

Fair Grove United Methodist Church
138 Fairgrove Church Road
Thomasville, North Carolina 27360

Safe Sanctuaries Policy

I. Introduction:

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, and the Western North Carolina Annual Conference, in June 2004, adopted resolutions aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children and youth in the church. This would include sexual, emotional, physical, and ritual abuse, and neglect. The adopted resolutions include 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 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 little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it 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 early 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.

(From The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church-2000; pages 180-81.
Copyright @ 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we the congregation of Fair Grove United Methodist Church of the Western North Carolina Conference adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse of not just children and youth, but all persons including the children, youth, elderly, and vulnerable in our church and community.

II. Purpose:

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all persons.

II. The Statement of Covenant:

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Fair Grove United Methodist Church of the Western North Carolina Conference pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all persons, including the staff, volunteers and participants in all activities affiliated with Fair Grove United Methodist Church or occurring on the campus of Fair Grove United Methodist Church. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, the elderly, and the vulnerable regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and methods of discipline); we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

III. Definitions

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

“**Child abuse**” means any of the following:

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

“**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 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 employment, occupation, or practice of their profession, come into contact with children. Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers and nurses, social services workers, day-care center workers, mental health professionals, peace and law enforcement officers.

“We” means local church.

IV. 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 shall be required to fill out a **Volunteer Screening Form** that shall include but is not limited to:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
 - c. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church or non-church organization to secure the background checks necessary for the ministry or position being applied for.
 - d. For local church’s ministries, persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with local 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 Staff/Parish Relations Committee, the Weekday Children’s Ministry Board, or other hiring body will replace the six-month waiting period.
 - e. All Church and Weekday Children’s Ministry Staff shall submit to a background check upon hiring or upon the implementation this policy.
2. Persons who have a break in service of one or more years shall, at the discretion of the Pastor, Ministry Team Leader, or other responsible body submit to screening procedures. **The local church reserves the option to repeat background checks** of persons who have had five (5) or more years of service.
3. All forms and background checks shall be kept as a part of the Confidential Safe Sanctuaries Files which shall be maintained in the church office. All applications and related forms must be completed.
4. Non-local church and Weekday Children’s Ministry programs shall maintain their own background check and informational files. The local church reserves the right to obtain an explanation of the non-local church’s record-keeping process and, upon written request of the Pastor, to be given copies of documents applicable to programs conducted at the local church.

5. The person in charge of the children's activity(ies) is responsible for reviewing this policy with each applicant during an interview prior to service.

V. 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 Leader and Volunteers working with children in church activities. An educational component of the Safe Sanctuaries Program will be part of the training for the ministry area. 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. Minimum supervisory standards will include the **"two-adult rule"**. The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms.
3. **No child will be left unsupervised** while attending the local church children's activity.
4. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open such as a restroom. **All activities should occur in open view.**
5. Should the children's activity be **an outdoor program** or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the person in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, and **the children are properly supervised.**
6. **Registration** materials for activities in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms.
7. 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.
8. No person shall supervise an age group unless he/she is **AT LEAST 18 years** of age or older and is five (5) years older than the children being supervised.
9. Accurate **participation records** shall be maintained for all children's activities. At a minimum, these records should list the date and hours of the activity, its location, the names of the children participating (including whether any were dismissed early and the times of such dismissals), and the names of the adults involved directly in the activity and other supervisors on site that day.

V. Reporting Abuse

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 or Helper 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** such as the name of the alleged victim and his or her address and family information.
3. **If Possible the Pastor is to be informed immediately before or subsequent to the making of a report.**
4. Upon receiving such information, **the person in charge of the children's activity will call the Davidson County Department of Social Services (336) 242-2500, the Senior Pastor, the Staff/Parish Relations Chair, and the Lay Leader.** This line of reporting shall be followed in all such incidents.
5. Any person who is the object of the report will be required 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.

VII: 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.

1. **The Pastor of the local church, 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, the person in charge of the children's activity shall make the initial contact with the Davidson County Department of Social Services.
4. If the allegation is against a Local church staff person, Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer or Helper or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity, the person in charge of the children's activity and the **Staff-Parish Relations Committee** shall be contacted immediately.

5. **Even in the event that the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a local church related event or activity**, procedures in number 3 shall be implemented. An example of this would be a child telling a teacher about abuse by a relative during the prior year. If this report were made to the teacher in the course of his or her duties as a teacher, then the incident report should be filed with the person in charge of the children's activity within 24 hours.
6. If the allegation is against a staff person, Ministry Team Leader, Volunteer or Helper, the custodial parent will be notified immediately and a face-to-face meeting with the parent will be scheduled.
7. In either case, **pastoral support** will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.

VIII. Social Media and Cyber Abuse

The internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than at any other time in the history of civilization. Some incredible ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. However, following basic *Safe Sanctuaries* procedures can help to minimize those risks. There is no such thing as privacy in cyberspace. Consider anything and everything on the internet as public information. Here are some recommendations:

Receive parental/guardian permission.

In addition to general permission to participate in a ministry, it is advisable to receive advance parental permission for children and youth and personal permission for vulnerable adults in writing for:

1. Posting photos of participants on any websites or sending them e-mail or cell phone messages or making videos for any use.
2. E-mailing, Instant Messaging (IM'ing), calling, texting, or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, personal digital device (for example IPOD, Nintendo D.S., Playstation Portable), or cell phone (keep in mind "free" minutes and data plans vary tremendously even with the same carrier).
3. The sharing of any full name or contact information.

Never post easily identifiable information online.

1. If you communicate by e-mail, do not use "broadcast" e-mails. Use the "Bcc" option (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only his or her address when a message is received.
2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information like event dates, times, locations, or participants.
3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests. When placing a child, youth, or vulnerable adult on an electronic prayer list, consider using only first names. If someone must know the last name or the mailing address of the individual, have her or him call the conference office or a designated contact person.

Limit individual communications with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner. (Even though you may be a sounding board for a person having a bad day, the reverse is not true.)
2. Save all communications you have with children, youth, and vulnerable adults (i.e. instant messages (IMs), chat room conversations, e-mails, text messages, etc.). An electronic "paper trail" can be important.

IX. Bullying

A. Minor on Minor Bullying

Minor on minor abuse and bullying shall never be tolerated. If it is observed the adults in charge must immediately stop the abuse/bullying and discuss with the appropriate parties how to prevent the situation from occurring again. If the abuse/bullying continues the parents of both parties shall be contacted and the offending party shall be disciplined in a way designated by the appropriate parties. This can eventually end in the bullying/abusive party being banned from non-corporate worship and fellowship (examples: youth retreats, lock-ins, etc.).

B. Adult on Adult Bullying

Adult on adult abuse and bullying shall never be tolerated. If it is observed/witnessed those present must immediately stop the abuse/bullying and discuss with the appropriate parties how to prevent the situation from occurring again. If the abuse/bullying continues both parties shall be contacted and the offending party shall be counseled in a way designated by the appropriate parties. This can eventually end in the bullying/abusive party being asked not to come to non-corporate worship and fellowship events. (example: Sunday school, retreats, etc.)

X. First Aid and Emergency Preparedness

At least one person on each trip/outing or present at each event must be trained and up to date in Emergency First Aid and CPR by a reputable agency (example: American Red Cross).

XII. Elderly and Vulnerable Members

The abuse of the elderly and vulnerable in our congregation and community is a possibility that accompanies the world we live in. The same procedures above shall be followed when dealing with visiting, working with, and sharing experiences with individuals and groups of the elderly and vulnerable.

XI. Yearly Trainings

The staff person in charge of educational ministries shall coordinate and offer trainings twice a year at times appropriate to the schedules of those who need training. (All volunteers must be trained once every four years).

Training models may be obtained from the *Safe Sanctuaries* texts available in the office of the staff person in charge of educational ministries.

XII. Conclusions

In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child and youth will be "...surrounded by steadfast love, ...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal"

(From "Congregational Pledge 2," "Baptismal Covenant II," in The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44).

**Approved July 2012 with Additions
Goes into Effect On September 1, 2012**