

First United Methodist Church

Stuart, Florida

Safe Sanctuaries Church Policy



2/09

Introduction & Overview

Summary of Issues:

Because the tragedy of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is a reality in our world, and because we recognize our responsibility to ensure a safe and protected environment for our children, First United Methodist Church of Stuart, Florida has developed this policy and associated guidelines to reduce the risk of abuse of children and youth in our church.

Jesus made the importance of children clear when he said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." Emulating his example, FUMC has grown to be an important place for nurturing children and youth in faith. This policy attempts to prayerfully and faithfully identify areas of risk and take steps to reduce that risk. This local church policy is in compliance with the 1996 mandate of the United Methodist Church. This policy and the guidelines herein are to be followed by all persons, ministries and programs dealing with children, youth (under age 18) and vulnerable adults.

Mandate for the Church:

From Scripture:

Matthew 18: 5-7 NRSV

"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, 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. Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks! Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!"

From Tradition:

- The United Methodist Hymnal Baptismal Covenant
- From The United Methodist Discipline:
 - Refer to The Book of Resolutions 1996, pages 384-386,
"Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in the Church"
- From The Council of Bishops' Episcopal Initiative on Children and Poverty:
 - "A Church for All God's Children," 1996 – 2004.

Resources:

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church, Joy T. Melton (Discipleship Resources 1998)

Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries, Joy T. Melton (Discipleship Resources 2003)

Safe Sanctuaries for Children & Youth, Joy T. Melton (Discipleship Resources 2008)

Out of the Basement: A holistic approach to Children's Ministry, Diane C. Olsen (Discipleship Resources 2001)

Children's Ministry Volunteers that Stick, Jim Wideman (Group Publishing 2004)

Job Descriptions & Leadership Training for Local Church Leaders 2005-2008 (Discipleship Resources)

Scope of the Problem:

When we think seriously about the promise we make in the baptismal service, we can only conclude that we are truly called to prevent child abuse in our churches. As Christians we are called to move beyond grieving about the issue to active efforts to eliminate the possibility of child abuse everywhere, and most especially in our churches.

Types of Child Abuse: Physical (battery, shaking, kicking, choking, "non-accidental"), Emotional (spoken or unspoken violence or cruelty), Neglect (endangers child's safety, health, and welfare), Sexual (fondling, intercourse, incest, exploitation and/or exposure to pornography or prostitution), Ritual (regularly and intentionally inflicted, possibly done with an appeal to a higher power).

It Can Happen Anywhere: The child victim is never responsible for causing the abuse, and is never to be blamed. The child victim is never capable of consent to abusive behavior. Child sexual abuse is ALWAYS wrong and is solely the responsibility of the abuser.

Knowing the Facts: Studies have estimated that 1 out of 3 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18. Estimates state that 1 out of 7 boys are sexually abused, but the actual number may be higher because of a reluctance to report occurrences.

The Church at Risk: The risk for churches is especially high because we're seen as "trusting organizations", and are always in need of additional volunteers. Furthermore, churches routinely provide opportunities for close contact with children.

Indicators of Child Abuse: Children showing anxiety about coming to church or being left in a class or program, or reluctance to participate when he/she had previously been enthusiastic may be an indicator of abusive behaviors. Abused children may have fears of specific individuals, experience nightmares, or show hostility.

Abusers: Who Are They?: Less than 20% are strangers – 93% of victims know their abuser. People who abuse children look and act just like everyone else. Those who sexually abuse children are drawn to settings where they can gain easy access to children, such as sports leagues, faith centers, clubs and schools.

How Does Abuse Happen?: Children are vulnerable, the abuser is powerful; without a comprehensive strategy against abuse, we are taking a needless risk that harm may be done to our children or our workers with children. Strategies must be supported by the entire congregation and applied to each worker involved in children's ministries. We need to think carefully about the safety of any one-adult/one-child situations. Look for group situations where possible. Set an example by personally avoiding one-adult/one-child situations with children other than your own.

Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse: Many victims are created, including the child, the congregation, the child's family, and often the family of the abuser. Of foremost importance is the child who has been harmed; he or she must be cared for. The congregation's wounds may continue well beyond litigation – that doesn't provide healing among the members. Litigation can go on for two or more years. Financial consequences are somewhere around \$750,000 if innocent/at least \$1-2 million if proven guilty. No congregation can afford, financially, ethically, or morally, to fail to implement strategies for the reduction and prevention of child sexual abuse.

Minimizing Opportunity for Abuse: If you eliminate or reduce one-adult/one-child situations, you'll dramatically lower the risk of sexual abuse for your child. Expect programs to perform careful screening and background checks on all persons working with children. Youth-serving organizations should have policies in place for dealing with suspicious situations and reports of abuse. Furthermore, these organizations should regularly train their staff to prevent, recognize and react responsibly to child sexual abuse.

Basic Procedures for Safe Ministry with Children and Youth

All church children and youth programs should adhere to the following basic procedural guidelines.

- The "Two-Adult" Rule: 2 adults should be present at all times. At least one adult must be over 18.

Avoid all one-adult/one-child situations, such as closed-door bathroom breaks.

Simple stated, the "Two-Adult Rule" requires no fewer than two adults present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children. Risk will be reduced even more if the two adults are not related. The nursery is always attended by at least two adults. A Sunday School class for children is always led by at least two adults. A Bible study group for youth is always taught by at least two adults. The youth fellowship group is always staffed with at least two adult counselors/leaders.

The significance of this rule cannot be overstated. A church will drastically reduce the possibility of an incident of child abuse if this rule is followed. Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation, and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have a chance to be alone with potential victims, they quickly lose interest in "working" with children.

Even small churches can adhere to this rule by using assigned adult "roamers" who move in and out of rooms.

- First Aid/CPR Trained personnel available at all times.

- Annual Orientation: to remind all volunteers and paid staff of appropriate behavior; accepted policies and procedures.

All workers with children and youth, whether the workers are paid, volunteer, part-time, full-time, clergy, or lay, should be required to attend an orientation session in which they are informed of the

- church's policies for the prevention of child abuse.
- Procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth.
- Appropriate steps to report an incident of child abuse.
- Details of the state laws regarding child abuse.

- The "Five-Years-Older" Rule: Adults should be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth. Workers must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth they will be leading.

- We will not be putting children in charge of children. This invites problems.

While in some situations they may provide excellent help, Youth volunteer workers should not be assigned as a sole leader or worker in any VBS setting. An adult should be assigned the group leader with the youth assigned as a helper. Youth helpers may be used in snacks (kitchen), room setup/cleanup, drama skits, games or in the music room.

- Un-shaded windows in all classroom doors.

Each room set aside for children and youth should have a door with a window in it or a half door. A window in every door removes the opportunity for secrecy or isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks. A half door offers protection against children wandering outside the classroom and allows for full visual access.

- Open-door counseling.

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session if the door has no window in it. Ideally, the session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance. Counseling sessions conducted behind closed doors are a breeding ground for false allegations of abuse.

- Advance notice to parents about program events and activities.

- Parent and family education about abuse and the components of First United Methodist Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

- Appropriate equipment and supervision for the setting and activity. Some settings or activities will require more supervision or expertise than others.

- An allegation or suspicion of child abuse, as previously defined in this policy (Physical (battery, shaking, kicking, choking, "non-accidental"), Emotional (spoken or unspoken violence or cruelty), Neglect (endangers child's safety, health, and welfare), Sexual (fondling, intercourse, incest, exploitation and/or exposure to pornography or prostitution), Ritual (regularly and intentionally inflicted, possibly done with an appeal to a higher power), should immediately be reported to the Director of Children & Family Ministry or the Director of Youth Ministry or to the Senior Pastor. (See attached form for reporting documentation). Church staff will follow Florida United Methodist Conference protocol and the State of Florida guidelines for reporting. In the case of an event involving media and First United Methodist Church, only the Senior Pastor will respond to media, unless someone else is designated by the Senior Pastor.

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When an allegation of abuse of any child, youth or vulnerable adult is made against a worker, member, other child or other youth, we must be prepared to do the following:

- Notify the parents of the victim and take any necessary steps to assure his or her safety until the parents arrive. The safety of the victim must be the church's primary concern.
- Do not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. Treat the accused with dignity, but immediately remove him or her from further involvement with the youth, children or vulnerable adult.
- Notify the proper law enforcement or department of family services agency.
- Notify the annual conference authorities, the church's insurance company and the church's attorney.
- Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response to the allegations of abuse.
- Call on your designated spokesperson (Senior Pastor or his designee) to make any necessary statements or responses to the news media.
- Prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns.
- Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted by law enforcement officials or department of family services.

**FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
STUART, FLORIDA
SAFE SANCTUARIES
VOLUNTEER APPLICATION**

02/09

The information obtained on this form is for internal use by this local church only.

Name _____ Date of Birth _____

Address _____

City, _____ state, _____ zip _____

Telephone _____ Email _____

Position applied for _____

List occupation, _____

Current employer, _____

Business address: _____

Time at this employment: ___years ___months

List (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly the past five years:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Name/address/telephone number of pastor, and employer and personal references that may be contacted.

Pastor: _____

Employer: _____

Personal: _____

Describe your background working with the program and/or age group requested. (Include information about church-related volunteer, and paid experience you may have.)

Groups you are currently active in:

Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense? Yes _____ No _____

Have you ever been charged with or convicted of child neglect or abuse? Yes _____ No _____

Have any complaints or allegations of misconduct involving children ever been made against you?
Yes _____ No _____

Have you been convicted of the possession, use, or sale of drugs? Yes _____ No _____

Within the past 30 days have you abused alcohol, legal or illegal drugs? Yes _____ No _____

Have you been convicted or plead guilty to a traffic offense within the last 5 years? Yes _____ No _____

Current drivers license number: _____ State: _____

Please explain fully any YES answers to the above questions. In addition to the above, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance, and care of young people? (Explain on separate sheet)

The information that I have provided may be verified by contacting persons or organizations that may have information concerning me. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless from liability any person or organization that provides information, and this release may be sent to any reference. I also agree to hold harmless the First United Methodist Church of Stuart, Florida, and the officers, employees, and volunteers thereof from any use of this application or information. I waive any right that I may have to inspect references provided on my behalf.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct; if it is found that the answers given are untrue, I understand it may be cause for dismissal.

Signature _____

Date _____

Volunteer Interview Guidelines
02/09

Interviewer Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Volunteer's Name: _____

Position: _____

1. How long have you been attending our church? Are you a member?
2. Have you ever been involved in children or youth ministries before?
3. Why are you interested in working with FUMC's children/youth?
4. What are your expectations of the kids/youth in our group?
5. What are your strengths as a leader?
6. What are your weaknesses?
7. How would you describe appropriate discipline for children/teens?
8. What is your most typical response to conflict between two or more people?
9. Describe your experiences sharing your faith with others.
10. What gifts, training, education, or other factors do you feel have prepared you for Christian service?

Form for Reference Check

02/09

Reference inquiry completed by: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

COMPLETE ONE FORM FOR EACH REFERENCE CONTACTED.

Use this form as a written record of contact with a reference of an applicant for work with children or youth.

Name of Applicant _____

Reference Name (if reference is a church or organization, identify both church and the person contacted.)

Reference Telephone/Address:

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?
2. How long have you known applicant?
3. How well do you know the applicant?
4. How would you describe the applicant?
5. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children and/or youth?
6. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to adults?
7. How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?

8. How would you feel about having the applicant as a worker with your child/youth programs?

9. Do you know of any characteristics that would negatively affect the applicant's ability to work with children/youth? If so, please describe.

10. Do you have any knowledge that the applicant has ever been convicted of a crime? If so, please describe.

11. Please list other comments you would like to make: