procedures for Children's Ministries

First United Methodist Church's Children's Ministries takes a positive approach to discipline based on the Christian principle, "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. 7:12)

Classroom teachers/leaders can facilitate the development of responsibility, self-regulation and self-control in children by:

- Setting clear, consistent and fair limits for classroom behavior.
- Encouraging appropriate behavior, patiently reminding children of rules and their rationale as needed.
- Using children's mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Anticipating and eliminating potential problems.
- Redirecting children to a more acceptable behavior or activity.
- Deflecting problems before they become conflicts
- Modeling appropriate and acceptable behavior.
- Listening and acknowledging the feelings and frustrations of children with respect.

There will be no use of corporal punishment, or techniques intended to humiliate or frighten any child.

Time-outs are discouraged because children need to learn to work out their problems, not be isolated from them.

Food or beverage is never withheld as a discipline device.

If discipline issues become common for a child, the volunteer should request a conference with the parent and the program staff responsible for the particular ministry.

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Participation Covenant Statement for Persons Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The congregation of First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as the volunteers and staff who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. 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 and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should volunteer to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults in any church-sponsored activity.
2. Volunteers who may have questions or concerns regarding their ability or suitability for a particular area of ministry (including physical limitations, temperament, or a personal history of abuse) are encouraged to discuss these concerns with the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education.
3. All adult volunteers involved with children, youth or vulnerable adults of our church are expected to be regular participants of First Church during their ministry.
4. Adult volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall observe all church policies regarding children's, youth and adult ministries.
5. Adult volunteers with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall have a completed Screening Form and background check, attend a Safe Sanctuaries training and other regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
6. Adult volunteers shall immediately report any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate to the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education.

Please answer each of the following questions:

As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to complete the screening form, background check and to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?

Yes No

As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to the Pastor or the Director of Christian Education?

Yes No

As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults?

Yes No

As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to inform the minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse?

Yes No

Have you ever been convicted of child abuse?

Yes No

I have read this **Participation Covenant**, and agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Print full name

After the volunteer has signed this document, make a copy of both sides, give one copy to the volunteer and place the original in their Safe Sanctuaries file.
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Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures

Annual Renewal Form

I have already completed and signed a Safe Sanctuaries Volunteer application and have submitted it to the church office. With this signature I agree that I have read over the policy again and accept the policy and procedures as stated on this day.

Signature

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