

First United Methodist Church  
Lakeland, FL

## **CHILD AND YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY**

### **Introduction**

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland is desirous of doing what it can to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children recognizes that:

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 states ". . . 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 and exploitation ... occur in churches, both, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines ... God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

Child abuse prevention and Ministry Protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children and youth, but also for our volunteers and staff working with youth.

The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children and youth. We should not allow the risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, thus making a difference in their lives.

### **I. Definitions**

#### **A. Child, Youth, Adult**

- A **child** is anyone under the age of 11.
- A **youth** is anyone not a "child" and under the age of 18 or still in high school.
- An **adult** is anyone 18 years of age or older

#### **B. Paid Staff, Adult Volunteer, Screen Adult, Youth Helper**

- A **Paid Staff** person is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened.
- An **Adult Volunteer** includes small group leaders, tutors, etc. Those volunteering at First United Methodist Church are excluded from working in areas of children and youth including those who are completing court ordered community service hours. (See Section IIA)

- A **Screened Adult** is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in church activities for at least six months. Exceptions to this rule must be approved by the Senior Pastor and Children's, Youth or Neighborhood Ministries Director.
- A **Youth Helper** is a volunteer under the age of 18 assisting with children's ministries activities, but must not be considered an adult volunteer and must be supervised themselves. A youth helper must also be counted as a student in the student/adult ratio.

### C. Child and/or Youth Abuse

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** includes any of the following:

- **Physical Abuse:** Violent non-accidental contacts that result in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
- **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child /youth's spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

## II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

The Pastor and the SPRC are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process of recruiting, screening, selecting, training, and supervising of non-appointive church staff and adult volunteers. *Para.258.12 2016 The Book of Discipline*

- A. Every adult volunteer who works with the Church's children and youth will be screened. All paid staff will be screened. Those who work regularly with children and/or youth will be trained on child protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth, and then annually thereafter. The procedure for screening are as follows: Each person, volunteer considered to work regularly with children and/or youth and all employees, shall complete an Applications for Employment (*Attach#1A or 1B\**) which includes a consent for criminal history background check and drug testing. This screening is good for three years after which time a re-screening will be necessary.
- B. Each person applying to work with children and/or youth shall "authorize" the church to conduct a criminal background check. At a minimum, the background check will include the one offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. Written authorization to run a background screening is required and is a part of the *Application for Employment*. First United Methodist Church of Lakeland currently uses the national criminal background screening program suggested by the Conference Department of Ministry Protection. ([www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection](http://www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection))

\* Indicates forms found in the Supervisor's Packet

- C. The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the application form and any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of discussion with the references, using the Reference Check Guidelines, (*Attach #2\**) will be retained with *Application for Employment*.
- D. Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children or youth, a designated paid staff member or other person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant reviewing with them the written application, (Interview Guidelines (*Attach #3\**)).
- E. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer must sign the Participation Covenant statement on the last page of this Policy stating they have read, they understand and agree to abide by the CYPP.
- F. The decision to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with youth and/or children is made after the interview and background check are accomplished.
- G. Where it has been determined that an applicant should **not** work with children or youth, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The appointed clergy and supply pastors or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.
- H. It is important that all records be kept in a designated, locked cabinet in the administration office. Files will be accessible to appropriate personnel system providing easy access and a safe place to be stored when they are not needed.
- I. Although not personally required to accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) through (G) above.

### III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work With Children and Youth

The Church shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff members, screened and non-screened adult volunteers who work consistently with children and/or youth. Training is also available online which includes a video and written test.

The training should include:

- The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- The church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
- Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.
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## **IV. Supervision of Children and Youth**

### **A. General Rules**

1. At least one screened adult will supervise all activities involving children and youth.
2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks). Half doors should be considered for toddler to second grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.
3. The "two person rule" is defined as having at least two people in any classroom or setting, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person.

### **B. Supervision of Classroom Activities**

1. **Crib/Toddler to Second Grade:** At least one **screened** adult should be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-6. When feasible, there should be two **screened** adults present, and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Two persons in the classroom is the expectation, at least one of them must be a screened adult. Children kindergarten or older are not to be held on any adult's lap.
2. **Grades 3-5:** At least one **screened** adult should be present for all classroom activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person who checks on all classrooms. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors are to remain open.
3. **Grades 6-12:** At least one screened adult should be present for all classroom activities. A designated person should periodically check all classrooms.

### **C. 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.

### **D. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure**

Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler should register their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through sixth grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday School and other children's activities. Picking-up children by non-authorized adults is forbidden.

### **E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities**

At least two screened adults should be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. At least two adults who are not members of the same family should supervise any meetings held in an individual's home. Meetings held in an individual's home must be pre-approved by the child's/youth's parent or guardian.

### **F. Counseling of Youth and Children**

In instances of youth or child 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 with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, 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 should be moved in 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 child/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 child or youth.*

#### **G. Time Following Group Events**

It is inevitable that occasionally, following children or youth group events, a child or youth's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, one screened adult may unavoidably supervise a child/youth. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being

### **V. Transportation**

#### **A. General Rules**

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This Policy includes both Requirements and Guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations in the Guidelines. It is expected that the Requirements will always be followed.

#### **B. Requirements**

(Refer to Church Vehicle Policies (*attach #4\**) for specific policies and procedures of First UMC, Lakeland)

1. The designated adult leader of the event must know drivers.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be the child/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 21 years old.
3. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the bus driver must be at least 21 years of age; drivers of all other vehicles, e.g. Yukon, pick up, golf cart must be 21 years of age.
4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license and physical is required. A copy of the driver's license must be on file at the church.
5. Drivers must require that seat belts are used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in

*\* Indicates forms found in the Supervisor's Packet*

cases of emergency or road detours.

7. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers and should not text message while driving.
8. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible should intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.
9. When any trip (local trip to across country) is planned, drivers or ministry leaders are to complete applicable paperwork at least 5 working days prior to trip to allow for driver background work to be concluded and driver to be approved by current insurance carrier. Driver's name will be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
10. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) search must be conducted and the appointed clergy or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory. MVR's are conducted annually. (The Conference's Ministry Protection office at 800-282-8011, x137, they will advise how to obtain a MVR of a driver. It is usually without charge.
11. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Participation Covenant Statement)

### C. Guidelines

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult, (both screened when transporting children and/or youth).
2. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.

## VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are requirements and guidelines of this policy. The requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the guidelines should be implemented. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

### A. Requirements

1. There should be at least two **screened** adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There should be at least one **screened** adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two-screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care, Medical and Permission Release Form (attach #5\*)

\* Indicates forms found in the Supervisor's Packet

## **B. Guidelines**

In a hotel-type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

- Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth per room.
- Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/youth rooms.
- Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
- A hotel should be selected where rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e. do not open to the outside.)

In home stay settings, housing should be assigned as follows:

- Two youth (same gender)
- One youth, one adult (same gender)

## **VII. Online Safety**

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

Church computers that are set up for guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic places and randomly monitored by staff. Controls should be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.

## **VIII. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Florida Statute 39.201 entitled, "Mandatory Reports" states that: "Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is abused, abandoned or neglected by a parent , legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, shall report such knowledge or suspicion of the department."

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for the child's welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or preschool does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when a child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative and potentially the legal requirement is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-96ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

- A.** Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has

been reported.

- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the supervisor, appointed clergy, or church administrator. If those are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.

If the accused is the supervisor, appointed clergy, church administrator or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office at the Florida United Methodist Conference Center in Lakeland.

- C. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive.

**NOTE:** *If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.*

- D. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
- E. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
- F. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy and supply pastors is to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
- G. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. (See Appendix VII). The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.
- H. Any contact with the media should be handled by a **pre-determined** spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy.

**NOTE:** *The Conference Communications Department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.*

**NOTE:** *The question that sometimes arise is: What about a “confidential communication” with a clergy person?*

Florida law (FS90.505) provides that some specific communications may be considered confidential if they occurred in the context of “seeking spiritual counsel or advice” from a clergy person. Thus a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2008 Book of Discipline, ¶1341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Again, the moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children.

**IX. Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Committee on Staff Parish Relations to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

**X. Application**

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation, are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

**ADOPTION RENEWAL**

This Child and Youth Protection Policy adopted by action of the Staff Parish Relations Committee of the First United Methodist Church this 6th day of March, 2017.

\_\_\_\_\_  
W David McEntire, Senior Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jo Fickes, SPRC Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Subsequent approval of the policy was adopted by action of the Church Council of First United Methodist Church this 24th day of April, 2017.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Russ Rhoads, Church Council Chair

First United Methodist Church  
Lakeland FL

## **PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT**

### **RETURN TO SUPERVISOR OR MINISTRY LEADER**

The congregation of First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- No adult who convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.
- All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall observe the Child Protection Policy at all times.
- All adults involved with children, youth of our church shall attend required training, and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding child abuse.
- All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?

YES

NO

**I have read this Participation Covenant and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.**

Name of Volunteer/Staff: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervising Staff Signature: \_\_\_\_\_