

# Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy

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# **First United Methodist Church Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy**

## **Mission Statement**

As members of First United Methodist Church (FUMC), we believe, in accordance with our Christian principles, that it is in the best interest of the church and the children, youth and vulnerable adults of the church to adopt policies, procedures, screening tools and training to better protect the physical, mental and emotional well-being of the children, youth and vulnerable adults who participate in FUMC church-sponsored activities.

## **Purpose of Policy**

The purpose for determining and implementing policies and procedures for staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the church is to protect the children, youth and vulnerable adults from abuse and the staff and volunteers from being unfairly accused of abusing any child(ren) or youth of vulnerable adults in any manner.

Churches may be liable for incidents and injuries that result from “negligent supervision”, i.e., the failure to exercise reasonable care in the training of workers with children, youth and vulnerable adults in the policies and procedures regarding abuse and safety. Adhering to certain policies can reduce the risk of negligent supervision. These policies and procedures also apply to the clergy, recognizing special situations involving confidentiality in performing their duties. It is with this mission and purpose in mind that the following policies, procedures, and screening tools will be used:

### **Screening:**

Screening is required for all paid staff and for volunteer positions involving supervision or custody of children, youth and vulnerable adults and includes but is not limited to the following:

- Paid staff: clergy, Church Secretary, custodian/s
- Youth ministry leaders and helpers
- Children and youth choir directors and helpers
- Christian education teachers, helpers, and substitutes
- Confirmation mentors
- Supervisors/chaperones of extended programs (overnight, daylong, weekend or longer)
- Drivers to events away from the church
- Anyone who has regular, extended, or significant contact with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults
- Nursery attendants and substitutes
- Youth assisted by an adult

**A. Completion of the appropriate screening form.** The screening form shall require

references, a Division of Criminal Investigation (DCI) check and, for persons who have been associated with the church for less than six months, an interview. The Program Administrator is responsible for administering the application and reference-check process.

**B. Prior-Record Rule**

1. Persons who have been convicted of either child sexual or physical abuse shall not provide service in any church-sponsored activity or program for children or youth.
2. Adults who have been identified as having committed sexual or physical abuse or having a criminal record involving violent crime to another person will not knowingly be employed by FUMC for service or accepted as a volunteer with programs or activities for children, youth or vulnerable adults.

**C. Driver Policy.**

All FUMC and related activities requiring transportation for children, youth and/or vulnerable adults as a part or purpose of the event must adhere to the following policy:

1. Drivers must have a valid Iowa driver's license and proof of a good driving record and must adhere to applicable laws.
2. Without exception, all drivers must be at least 18 years of age.
3. To the extent reasonably possible, in vehicles carrying more than four children or youth, there should be an adult in addition to the driver of the vehicle.
4. Passengers are required to wear seatbelts and use child safety seats as required by Iowa Law.
5. The owner of the vehicle must have evidence of insurance to at least the minimum state of ownership requirements.
6. There shall be no smoking while in the vehicle or consumption of alcohol at any time by a driver or adult passenger while traveling to, from, or during a FUMC sponsored child, youth or vulnerable adult activity.
7. The driver of the vehicle shall refrain from cell phone usage while driving.

**D. Six-Months Rule**

All volunteers working with youth or children must have participated in FUMC activities for six months or more or have suitable references from other churches in which they have participated.

**E. Youth Employees and Volunteers**

All youth employees and youth volunteers (those under the age of 18) must present a signed Parental Permission form (sample attached) before they can be authorized to work with children.

**Maintenance of Records**

All completed screening forms and related materials (letters of reference, interview notes, etc.) will be kept in a locked, confidential file. Only the pastor and the program administrator will have access to these records. These people shall keep all information confidential unless it is necessary to release it under the Reporting Procedures (see below).

## **Worker Supervision and Training**

### **1. Two-Adult Rule**

Two or more adults must be present during church activities that involve children and youth. Exceptions, such as with the confirmation mentor program, counseling and providing transportation, etc. are permitted only by:

- a) Obtaining written parental permission and/or
- b) Using an “open door” policy (the door to the room where the youth and adult are meeting is left open) and/or having doors with windows.

Exceptions may also need to be made in some situations in which every attempt was made to secure two adults. Under these circumstances, a youth may assist an adult. In the event that an exception is made, written notice shall be given to the pastor or Church Secretary.

### **2. Adequate Personnel**

Programs and activities that involve children and youth should always include adequate supervisory personnel. With the minimum of two adults the recommended ratios are as follows:

Newborn up to Age 2	1 adult for each 4 children
2 years	1 adult for each 6 children
3 years	1 adult for each 8 children
4 years	1 adult for each 12 children
5 years	1 adult for each 15 children

### **3. Church Nursery**

Children being cared for in the church nursery should be released only to the person who delivered them to the nursery or to their parent, guardian or someone specifically authorized by the parent, guardian or person delivering the child to the nursery. A nursery registry form will be available.

### **4. Reporting Suspicious Behavior**

Any inappropriate conduct or relationship between a worker and a child, youth or vulnerable adult, or between youth and another child or youth shall be reported to a Pastor, Leadership Council Chair or designated staff within 24 hours and investigated by using the procedure outlined in the Response Plan.

### **5. Training Session**

All paid staff, all workers with children and youth, and the education committee will be required to participate in training designed to inform them of the Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection policies and procedures under which the church operates. As a part of this training, they will be made aware of the legal penalties of misconduct, especially sexual relationships with minors, and the extent and limitations of the coverage provided by the church insurance policy.

A videotape of the training session will be available for later viewing.

The parents of children/youth in FUMC programs will be informed of the Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Protection policies and procedures under which the church operates with emphasis on the safety and well being of their children/youth.

### **Reporting and responding to an Allegation**

Who reports? Under Iowa State Law 232.69: Sunday school and Youth Volunteers are Permissive reporters. They are encouraged to report when they have reasonable cause to believe that abuse has occurred.

#### **1. Reporting Obligations**

- a) A verbal report of *suspected* abuse would be filed immediately with the Iowa Department of Human Services if the suspected abuser were the child's or youth's parent or caretaker. If the suspected abuser is church staff or a volunteer, a report to police will be filed.
- b) The police will also be contacted if the child's or youth's immediate safety is at risk.
- c) A written report will be made within 24 hours of an incident using the "Child and Youth Protection Policy Incident Report Form." Unfounded reports will be destroyed after the investigation process is complete.

If responding to Allegations involving a member of the clergy, the allegation of abuse is to be reported directly to the District Superintendent at 3047 Center Point Rd. NE, Ste C; Cedar Rapids, IA 52402-4064. Phone number: 319-365-6273.

#### **2. Reporting Procedure**

- a) Any suspected abuse committed by church staff or a volunteer on church property or at a church-sponsored event should be reported by the adult closest to the situation (e.g., an eyewitness, the first adult told by the child or youth, or the child's/youth's parent) first to a pastor or the designated staff. In the case of a paid staff member, the pastor or designated staff shall inform the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
- b) If a pastor or the designated staff is not on site or available by phone, the reporter should fill out a report form and contact a pastor or designated staff as soon as possible. (The forms are available in the church office.)
- c) A pastor or the designated staff should begin documenting in writing all efforts in handling the situation from the time it was first reported. This documentation will be continued throughout the investigation process.
- d) A pastor or the designated staff should notify the child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s), church attorney, insurance agency, and the Chancellor of the Iowa Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.
- e) A pastor or the designated staff should notify the Department of Human Services (888-270-3864) or the police when appropriate (see reporting Obligations section of this response plan).
- f) The suspected abuser should not be confronted until the safety of the child or youth is secured.

### **3. Response Plan**

- a) All allegations should be taken seriously.
- b) Pastoral care should be extended to the alleged victim and the family.
- c) Pastoral care should be extended to the suspected abuser and family.
- d) Care should be taken to avoid prejudging the situation. The suspected abuser shall be afforded full due process in the handling of any complaint. The suspected abuser should be kept apprised of all developments. The suspected abuser should be supported and treated with dignity.
- e) The Pastor, designated staff or Staff Parish Committee shall immediately suspend the suspected abuser of his/her responsibilities as they relate to this policy.
- f) The text of the prepared public statement (see “Spokesperson” section below) shall be used to answer to the press and the congregation, using care to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all involved.

### **Spokesperson(s)**

Only the Pastor, designated staff, or the appointed attorney shall speak to the media concerning a specific case. The following prepared statement will be used initially:

*We are aware of an allegation of abuse involving a child or youth of the First United Methodist Church (FUMC). The appropriate authorities have been contacted and are investigating the allegation. The church has a protection policy in place to screen all people working with children and youth in our programming. This policy was implemented in 2007. For the protection of all involved, I cannot disclose any further information at this time. We are working with legal counsel to prepare a more complete statement, which we will release as soon as it is finished. Thank you.*

Instruction on the procedure with the media is to be included in all staff and volunteer training.