



First United Methodist Church of Kalamazoo  
212 South Park Street · Kalamazoo, MI 49007  
269-381-6340



**SAFE SANCTUARIES**  
**POLICIES FOR CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY**  
**IN THE CHURCH**

Adopted by Church Council – May 26, 2020

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# **POLICY FOR CHILD AND YOUTH SAFETY IN THE CHURCH** **GUIDELINES**

## **AGES 0-17 YEARS**

First United Methodist Church, Kalamazoo, MI

### **Preamble:**

Christians are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus. All persons are created by God. God intends all persons to have worth and dignity in their relationships. We are a connected body, and when one part of this body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God intended. The scriptures witness to a God who brings about justice, mercy and grace. This policy is an act of hospitality to those who may be at risk due to their age, size, gender, race, sexual identities and mental and/or physical capacities. The innocence of children is what best enables them to seek out God with fearless enthusiasm. That innocence is also what leaves them most vulnerable to abuse, bullying or neglect. Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected.<sup>1</sup> Often abuse occurs in settings where children or youth should have been able to feel safe -- homes, schools, camps, and sadly the church. In more than three quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser.<sup>2</sup> Although the practice of abuse, bullying and neglect, or the making of false accusations is not to be condoned, we will continue to acknowledge that God's grace is available to all. All persons are valued as human beings in God's image.

The purpose of this policy is to protect all who come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse, and to limit the extent of legal liability of First United Methodist Church of Kalamazoo. Therefore, this policy, prompted by the 1996 General Conference of The United Methodist Church, is designed to minimize the risk of abuse, bullying, and/or neglect to children and youth at FUMC events.

1 Joy Thornburg Melton, SAFE SANCTUARIES: REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD ABUSE IN THE CHURCH (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998). Available through [www.discipleshipresources.org](http://www.discipleshipresources.org) and [www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com). Rev. Melton is a deacon in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. She is both a Christian educator and an attorney. 2 Ibid.

## **CHILD SAFETY GUIDELINES AGES 0-12 YEARS**

1. Volunteer/unpaid adults and youth may be permitted to work with children only after they have been a member or constituent of FUMC for six months, have completed all forms and background checks required below, and by recommendation of Pastor/Director or CFM Team member.
2. All persons – volunteer and/or staff – working with children more than five times in a calendar year must complete the following:
  - a. Application for Working with Children or Youth
  - b. Disclosure Form
  - c. Criminal Background/Felony Check
  - d. Child Abuse/Neglect Background Check
  - e. Code of Ethics for Volunteers in Ministry to Children or Youth
  - f. Reference check
  - g. Personal interview
3. Persons who help with children's activities fewer than 5 times a year must be under the direct supervision of a screened staff person/volunteer.
4. Children are the responsibility of their parent/guardian when not in scheduled children's activities.
5. Children will not be allowed to leave the room or church building without a parent/guardian or the written permission of a parent/guardian listing with whom the child may leave during scheduled children's activities.
6. Parents/guardians must make sure that adults responsible for care/supervision are present and follow the check-in procedure before dropping their children off. Children must be picked up within 15 minutes after the activity is over. At least two adults will remain until every child is picked up and signed out.

7. Every attempt will be made to ensure that at least two adults will be present in all classrooms and for all church-related children's activities. When only one adult is present, the Super must be informed so that s/he may be alert to any needs. Additionally, the door to the classroom will be left open until the time the second adult is again present.
8. Babysitting/childcare may be provided by at least two youth, who are minimally five years older than the children, under the direction of and at the discretion of the Sunday School Supervisor.
9. Ratios of staff to children shall be in compliance with the rules and regulations of the State of Michigan. (Below are the guidelines from [www.michigan.gov/michildcare](http://www.michigan.gov/michildcare).)
  - Birth to 12 months – 1:3
  - 13-30 months – 1:4
  - 31-35 month – 1:5
  - 3 year olds – 1:7
  - 4 and 5 year olds – 1:8
  - 6 – 10 year olds – 1:9
  - 10 – 12 year olds – 1:10
10. Preschool children may be helped in the bathroom by an adult/youth only if the door is left open. For children who can help themselves in the bathroom, the adult/youth will wait outside in public view. Diaper changes must be performed by an adult/youth in public view.
11. If there is a discipline problem, the child shall be taken aside in the same room where the other children are or into a public hallway with another adult present to discuss/attend to the issue at hand. The parent(s)/guardian will be consulted to find ways to remedy the issues if there are ongoing difficulties.
12. Children are not allowed in the church kitchen without adult supervision.

13. Staff/volunteers witnessing an accident or incident shall immediately notify the Sunday School Supervisor and/or the Pastor/Director responsible for this ministry area, fill out an accident/incident report form and follow all policies for reporting such an accident/incident.
14. Staff/volunteers shall immediately report any signs or behaviors which seem to indicate abuse or neglect or behaviors that are inappropriate for the classroom/activity to the Sunday School Supervisor and the Pastor/Director responsible for this ministry area and the procedure for reporting suspected abuse will be immediately implemented.
15. If it is suspected that a child may intend to harm himself/herself or another, the staff/volunteer shall immediately notify the Pastor/Director responsible for this ministry area and the procedure for reporting suspected abuse will be immediately implemented.

## **YOUTH SAFETY GUIDELINES AGES 13-17 YEARS**

1. Volunteer/unpaid adults may be permitted to work with youth only after they have been a member or constituent of FUMC for six months, have completed all forms and background checks required below, and by recommendation of Pastor or Youth Council member.
2. All persons—volunteer and/or staff-- working with youth more than five times in a calendar year must complete the following:
  - a. Application for Working with Children or Youth
  - b. Disclosure Form
  - c. Criminal Background/Felony Check
  - d. Child Abuse/Neglect Background Check
  - e. Code of Ethics for Volunteers in Ministry to Children or Youth
  - f. Reference check
  - g. Personal interview
3. Persons who help with youth activities fewer than 5 times a year must be under the direct supervision of a screened staff person/volunteer.
4. Youth are the responsibility of their parent/guardian when not in scheduled youth activities. Youth are deemed responsible to come and go directly from activities to their parents or other provided transportation. Youth will not wait outside in the parking lot for their ride.
5. At least one screened adult will supervise all activities involving youth. The ratio of adult to youth shall be: middle school 1:8; high school 1:10. Every attempt will be made to ensure that at least two adults will be present for activities. If there is an instance in which a second adult is not present, activities will all take place in the main open area of the Youth Center until a second adult is again present.
6. The Youth Center is an open and accessible area, with three classrooms adjoining that each have windows within the doors. It is permissible for one screened adult to be working within these areas with a group of youth in ratio, with another screened adult in a different classroom.



7. Youth Ministries of FUMC has an open door policy. Parents, volunteers or staff of the church should be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.
8. At least two screened adults shall be present for all non-classroom activities involving youth. At least two adults who are not members of the same family shall supervise any meetings held in an individual's home.
9. It is inevitable that occasionally, following an event that a youth's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, one screened adult may unavoidably supervise a youth. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being.
10. When an event requires transportation, drivers must have a valid driver's license, have a copy of the license on file at the church, and be 21 years of age. Drivers must require seat belt use at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication and should not text message while driving. Best practice is to assign a navigator and communicator to the front seat. Youth who drive their own vehicles are expected to maintain safe driving practices. On the occasion that a youth rides with a youth driver for an event, parental permission will be sought.
11. For trips and retreats where youth gather for overnights at or away from the church, two screened adults will be present. There shall be one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults shall be the same gender as the youth. The person in charge of youth for overnight trips/retreats shall possess parental permission slips including permission for emergency care.

12. In instances of youth counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate church paid staff person may meet individually with a youth. At any counseling session, the door of the room shall remain open, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session shall be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

Note 1: At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if they are qualified to address the youth's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should be considered.

Note 2: This is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a youth.

# **REPORTING PROCEDURES FOR SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE AND/OR CHILD ABUSE**

## **Guiding Principles**

All known or suspected cases of child abuse or child neglect shall be reported to the appropriate individual(s) and/or agencies, as identified below in this policy.

The policies and procedures below define the minimum reporting requirements of the Church. These policies and procedures do not preclude anyone from additionally reporting a known or suspected case of child abuse or neglect to others who need to know for the protections of a child. Unless the protection of a child requires otherwise, confidentiality of the information reported or received should be respected to protect the rights and interests of the suspected (but not convicted) perpetrator, the victim and their families.

## **Known or Suspected Abuse/Neglect by a Pastor/Director**

All known or suspected cases of child abuse or child neglect committed by a Pastor/Director must be reported as required by law, and also reported to the chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. The chairperson shall then convey the report to the United Methodist Church District Superintendent.

## **Known or Suspected Abuse/Neglect by Anyone Other than a Pastor/Director**

All known or suspected cases of child abuse or child neglect, in which the alleged perpetrator is someone other than a Pastor/Director, shall be reported to the Pastor/Director responsible for each ministry area. The reporting individual and the Pastor/Director shall then convey the report to the Children's Protective Services orally within 24 hours, and in writing within 72 hours, as required by law.

## Reporting to the Parents or Guardians

All known or suspected cases of child abuse or child neglect that are reported to Children's Protective Services shall also be reported by the Pastor/Director responsible for each ministry area to the parents or guardians of the child, with the following exceptions:

- If a parent or guardian is the alleged perpetrator of known or suspected abuse, then the Pastor/Director may or may not, at his/her discretion, advise the parents or guardians that the Church made a report to the Children's Protective Services.
- The Pastor/Director shall not notify a parent or guardian of a report of known or suspected neglect, if the Children's Protective Services request that such notification be withheld.

## **RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE/NEGLECT**

### General Goals and Objectives

In responding to any occurrence of a known or suspected case of child abuse or child neglect, First United Methodist Church of Kalamazoo aims to achieve the following goals and objectives (listed in descending order of priority):

- Protect the victim and other children from any continued exposure to abuse or neglect.
- Provide adequate care for the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of the victim, the alleged perpetrator, and the Church.
- Respect and preserve the legal rights of both the victim and the alleged perpetrator.
- Provide adequate care to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

## Investigation

- Except to the extent provided below, the Church should not conduct any investigation of any reports or accusations of child abuse or child neglect. The Church is not equipped or trained to conduct such an investigation.
- The Church shall cooperate in any proper investigations by the Children's Protective Services, law enforcement agencies, liability insurers, and the parties involved.

## Procedures

Any employee or volunteer accused of violating the Child Protection Law or church policies for child safety, shall be placed on a leave of absence (paid or unpaid), pending resolution of the allegations.

All persons involved in the response should document their handling, activities, and communications.

If a suit or claim arising out of alleged child abuse is filed against: (1) the Church; (2) anyone, for child abuse allegedly occurring on Church premises; (3) anyone, for child abuse occurring while the child was attending or participating in any Church-related function, activity, event, or program; or (4) anyone, for child abuse allegedly occurring while performing any services in his/her capacity as a pastor, employee, church member, volunteer or Child care worker:

- The applicable response procedures defined above should be immediately implemented.
- The Chair of the Trustee Committee and the Chair of the Church Council should be immediately notified; the members of these Committees should be notified by their next regularly scheduled meetings that a charge has been filed.
- The Trustees' or Church attorney should immediately forward the claim or suit to the Church's liability insurance carrier, with a written request that the carrier provide a defense to the claim or suit for the Church, pastor, employee, member, and/or other volunteer Child Care worker.

- A member of the Church should be appointed by the Church Council as the contact person to handle, oversee, and/or represent the Church in all communications with:
  - The Church's liability insurance carrier,
  - Counsel retained by the liability insurance carrier and/or the Church, and
  - Anyone else involved directly or indirectly with the claim or suit.
- This contact person should be authorized to make decisions related to handling the claim or suit, short of settling the claim or suit, on behalf of the Church. This appointee shall report the status of the claim or suit regularly to the Trustees and the Church Council.
- The Church Council shall make all final decisions on proposed settlements involving any financial or other response by the Church to the claim or suit.
- All Persons involved in the response should document their handling, activities, and communications. (see incident form)

### **Conclusion:**

As Christians, we are called to live according to the gospel of Jesus. All persons are created by God. God intends all persons to have worth and dignity in their relationships. We are a connected body, and when one part of this body is injured physically, emotionally or spiritually, the entire body is rendered less than God intended.

While the vast majority of those who work with our programs are of the highest moral and spiritual character and are deeply committed to the needs of those to whom they minister, the reality is that the potential for abuse, bullying, or neglect is present.

We understand that those with clear backgrounds and records might find this process burdensome or offensive. Yet if we are to take seriously our responsibility for children and youth, all applications for workers and volunteers must be treated in the same manner. This policy is an act of hospitality to those who may be at risk due to their age, size, gender, race, sexual identities, and mental and/or physical capacities. We thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we endeavor to make our programs safe and secure for all who participate.

## DEFINITIONS

### **Church or FUMC**

“Church” or “FUMC” means the First United Methodist Church, Kalamazoo, MI, the building itself or any other location where the church sponsors activities for children.

### **Child**

“Child” or “children” refers to persons between the ages of 0 and 12 years.

### **Youth**

“Youth” refers to persons between the ages of 13 and 17 years.

### **Adult**

“Adult” refers to persons age 18 years or over.

### **Sunday School Supervisor/Superintendent**

“Sunday School Supervisor/Superintendent (or ‘super’)” refers to the adult responsible for the overseeing of the Children’s Sunday School programs each week during the published hours of Sunday School programming.

### **Staff/Employee**

“Staff/Employee” refers to persons who are paid for their specifically named services by FUMC.

### **Volunteer**

“Volunteer” refers to any person, not an employee, who provides any services, care, guidance, assistance, or supervision for any child in a Church-related ministry, activity, event or program, under the supervision of the Sunday School Superintendent, the Children and Family Ministry Team, or a Pastor.

### **Children and Families Ministry Team - CFM**

“Children and Families Ministry Team or CFM” refers to those persons officially serving on the leadership team responsible for ministries for children and families at FUMC. This team serves under the supervision of the Pastor/Director responsible for this work area of the church.

## **Youth Council**

Youth Council refers to those persons officially serving on the leadership team responsible for ministries for youth and families of FUMC. This team serves under the supervision of the Pastor responsible for this work area of the church.

## **Accident**

An unforeseen and unplanned event or circumstance that results in an injury to some part of the body.

## **Incident**

An unforeseen event with potentially serious consequences, usually not involving bodily harm. i.e. name-calling, false accusation, etc.

## **Child Abuse**

Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare, which occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare, or by a member of the clergy and/or directors.

## **Child Neglect**

Harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare. Neglect falls into one of these two categories: 1) failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, health care and/or protection from child abuse; or 2) failure to intervene to eliminate risk to the child's health or welfare, when that person is able to do so, and has, or should have, knowledge of that risk.



## **Sexual Abuse**

The exploitation of a child, or any sexual intimacy forced on a child, for any stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, “peeping Toms,” and request to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact includes fondling the body parts such as breasts, groin, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral or anal sex.

## **Emotional Abuse**

Attempting to control a child’s life by destroying a child’s self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child’s mental and physical ability to resist, cuts off his or her contact with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem – all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

## **Physical Abuse**

Any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a child – whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, mark or bruise. Physically abusive behavior ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing, and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is an intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event but can also be a chronic pattern of behavior.

## **Incident Reporting**

Incident reporting refers to the giving of information to the appropriate persons and/or investigating agencies of any observed or suspected child abuse or neglect. Such reporting shall follow the guidelines stated in the following policy for Child Safety.

All persons interested in working with children (ages 0-17) are required to complete and submit the following forms to church leadership:

- Application for Working with Children or Youth
- Disclosure Form for Working with Children or Youth
- Code of Ethics for Volunteers in Ministry to Children or Youth
- Background Check Authorization
- Record of Reference Check Contact For Employees/Volunteers working with Children or Youth

Forms may be obtained from Julia Librizzi, Director of Children and Families Ministries; Ruth LaMachia, Church Business Administrator; or Rev. Julie Kline.





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