

Safe Sanctuaries Child Protection Policy

First United Methodist Church
1001 5th Ave. Conway SC, 29526

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating any potential for child sexual abuse in the church. 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 one 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 depths 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 Principals of the United Methodist Church state that, "...Children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." – *The 2012 discipline of the United Methodist Church ¶ 162 C*

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real and appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of 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. – *The 2012 Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church ¶ 162 C.*

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, First United Methodist Church of Conway SC, adopts this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this *Child Protection Policy* and accompanying procedures is in demonstration of our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

Covenant Statement

First United Methodist Church of Conway SC, hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as all our workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers. We will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with SC state law.

Theological Explanation

We adopt this policy in accordance with the statement we as a congregation make at each baptism; that we will, “Nurture children and youth in the Christian faith and life and include them in our care.” With this policy, we renew our Baptismal pledge to, “live according to the example of Christ

1. Staff Recruitment and Selection Guidelines

a. Age

In recruitment and hire of volunteers and paid staff working with youth and children in any position of authority, there must be at least eighteen years of age and at least five years older than the age of the working to serve. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years to better have the perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving.

b. Application

Applicants must complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background checks.

c. Background Check

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for children, youth and all other church ministries, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior.

d. Prior Convictions

Individuals who have been convicted of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect are not eligible to work in any church sponsored activity or program for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

e. Interview

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability in the work they desire to do. Interviews shall be conducted by the leader for the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team interview process may be used. *Safe Sanctuaries Child Protection Policy* guidelines should be discussed as part of the interview.

f. Child Abuse Survivor Applicants

Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of the congregation of the First United Methodist Church. A person's experience with abuse and the recovery process may be pertinent to their suitability as children or youth ministry workers. Applicants who are survivors of abuse should discuss this in confidence with the person who conducts the confidential interview. If an applicant is uncomfortable doing so, s/he may request an interview be conducted by the pastor.

g. Confidentiality of Information

First United Methodist Church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Applicant information will be marked as such and stored in a secure locked location with limited access afforded only to church staff. The Director of Christian Education is responsible for the

implementation of these policies as well as the maintenance of confidential records.

h. Required Forms of Signatures

In addition to staff applications and reference forms, all applicants will sign, *Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check, Participant Covenant Statement and Verification of Policy Statement Understanding.*

2. Staff Supervision Guidelines

All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with First United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

a. Two Adult Rule

Concerted effort will be made to recruit a sufficient number of volunteers so that two or more adults will be present for any church sponsored activity.

b. Goals for Worker to Child Ratio

First United Methodist Church has a goal of maintaining the following ratios of ministry workers to children whenever feasible. These ratios are goals. First United Methodist Church recognizes that achieving these ratios may not be feasible.

Program:	Workers:	Children:
Nursery	2	1
Sunday School	2	14
Youth Programs	2	16
Mid-Week Classes	2	14
VBS	2	14

c. Nursery Procedure

All parents utilizing the church nursery shall observe the check-in/out procedure.

- 1.) First-time drop offs must register for *FLYPAGER* nursery paging system. *FLYPAGER* operated via SMS. Registration requires notification of person/s allowed to check-out.
- 2.) Repeat drop offs must their child/ren in-out with the nursery staff each Sunday or other event wherein a nursery is available.

d. Open Door Policy

Further protection of children requires that an open-door policy must be followed. This provides for the parents of children, clergy, administration and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the classroom activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.

e. Outside Access

Access to a phone must be provided when children and youth groups are away from church property. The First United Methodist Church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from church property.

f. Doors and Windows

All classroom and office doors will have a window of visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows shall always be kept free from adornment and kept locked.

g. Individual Counseling

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If possible, another adult is to have knowledge of staff members' whereabouts and with whom they are meeting. Children and youth receiving individual counseling should be told that they are free to discuss any aspect of the counseling process with a parent or another adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs during the counseling. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the session will be reported in accordance with *Section 3. Abuse Allegation Response Procedure* of this policy.

h. Touch

Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth; i.e. it is generally appropriate for toddlers to sit in a nursery worker's lap and give a kiss on the cheek, but it is not appropriate for an older child and adult worker to behave this way.

Touching should be initiated by the child or youth. It should be in response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, affection. It should not be based upon the emotional need of the adult.

Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present, and touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use a restroom.

Touching behavior should not give the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers, our behavior must always foster trust; it should be above reproach.

A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.

Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

i. Outings Away from Church Property

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must have written consent and a notarized medical release form. Consent and medical release forms may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually.

There must be access to a phone or cell phone when groups are away from the church property. Under no circumstance is one adult to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone. On overnight outings female staff will supervise female youth and male staff will supervise male youth in their sleeping quarters.

Except for a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

j. Classroom Discipline Procedure

All teachers and workers shall use the following disciplinary measures:

- 1.) If a child's behavior is inappropriate and a teacher or worker shall tell the child specifically what s/he is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is. i.e. "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building."
- 2.) If the previous measure is not effective the child shall be guided to another activity.
- 3.) If inappropriate behavior continues the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students.
- 4.) If the child's disruptive behavior continues after all three previously stated measures have been taken a teacher will notify the Dir. or Christian Education who will talk with the child and work with the child's parents.
- 5.) No physical punishment or verbal abuse, such as ridicule, are to be used at any time.
- 6.) If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room become necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardian as soon as possible.

k. Gifts

No staff or volunteer workers are to give gifts to individual children or youth without the prior knowledge of the parent(s) or responsible clergy. Because gift giving can be a tool of buying silence or loyalty, gift giving should be done on a group basis, or for special occasions only. Gifts must not be elaborate and should be modest and appropriate for the occasion.

l. Training

Prior to working in the children's or youth departments, workers must undergo *Safe Sanctuaries Child Protection Policy* training and completed annually. In addition, a summary of current child sexual abuse statutes and reporting requirements for the legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who supervise children's and youth activities. Legal reporting requirements are outlined in *Section 3* of the *Safe Sanctuaries Child Protection Policy*.

Church employees who supervise young people must maintain current certification in basic first aid and basic CPR. The church will pay expenses for this training. New employees must get certification within ninety days of employment. Nursery workers and others serving young children may also want infant and toddler CPR.

m. Emergency Training

Bi-annually Emergency, Fire, and Inclement Weather drills will be held during Children's Ministry Events and Preschool. First United Methodist Director of

Education shall be responsible for maintaining a detailed 'Fire Safety Log' located in the office of the Ministry Assistant.

n. Verification of Reading *Safe Sanctuaries Child Protection Policy* statement

Upon receipt of this policy the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that s/he has read and agrees to abide by Conway First United Methodist Church *Safe Sanctuary Child Protection Policy*.

3. Abuse Allegation Response Procedure

As a caring Christian community, First United Methodist Church is committed to protect and advocate for children and youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spirituality grounded, healthy life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for children, youth, and adults in which they are protected from abuse. It is a legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where the abuse takes place. First United Methodist Church is committed to reporting suspected abuse to stop potentially existing abuse and to prevent further abuse.

Reporting abuse is to witness to the world our commitment to the love and justice of God. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of people crying out for help. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. First United Methodist Church is committed to creating a supportive environment offering both objectivity and empathy as we seek to create an environment in which healing can take place. If abuse is suspected, observed, or disclosed to a children's or youth volunteer or paid staff member, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. Be prepared to do the following:

- a. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child as the situation requires.
- b. Immediately contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.
- c. Immediately notify the proper authorities.
 - i. Provide written documentation of the incident in the included form in appendices of this document.
 - ii. Notify the local DSS county office. This is a requirement of the law.
 - iii. If the pastor is the accused party the designee will notify the Chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
 - iv. Release written documentation to either the pastor or the Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee.
- d. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities have been notified even if the parent(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: if one, or both parent(s) is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification to the parent(s).)
- e. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the attorney who handles legal matters

for First United Methodist Church, the First United Methodist Church insurance company, and the Marion District of the UMC District Superintendent. The district superintendent will report the allegation to the office of the South Carolina Conference Bishop. If the accused is a clergy member of the SC Annual Conference, local licensed pastor or diaconal minister, provisions of ¶2702 of the *2012 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* must be followed.

- f. If the accused is working as a paid staff or volunteer with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth.
- g. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his/her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of First United Methodist Church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
- h. Any contact with the media should be handled by either the pastor or the Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee if the pastor is the accused. Care shall be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
- i. A printed record of the basic information shall be filed to ensure ongoing ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. A form for this shall be available in the church office. The report shall be brief and contain only information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place to ensure confidentiality of all parties involved. First United Methodist Church is required to file a copy of the report with the SC Annual Conference Bishops Office where it shall remain confidential.
- j. A list of emergency contact numbers shall always be available to the staff.

Emergency Contact

Horry County DSS

1951 Industrial Park Rd. Conway, SC 29526
(843) 336-1600

Chair of Staff Parish Relations Committee

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Marion District of the SC Conference of the UMC

P.O. Box 543 Marion, SC 29571
(843) 423-1202

SC Conference of the UMC Bishop's Office

4908 Colonial Drive Columbia, SC 29203
(803) 786-9486

