

Safe Sanctuary Policy

First United Methodist Church

Birmingham, Alabama

First United Methodist Church believes that all persons are significant to the growth of God's kingdom and should have opportunity to worship, learn, and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and growth of others. We seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children and youth. We seek to provide a safe environment in which opportunities for abuse are minimized through proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them.

Our goal is to strive to be a "Safe Sanctuary" where we can work hand-in-hand growing our children and youth in their faith and a life devoted to Christ.

This policy contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, and policies/procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

"Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'" (paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) 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 goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children and youth, participating in the life of our church.

The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of minors or who have the opportunity to have contact with minors in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

Definitions

Ala. Code § 26-14-1(1)-(3) (Supp. 1998)

MINOR means a person under the age of 18 years.

ABUSE means harm or threatened harm to the health or welfare of a child through:

- Non-accidental physical injury;
- Non-accidental mental injury;
- Sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse; or
- Sexual exploitation or attempted sexual exploitation.

SEXUAL ABUSE includes:

- The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or
- Having a child assist any other person to engage in any sexually explicit conduct, or
- Any simulation of the conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction of the conduct; or
- The rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children.

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION includes:

- Allowing, permitting, or encouraging a child to engage in prostitution; and
- Allowing, permitting, encouraging, or engaging in the obscene or pornographic photographing, filming, or depicting of a child for commercial purposes.

NEGLECT means negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child, including the failure to provide adequate food; clothing; shelter; medical treatment; or supervision.

EXCEPTION

Ala. Code § 26-14-7.2(a) (Supp. 1998)

When an investigation of child abuse or neglect by the Department of Human Resources determines that a parent or legal guardian legitimately practicing his or her religious beliefs has not provided specific medical treatment for a child, the parent or legal guardian shall not be considered a negligent parent or guardian for that reason alone. This exception shall not preclude a court from ordering that medical services be provided to the child when the child's health requires it.

HAZING:

To persecute or harass with meaningless, difficult, or humiliating tasks. To harass or annoy by playing abusive or shameful tricks upon someone.

VOLUNTEER:

Anyone who is not paid by the church on a full time or part time basis, and is serving in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors under the supervision of a staff person.

EMPLOYEE:

Anyone who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis, whether or not they work directly with minors.

YOUTH -IN-TRAINING:

Anyone between 6th grade and 18 years, at least 12 years of age, may apply for a YIT position. They would work with a lead adult when working with minors

LEAD ROLE:

A volunteer that is placed in charge of a class or activity and is responsible for the safety of those minors involved.

I. EMPLOYEE/VOLUNTEER SELECTION PROCESS

No person shall begin serving in ANY role in children or youth ministries or activities without first having completed the application, training and the appropriate background checks.

EMPLOYEES**A. Employees**

- Complete a confidential application form and references will be checked and documented
- Complete a Consent & Authorization for Background Check
- All staff are required to attend Safe Sanctuary training yearly. Documentation of this training will be kept in a locked file in the Children's Ministers office. They will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- The Background Checks include national and multi-jurisdictional criminal check, State of Alabama and sex offender check. The background checks will be renewed every year.

VOLUNTEERS**A. Volunteers**

- Complete a confidential application form including contact information and non-related references.
- Complete a Consent & Authorization for Background Check
- All volunteers are required to attend an age-appropriate orientation/training session on Safe Sanctuary yearly. Documentation of this training will be kept in a locked file in the Children's Ministers office. They will receive a copy of the Safe Sanctuary and the Volunteer Covenant. The Volunteer Covenant will be signed by a volunteer and returned to the supervisor to be placed in the Safe Sanctuary file.

- The Background checks include national and multi-jurisdictional criminal check, State of Alabama and sex offender check. The background checks will be renewed every three years.

Additional Requirements:

Children and Youth Worker's Age Qualifications:

All employees working with children and youth must be 19 years or older. Volunteers working with children in a lead position must be 19 years or older. Exceptions to Age Qualifications for FUMC employees. Nursery Workers may be hired at 16 years of age and paired with an adult for working in the FUMC nursery. The nursery worker will not be placed in a lead role until age 19. Hiring will be subject to an interview process and approval by the Ministry Leader and Senior Pastor.

Youth in Training:

Those between 6th grade and 18 years, at least 12 years of age, may apply for a YIT position. They would work with a lead adult when working with minors. (i.e., VBS) The qualifications and approval process is similar to that of a children's volunteer except for background checks. These are all unpaid roles.

Six month Guideline:

It is preferred that a volunteer working with children be a member of First United Methodist Church, or regular attendee, for at least six (6) months. A volunteer who does not meet this requirement may serve in the church's children and youth ministry upon approval of the appropriate age-group minister as long as they are not placed in a lead role position.

Parents:

- A parent may accompany their child on any of the church activities or programs as long as they have passed volunteer requirements. In these situations, the parent will be expected to follow the rules specified in this policy when accompanying their child to an activity or program.
- All present adults will be considered volunteers and will be expected to lead with best practices including interactions with their child.
- When a child has not been dropped off/checked in to a ministry program, guardians are expected to always keep children in their care and under their watchful eye. Due to our location and open accessibility for all, it is in the best interest of the child for the guardian to carefully protect their children in large church gatherings.

II. PROTECTION PLAN

A. Two Adult Rule

- Two non-related/non-cohabitating adults must always be present in groups of children and youth.
- No adult will be left alone and isolated with a minor.
- If one-on-one conversations such as counseling, discipline/redirection, or other private conversations are needed, all conversations will be held within sight of

and in knowledge of another adult. Adults will maintain visual lines of sight at all times of interacting with any minor.

- When texting, emailing, or using social media platforms with students, 12-18 years, parental consent will be confirmed and, as necessary, guardians will be included in the conversation.
- When the two adult rule is not feasible, the adult supervisor will be required to spot check or make unannounced visits as necessary.
- Age-group ministers, division directors, hall monitors, greeters and/or program directors will be present, or nearby, and available on each floor and in the hallways where minors are present.

B. Ratio of Adult – Minor

- Volunteers and staff responsible for no more than ten (10) minors (1:10).

C. View Windows/Open Doors

- Preschoolers, children, and youth will be placed in rooms with view windows or open doors for all teaching/learning activities.
- No Locked doors in areas of supervision.

D. Overnight Activities

- All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with the Safe Sanctuary Policy during First United Methodist Church sponsored over-night activities.
- All minors and adults will sleep in gender specific areas.
- Chaperones will be same gender as children or youth being chaperoned
- No adult volunteer, including parents of children and youth, will be allowed to share a bed with a child or youth.
- Sleeping plan will be approved prior to the event if additional considerations are needed. A Medical Liability form will be required and kept with the age-group leader of each over-night event.

E. Within Town Activities

- All Employees and Volunteers will be required to comply with the Safe Sanctuary Policy during First United Methodist Church sponsored within town activities.

F. Out-of-Town Activities

- All participants should have written parental consent and a medical release form.
- Parental Consent Form for the activity must be completed for each activity.
- Medical Release Forms should be completed for every out-of-town activity.
- All medical consent forms will be considered valid until renewed.
- All Employees and Volunteers shall be required to comply with all of First United Methodist Church's policies including, but not limited to, those outlined in the Safe Sanctuary Policy during First United Methodist Church's sponsored out-of-town activities.

G. Early Learning Center (ELC) Operating Policies and Age-Specific Guidelines

First United Methodist Church Early Learning Center also has Operating Policies and Procedures that will be conscientiously followed by Employees and Volunteers of the ELC. In addition to the ELC's Operating Policies and Procedures, ELC Employees and Volunteers are required to abide by the rules set forth in this Safe Sanctuary Policy. Questions pertaining to the ELC Operating Policies should be directed to the Director of the ELC.

H. ELC Weekday Programs, Instructional Opportunities

Due to the professional relationship of the teacher and student, parents of the ELC understand that only one teacher may be present in certain learning or artistic performance programs. All professional teachers shall complete the "employee" selection process, even if they are volunteers.

I. Being Alone with Child

Avoid being alone with a child without being visible to others in the immediate surroundings.

J. Background Checks

- A designated person on staff will be responsible for all background checks after they receive a completed Consent & Authorization for Background Investigation. That person will be disclosed during training.
- Information will be kept confidential and it will only be shared with the Senior Pastor, clergy, appropriate age-group minister, and/or other necessary staff or SPRC persons
- Returned results will be filed in confidential files locked in the Children's Ministers office.
- If there is a questionable report received, the Senior Minister, Direct Supervisor (if appropriate), and the Chair of Staff Parish Committee will meet to review.
- Any background check that indicates abuse of any kind towards children or sexual abuse towards anyone will automatically disqualify the candidate. For any other flagged background checks, the senior pastor, staff parish chair and direct supervisor (if appropriate) will make a final decision.
- No person who has a past history of being a child abuser (including sexual abuse) and/or has been convicted of child abuse (including sexual abuse) will be allowed to be involved in any children/youth ministries or activities. No exceptions are permitted.
- If information indicates that charges were filed against an applicant but that there was no conviction, then the church should investigate how the issue was resolved and may choose to contact the police department or the prosecuting attorney's office to discover more of the details. When the maximum amount of information has been gathered, a decision about whether this applicant poses too great a risk to the church's children and youth will be made. Every step should be taken during the investigation and the decisions made should be documented in the church's confidential file.
- If information unrelated to child abuse is returned the review team will gather the maximum amount of information and then a decision about whether this applicant poses too great a risk to the church's children and youth will be made. Detailed

documentation of every step taken during the investigation will be maintained in the church's confidential file.

K. The "Five-Year-Older" Rule

Employees/volunteers that are in a lead position should be a minimum of 5 years older than the minors with whom they work

L. Sign In/ Sign Out Procedures

The church provides sign in/sign out procedures for all children and youth.

M. Transportation

- All drivers must adhere to a screening and background check performed by First United Methodist Church.
- Drivers must have a valid driver's license and complete a Motor Vehicle Report
- Drivers must provide an updated copy of their driver's license to First United Methodist Church.
- First United Methodist Church's Insurance will be used while a driver is using any church owned vehicle or renting a vehicle for FUMC events.
- Drivers using their own personal vehicle will be required to have a valid driver license and valid insurance.
- Parents will be provided with the trip leaders contact information.
- Each trip will have a passenger record on board.
- There will be a minimum of 2 adults required for all trips.
- A medical liability form is required for all children and youth attending all off campus and/ or overnight events

N. Potty Procedures

- Nursery: Diapering in open, visible area
- Toddlers: Supervised Independence
- Elementary: Complete privacy unless emergency- can prop the exterior door open to hear in case help is needed. Individual stall doors should remain closed and locked.

O. Vulnerable Persons

Definitions

Caregiver – An individual who has responsibility for the care of a Vulnerable Person as a result of a family relationship, or who has assumed that responsibility voluntarily, by contract, or as a result of the ties of friendship.

Elderly Person - A person 60 years of age or older (definition from the “Protecting Alabama’s Elders Act”, adopted by the Alabama Legislature on May 20, 2013, and signed into law by Governor Robert Bentley on May 23, 2013.).

Emotional Abuse – The intentional or reckless infliction of emotional or mental anguish, or the use of a physical or chemical restraint, medication or isolation as punishment or as a substitute for treatment or care of any Vulnerable Person.

Exploitation – The expenditure, diminution, or use of the property, assets or resources of a Vulnerable Person without the express voluntary consent of that person or his or her legally-authorized representative.

Financial Exploitation – The use of deception, intimidation, undue influence, force or threat of force to obtain or exert unauthorized control over a Vulnerable Person’s property, with the intent to deprive the Vulnerable Person of that property.

Vulnerable Person– Any person, regardless of age, whose behavior indicates that they are mentally incapable of adequately caring for themselves and their interests without adverse consequences to themselves or others, or who, because of physical or mental impairment, socioeconomic status, language barriers, education, or otherwise, is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, exploitation (whether physical, mental, emotional, or financial), sexual abuse, or emotional abuse by others. (definition taken from the “Adult Protective Services Act of 1976”, Ala. Code (1975) §38-9-2(1), but expanded to include vulnerable children).

Screening Procedures for Volunteers and Staff Persons Working with Vulnerable Persons

All persons, including First Church Staff Persons, who intend to work with Vulnerable Persons at church-sponsored events, including overnight or longer events, must be properly screened and attend an age-appropriate orientation/training session on Vulnerable Person protection and abuse (with emphasis on Vulnerable Persons with special needs), and have a current background check. All persons working with Vulnerable Persons must be at least 19 years old. Documentation of this training and background check will be kept in a confidential file maintained by First Church. Training will include the personal hygiene requirement and training will be conducted and verified annually.

P. Facility Usage

- All outside persons using the facility will be required to read and abide by the FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- Lead coordinator will be viewed as the one in charge and will fall under the responsibility of sharing and enforcing the Safe Sanctuary Policy with their group.
- Trustees will provide the Safe Sanctuary Policy to all applicants using the facilities that have children or youth attending.

III. REPORTING PROCEDURES

A. Alabama Law

In order to protect children from abuse/neglect, the Alabama legislature provided for the reporting of child abuse/neglect to appropriate authorities. The legislature's intent was that, through the cooperation of state, county, local agencies, and government divisions, protective services would be made available in an effort to prevent future abuse/neglect.

Code of Alabama 1975 26-14-1 provides for the mandatory and permissive reporting of child abuse/neglect to a "duly constituted authority," primarily DHR and law enforcement, when any person suspects children are being abused or neglected and 26-14-1 provides for immunity from any liability, civil or criminal, that might otherwise be incurred or imposed when any person makes a report in good faith.

1. Mandatory (26-14-1)

Persons and institutions mandated to report child abuse/neglect include all hospitals, clinics, sanitariums, doctors, physicians, surgeons, medical examiners, coroners, dentists, osteopaths, optometrists, chiropractors, podiatrists, nurses, school teachers and officials, peace officers, law enforcement officials, pharmacists, social workers, day care workers or employees, mental health professional or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child when such child is known or suspected to be a victim of child abuse or neglect.

As of September 2003, clergy and any person who spends the majority of his/her time in service to a church are also added to the mandated reporting list. (See Attachment: Rule 505.-Communications to clergymen.) Note: Rule 505 gives the state definition of clergy which includes anyone who spends the majority of his/her day in the service of the church.

2. Permissive (26-14-4)

In addition to those persons, firms, corporations and officials required to report child abuse and neglect, any person may make such a report if that person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is being abused or neglected. Examples of persons who come under the permissive reporting category include, but are not limited to, parents, relatives, private citizens, and children.

3. Anonymous

Abuse/neglect reports are frequently made by persons who wish to remain anonymous. IN many situations an anonymous reporter can be helped to reveal more information if child welfare staff explain DHR's policies and procedures for CA/N reporting and initial assessments.

B. Responsibilities of Children's Workers and Youth in Training

1. Reporting abuse can precipitate severe consequences to a family, so it should never be done casually or thoughtlessly, and certainly not for malicious purposes. At the same time, failing to report abuse can have severe consequences to a minor at risk. Therefore, in case of alleged, suspected, or actual abuse, children's workers, youth workers, workers in training, or church leadership have the responsibility to immediately report any alleged, suspected or actual incident of abuse to the Ministry Leader or Senior Minister.
2. Contact or cause to be contacted the involved minor's parents or legal guardians (unless they are the accused). If the involved minor's parents or guardians are not immediately available, entrust him or her to the care of at least two trusted church adults until the parents arrive. The safety of the victim must be the church's primary concern.
3. Only discuss the incident with the involved minor in the presence of the ministry leader or Senior Minister.
4. Document in writing the circumstances and discussion concerning the incident and submit such documentation to the Senior Minister in 24 hours.
5. Maintaining confidentiality and protecting the reputation of the accused is another primary concern of the church. Do not discuss the incident with any persons other than those directly involved. Advise other people who are not involved in the incident to leave the area unless advised otherwise by the local police.
6. In the case where the involved minor is hurt or been the victim of known sexual abuse, see that the appropriate medical and/or law enforcement authorities are contacted immediately.
7. Fully cooperate with church leadership investigating the incident.
8. Cooperate with any law enforcement bodies investigating the incident.
9. Only offer information that is requested and immediately required by law enforcement personnel prior to receiving advice from legal counsel.
10. Do not sign any documents without the advice of legal counsel.
11. Never prejudge or blame the minor and/or his or her parents or legal guardians, or the accused as a result of the incident.
12. After the initial discussion and report, do not make any contact with the involved minor regarding the case without clearance from the minor's parents/legal guardian and the Senior Minister.

13. Do not retaliate or treat the minor's family differently as a result of the minor's reporting of an alleged and/or actual incident of sexual abuse.

14. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger and hostility. Treat him or her with dignity, but immediately remove him or her from further involvement with children or youth.

C. Responsibilities of the Ministry Leader or Senior Minister

1. Any significant violations of the Safe Sanctuary will be verbally reported to the ministry leader or the Senior Minister immediately.

2. The ministry leader will report to the Senior Minister. In the absence of the Senior Minister, the violation will be reported to the Chairperson of the Staff Parish Committee.

3. The Senior Minister should verify that parents of the involved child have been notified (unless they are the accused).

4. Details surrounding the incident must be documented in writing and submitted to the Senior Minister within 24 hours.

5. Notify the Jefferson County Department of Human Resources.

6. Ensure that the incident is discussed with only those who are directly involved.

7. Ensure that the involved minor and their family and the accused and their family are cared for.

8. Cooperate with any law enforcement bodies investigating the incident.

9. Only offer information that is requested and immediately required by law enforcement personnel prior to receiving advice from legal counsel.

10. Do not sign any documents without the advice of legal counsel.

11. Never prejudge or blame the child and/or his or her parents or legal guardians as a result of the incident.

12. After the initial discussion and report, do not make any contact with the involved child regarding the case without clearance from the child's parents/legal guardian and the Senior Minister.

13. Do not retaliate or treat the involved child or the child's family differently as a result of the child's reporting of a suspected and/or actual incident of abuse.

14. If the involved child is hurt and needs to be transported to the hospital make sure that the following happens:

- Ensure that the proper authorities are notified
- If the parents are not available, ensure that an adult is sent with the involved child in the ambulance
- See that the parents are escorted to the child when they arrive.

15. Investigate any incident thoroughly, calling in authorities when appropriate.

16. See that the identity, privacy and well being of those involved are protected.

17. Assure those involved that a thorough investigation of the incident will take place

D. Responsibilities of the Senior Minister

1. Immediately notify the church's legal counsel and insurance carrier of any incident of abuse.

2. Notification of the District Superintendent should be done as soon as possible, especially if the perpetrator is church staff or clergy. The District Superintendent should decide whether or not to notify the conference. Remember to keep a log of every comment and contact that is made in dealing with the issue.

3. Counsel, exhort, discipline or recommend for discipline any church member found to be violating the provisions of the Protection Plan.

4. In the event that the Pastor is alleged to have violated the policy, or is suspected of violating this policy, the Chairman of the Staff Parish Committee shall fulfil these responsibilities.

E. Public and Media Information

1. Only one person shall serve as official spokesperson for the church to the public, media or any governmental agency.

2. The Senior Minister and the Staff Parish Committee shall appoint the official spokesperson.

3. All members of the church are advised to avoid talking or giving comments to the public, media or governmental agencies.

4. All questions received by church members should be referred to the official spokesperson.

IV. RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

A. All allegations will be taken seriously, and church staff will take appropriate action in accordance with the laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policy requirements, and based upon advice of legal counsel.

B. The official spokesperson for the church in any of these matters will be the Senior Minister or his appointee. No other staff members or church members shall speak to the media in an official capacity.

C. The church staff will document (in writing, with date and signature) all efforts in the handling of any incident.

D. The church staff will not deny, minimize, or blame any individual involved in allegations. First United Methodist Church staff will minister to all involved, as well as cooperate with authorities.

E. All information will be kept confidential outside of those who have legal authority to obtain such information.

IV. AMENDMENT OF POLICY

The Executive Council may amend these policies.

VII. EFFECTIVE DATE

Begin Implementation January 2016

Required Forms

Recruitment/Screening/Hiring Process for Workers and Volunteers

- Volunteer Application Form
- Employee Application Form
- Consent & Authorization for Background Investigation Participation Covenant Statement for Volunteers

Note: Required forms may be different for the ELC

Other Important Forms

- Minor Accident/Incident Report
- Notice and Release for Participation in a Church Sponsored Event or Release, Waiver, Indemnity Agreement
- Authorization for Medical Treatment

Resources Utilized in Compiling Plan

1. Alabama State Law
2. Safe Sanctuaries, Joy Thornburg Melton
3. North Alabama Methodist Conference Child Protection Training
4. Sample Protection Plan Suggested by the Birmingham attorney, Tom Eden, a church law specialist
Child Protection First!, Child Abuse Prevention Policy for First church of Alabama ;
Child Protection First!, Child Abuse Prevention Policy for Shades Mountain Baptist Church