



## **FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH- Odessa**

### **Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures for Children, Youth, & Vulnerable Adults**

In April 1996, The General Conference of The United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church. In 2007, the New Mexico Annual Conference also adopted a resolution requiring each congregation to develop a Child Abuse Prevention Policy. These resolutions are grounded in scripture.

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 most vulnerable among us.

God calls us to make our church a safe place, protecting our children, youth and other vulnerable individuals from sexual, ritual and other forms of abuse. God calls us to create a community of faith where children and youth grow safe and strong. *(From the Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, pages 180-181, 2000, United Methodist Publishing House, 2000.)*

First United Methodist Church Odessa (FUMCO) has decided to consider child, youth and vulnerable adult safety and abuse in a single policy. FUMCO establishes this Safe Sanctuaries policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety, mental well being and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Our goal is to provide a safe, Christian environment for all our children, youth and vulnerable adults. Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministries of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children and youth as well as all workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate our workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of appropriate policies and methods; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of child abuse that conforms to the requirements of Texas state laws; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Scout groups chartered by First United Methodist Church Odessa shall follow their own children and youth protection policies. The FUMC Children's Center will have a separate child protection policy; however it will conform to the principles of this policy and must be approved by the Church Council. Other outside groups using church facilities shall be furnished a copy of this Safe Sanctuaries Policy and must follow it unless they have their own child/youth protection policies

In this policy the term child, youth or vulnerable adult is mean to collectively mean children, youth and vulnerable adults.

## DEFINITIONS

**Abuse** means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of a child, youth, or a vulnerable adult that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or mistreatment, sexual harassment, sexual contact, sexual molestation; disseminating, exhibiting, or displaying sexually explicit material.

**Adult** means any person at least 18 years of age.

**Appropriate** means conduct that one would reasonably assume would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.

**Child, Children or Youth** refer to a person less than 18 years of age.

**Leader** means anyone directly responsible for supervising and overseeing the specific Church related function, event or activity.

**Parent or guardian** means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent or appointed guardian with the general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.

**Sexual abuse** means engaging in any sexual contact, sexual penetration, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, of a vulnerable adult, child or youth; or the dissemination, exhibiting, or displaying of sexually explicit material to an adult with special needs or child or youth, regardless of whether such conduct is with or without the knowledge or consent of the adult with special needs, or child or youth. This abuse may be violent or nonviolent. It includes any conduct that involves vulnerable adults, or children in sexual behavior for which they are not personally, socially, emotionally or developmentally ready.

**Sexual contact** means the intentional touching of the intimate parts or the clothing covering the immediate area of intimate parts of a youth, child or vulnerable adult.

**Sexual exploitation** means allowing, permitting or encouraging a vulnerable adult, child or youth to engage in prostitution or in the photographing, filming, creating electronic or computer-generated images or other forms of depicting a child, youth or vulnerable adult engaged in actual or suggestive sexual conduct.

**Sexual harassment** means any sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, which is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating or coercive.

**Staff** means any employee of the Conference, District or ministry, volunteer or paid.

**Volunteer** means a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any conference and/or district event or ministry without compensation.

**Vulnerable adult** means an adult who has one or more mental, physical or emotional impairments that render the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without help.

## STATEMENT OF POLICY

***First United Methodist Church intends to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults to the greatest extent possible.***

- a. Abuse of a child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult is prohibited in any First United Methodist Church event and or ministries.
- b. Any member of staff or a volunteer for any ministry who observes or suspects that abuse has occurred concerning a child, youth, or vulnerable adult must immediately report such observed or suspected abuse to the ministry official, and complete any required report in compliance with Texas Department of Regulatory and Protective Services.
- c. Reports of observed or suspected abuse may be made orally and/or in writing to a ministry official and such official shall document the report if it is made orally.
- d. It is the responsibility of the ministry official to ensure compliance with this policy.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY AND PROCEDURES

### SCREENING AND TRAINING

***All persons (staff or volunteer) who work with child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are those that have direct contact and supervision of child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are required to complete the following before beginning to serve on a consistent basis. A minimum of the first three items (application/participant covenant agreement, background check, and specific ministry guidelines agreement) is required to serve until the safe sanctuaries training can be completed within one month of first time serving.***

**1. Background Investigations**

*All persons (staff or volunteer) who work with child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults are those that have direct contact and supervision of child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, must have a nationwide criminal background check done for them. The staff or volunteer may not work with child, youth, and/or vulnerable adult events or ministries until the background check is cleared.*

Each person will sign a consent form in advance for background checks.

*This does not include those persons who are employees of independent contractors who are involved in events, such as bus drivers of contracted bus lines, bands, and the like.*

**2. Application & Participant Covenant Agreement**

Each volunteer for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adult events or ministries shall complete the general FUMC application and the Participant Covenant Agreement. Both forms shall be returned to the Family Ministries pastor.

The forms are available at church and then also online in the future.

**3. Specific Ministry Guidelines**

Each staff and volunteer shall review the ministry guidelines provided by the specific ministry pastor in which he or she is serving. Sign guideline agreement and return to Family Ministries Pastor.

**4. Safe Sanctuaries Training**

**(Initial Training)** Face-to-face training with *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth* by Joy Thornburg Melton. Teaching, DVD, quiz, and the certificate will be administered in a one-day session either by the Children's Ministry Pastor, Youth Ministry Pastor, Family Ministry Pastor or a designated leader.

**(2<sup>nd</sup> Year +)** each year after initial training, the person can choose to renew the training either face-to-face or online with Protect My Ministry.

**\* Nursery and Preschool**

First Aid and CPR training is required for all nursery and preschool workers.

**\* Records of all screening and training will be maintained through Family Ministries**

# Procedures and Rules for Working with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

## ➤ Two-Adult Rule

Hereinafter, the term adult will mean a person, aged 18 or above, consistent with Texas law.

No fewer than two adults who have undergone a background check, one of whom is 21 years or older, shall be present with each group of infants, children or youth for any church sponsored program, event, outing, or ministry, to include watching (“babysitting”) infants and children while parents attend other functions. For the purpose of this rule, married couples working with the same group are considered one adult. If a second adult is not available during times of major use at the church (Sunday school, Wednesday nights), the classroom door will remain open and an adult may supervise the groups by “floating” in the area. The nursery coordinator will be responsible for identifying an appropriate adult to act as floater during times when major use at the church might not provide adequate supervision.

## ➤ No One-on-One Contact

One-on-one contact between adults and children or youth is not permitted. In situations that require personal conferences, the meeting may be conducted such that it is audibly isolated but must be conducted in view of another adult (e.g., “open door” policy, public places outside the church). This policy also applies to pastoral counseling of youth or children.

## ➤ The 15 Age Limit Rule

*Persons hired to work with children and youth must be at least fifteen years of age.* At least one volunteer or paid worker in each nursery, preschool or children’s area must be age eighteen or older. This rule allows teen helpers who are in senior high or older to help in the nursery consistent with Rule 1. Two examples help to clarify this rule. (1) The nursery during Sunday School could be staffed by one adult volunteer, age 18 or above, and one or more paid teens, age 15 or above, provide that the nursery door remains open and supervision is provided by a “floating” adult, age 21 or above. (2) Babysitting at the church for Parents’ Night Out on a Friday evening would have to comply with Rule 1 above, but the staff could be supplemented by paid teens, 15 or above, to handle a larger crowd. Guests (e.g., boyfriends or “stray children/teenagers”) will not be allowed in the nursery or preschool areas unless they are children of the volunteer or worker. In the interest of safety, nursery staff may deny nursery services to uncontrollable children.

➤ **Five-Year-Older Rule**

Any worker, youth or adult, volunteer or paid, must be at least five years older than the group with which they are to work. This rule shall not prevent persons who do not meet this criterion from participating in events, trips and outings with younger persons.

➤ **Six-Month Rule**

In order to be eligible to work with children, youth and vulnerable adults, volunteers should have regularly attended First United Methodist Church Odessa for six months. Regular attendance means attending worship or Sunday school at least once per month for six months. This rule shall not prevent parents from visiting and participating in activities of their children.

➤ **Advance Notice Rule**

Children and Youth ministry leaders shall always give the parents advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will participate.

➤ **Photographing Children**

Parents may give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped in youth activities when they fill out annual Program Participation forms. No identifying names shall be displayed on the church website. Parents are not required to give permission for their children to be photographed or videotaped in order for them to participate in church-sponsored programs. Photography or videotaping during Church events not requiring permission forms is permissible.

➤ **Transportation Rule**

The two-adult rule applies to transporting children or youth to or from any church-sponsored event, program or ministry. All drivers must be at least 21 years old and must be covered by the vehicle's insurance policy, whether the vehicle is privately owned, rented, or owned by the First United Methodist Church Odessa. For trips that require multiple vehicles, the two-adult rule can be complied with by having one adult driver per vehicle as long as all vehicles travel together (caravan) and communication between vehicles is possible. Drivers will refrain from using cell phones while transporting children or youth to or from a church-sponsored event.

➤ **Overnight Accommodations** - *events that require overnight accommodations*

In camp or dormitory type settings at least two leaders will be present with every group of children/youth. When staying at a camp or hotel setting, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms

from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth. Any one leader shall not be alone with any one child/youth. And, co-ed overnight activities require both male and female adult leaders without exception.

➤ **Social Media and Technology**

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media policies that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for vulnerable persons. To this end, following are guidelines for the use of social media, technology and the internet:

- We will protect the privacy and identity of all vulnerable persons in online writings, postings and discussions.
  - Volunteers and staff must not post photos or video that identifies vulnerable persons by name, address, or other specific identification on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
  - All social media groups (Facebook, etc.) associated with preschool, children's or youth ministry areas should be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group's administrator(s).
  - All church-related social media groups (Facebook, etc.) and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
  - Photos of vulnerable persons may only be published or posted on social media (Facebook, etc.) after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. It is suggested that all permission slips contain a statement that approval to participate in the event includes approval for photographs to be used in church-related media. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitter pics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors without permission.
  - Photos may only be posted to the social media (Facebook, etc.) page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should refrain from using names and never post a last name when posting photos or identifiable information. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. "tag") themselves.
  - When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only "checkin" yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
  - In the case of clergy/professional staff and church member online connections, friend requests, follow requests, circle requests, etc. should be initiated by the church member, especially if the church member is a vulnerable person.
- We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.
  - No adult shall initiate social media (Facebook, etc.) contact with or "friend" a vulnerable person. When accepting the "friend" requests of a vulnerable

person, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with vulnerable persons shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.

- When emailing, texting, tweeting, posting or messaging a vulnerable person, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the “two adults present” Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (SnapChat, Facebook, Poke, etc.) should be avoided.
- Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for counseling - especially with vulnerable persons. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation into an appropriate Safe Sanctuary model (i.e. office with windows, two adult rule, etc.).
- We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyber-bullying. Every children’s ministry and youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training session is encouraged to include in its teaching a session on the types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it.
- We shall educate our congregation in the effective and safe use of social media and technology to live out their Christian witness in what they write, post, share, and view.
  - We all must understand, and teach to vulnerable persons, that once something is posted on web, sent via email or sent via text, it is impossible to fully recover or erase it. There should be no expectation of privacy or reasonable expectation that the information stops with the person for whom it was intended. The promises of privacy offered by apps (like SnapChat) are illusionary.
  - A good rule of thumb: If you don’t want it posted on the church sign, website, or bulletin, do not text it or post it via social media.

➤ **Other Policies**

- First Aid and CPR training is required for all nursery and preschool workers.
- Sign-in/sign-out procedures apply for all nursery , preschool, and grades K-5th classrooms.
- Texas childcare minimum standards will be used for child/staff ratio.
- Each staff and volunteer shall wear a nametag.
- Windows are installed in each door for Children and Youth Ministries.
- The door will remain open when there is only one adult in the room with a child.
- Open-door counseling procedures will be used with others near by when possible.
- Appropriate equipment and supervision is applied for activities.
- Adequate insurance is held for the scope of ministries.
- An annual orientation session is provided and includes: church safe sanctuary policies and procedures, procedures to be used in ministry with child, youth, and/or vulnerable adults,



appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse, and details of state law regarding child abuse, and update any necessary paperwork.

## Responding to Allegations of Abuse

*\* while on the premises of FUMCO or at any other church related function*

Allegations by a child concerning abuse must be reported to the CPS authorities, OPD, and at least one of the individuals listed below. A committee will be immediately convened to investigate the allegation. This committee will be composed of the following people, unless they are involved in the allegation:

- Pastor
  - Family Ministries Pastor
  - Lay Leader and/or Church Council Chair
  - SPRC Chair
  - Children's Center Director, if Children's Center related incident
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Every volunteer and paid worker with children and youth should be trained regarding Texas requirements for reporting abuse to law enforcement authorities and child protection services. Volunteers or staff members who suspect abuse of a child or youth in a non-church situation are also obligated to report the alleged incident to the appropriate Child Protective Services (CPS) authorities. This committee will not wait for a time when everyone can be present, but will initiate its meeting as soon after the alleged incident as possible, but no more than 24 hours after the initial report. Proceedings shall be conducted confidentially in a way that protects the rights of the alleged victim, the family and the accused, including their privacy. Legal immunity only exists for initial reporting directly to a child abuse hotline, law enforcement or child protective services.

The committee will first assure the alleged abuser has been removed from contact with the alleged child or youth victim. The committee will next assure that all reporting requirements have been met. The Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse shall be used to record action taken. It is imperative that the person filling out this report be familiar with Texas law, as well as legal liability for defamation of character and invasion of privacy, before taking any action or completing the report. The committee will take action to gather all necessary information regarding the incident, while taking all necessary precautions not to interfere with any official investigation.

The Pastor, or his/her designee will contact the New Mexico Conference Communication/Safe Sanctuary Team who will be responsible for dealing with the media. The Pastor or his/her designee will be the spokesperson within the congregation. If the alleged abuser is a pastor,

the New Mexico Conference Reporting Procedure shall be followed. With guidance from a legal professional, the Pastor shall initiate appropriate ministries and actions over a long period to enable healing by all affected persons. Our goal is to always strive to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.

The Family Ministries Pastor, Children’s Ministry Pastor and the Youth Ministry Pastor will oversee the implementation of this policy and provide for the safekeeping of the consent forms at the church. The policy will be reviewed at least annually by volunteers, workers, and church administration, so that all will be reminded of the rules and so that any needed modifications may be made to the policy.

Approved and adopted by First United Methodist Church Odessa on \_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_  
Church Council Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
SPRC Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Senior Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Family Ministries Pastor