

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH QUITMAN, TEXAS

Adopted by the Church Council on September 25, 2005

I. Policies and Procedures

When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, "Let the children come to me." Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy is designed to set procedures for the safety of the children, youth, and other vulnerable persons at First United Methodist Church of Quitman. This is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

II. Definitions

Physical Abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a vulnerable person. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (e.g., knife, belt, strap), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones, and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a person's body.

Emotional Abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes a vulnerable person to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the vulnerable person of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Vulnerable persons exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers a vulnerable person's health, safety, or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing,

medical care, education, and even affection and affirmation of the person's self-worth. This is perhaps the most common form of abuse.

Sexual Abuse: Abuse in which sexual contact between a vulnerable person and an adult (or another older and more powerful youth) occurs. The vulnerable person is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the vulnerable person is physically and psychologically dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to pornography or prostitution.

Ritual Abuse: Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a vulnerable person are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the vulnerable person's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the vulnerable person, other persons, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem too grim to be true. Vulnerable persons making such reports must not be ignored.

III. Statement of Covenant

As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons as well as all of the workers with vulnerable persons. We will:

- # follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers;
- # implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events;
- # educate all of our workers with vulnerable persons regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods (including first aid and discipline);
- # have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law;
- # be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

IV. Requirements for Staff and Volunteers

All persons (paid staff members or volunteers) seeking to work with children and youth should fulfill these requirements:

1. All paid staff and volunteers will complete all forms, statements and applications provided by the First United Methodist church office (or designated staff member).¹
2. Criminal History/Background Checks will be performed on all staff members and volunteers who work with children/youth, and will be renewed annually. Results of these background checks will be received and reviewed by designated members of the Safe Sanctuary Committee. Acceptance or denial of the volunteer applicant based on the information contained in the background check will be made by the Safe Sanctuary Committee.
 - # No one shall be allowed to work with children, youth or vulnerable persons if, in the belief of the leader, sponsoring agency, or the event director, he/she represents a potential threat of committing abuse or violating this policy.²
 - # No one shall be allowed to work with children, youth or vulnerable persons if he/she are known to have been previously convicted of, pled guilty (or no contest) to any crime arising out of any act or conduct involving sexual abuse, or any act or guilty conduct which is of a sexual, molesting, seductive or criminally deviant nature, whether or not such conduct involved a child. This includes, but is

¹Applicable application form (for staff or volunteer position), Adult Participant Covenant Statement, Consent to Perform Criminal Background/History Check, etc. NOTE: All personal documents, forms and information generated during this process will be kept in a secured area and maintained by a designated member of the Safe Sanctuary Committee. (See Section XI, Forms)

²Any paid staff or volunteers who have experienced childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. Individuals who have such a history are encouraged to discuss their desire to work with children and youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in any volunteer service involving contact with children or youth of the First United Methodist Church of Quitman.

not limited to crimes involving pedophilic behavior (molestation of a pre-adolescent child), incest, rape, assaults involving adults with special needs, murder, kidnapping, pornography, and the physical abuse of an adult with special needs.

- # No one shall serve as a care provider who has had a verdict or judgment rendered against him/her in any civil action arising out of any person act or conduct related to sexual abuse of an adult with special needs or child. This qualifying rule shall apply no matter how long ago the civil verdict occurred and judgment was rendered.
- # If the Pastor is aware of other at-risk behaviors, he/she shall discourage the participation of that individual in children/youth related activities.

3. Membership in the First United Methodist Church:

- **Volunteers:** Must be congregation members for at least 3 months* to work in the Nursery, teach Sunday school or work with the Junior/Senior High Youth Groups or receive references from two congregation members.

Volunteers may begin the application, training and background check process at any time during that 3-month period.

4. **References:** References provided by the applicant (staff or volunteer) will be checked by the designated members of the Safe Sanctuary Committee. The Reference Check Form will be used for documenting the results of these checks. (See Section XI, 3)
5. **Training:** Persons working with children and youth must attend initial and continual training and educational events provided by the church in order to keep informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse and reporting procedures. Initial training will be coordinated/performed by the Safe Sanctuary Committee, then performed on an annual basis or when a new staff member is hired or volunteer is invited to be in service. All workers with children/youth will be required to attend an annual training session at which time they will renew their Participation Covenant Statement. (See Section XI, 4)
6. **First Aid/CPR:** First Aid and CPR certification for workers with children and youth is a basic step to help others respond competently to the needs of the children

and youth. At least one person, with First Aid/CPR certification, must be on site at all times.

7. Record of Training Form: A Record of Training form will be kept on each volunteer that will list the date of training, type of training received, and instructor. (See Section XI, 11)

V. Requirements of Outside Organizations/Groups

A responsible representative of any outside organization, group(s), or individual(s) who use any of the facilities of the First United Methodist Church of Quitman shall sign an Indemnification and Release form stating that they are in compliance with the Safe Sanctuary Policy of the First United Methodist Church.

Certified leaders of the Boy or Girl Scouts of America shall be subject to their own respective organization's rules and regulations concerning safety of those individuals they are charged with caring for.

VI. Basic Procedures for Responsible Adult Supervision

1. General

It is the purpose of this policy that First United Methodist Church of Quitman to provide adequate adult supervision for children and youth.

2. Two-Adult Rule

The Safe Sanctuaries Book, which was authorized by the United Methodist Church in 1996, strongly recommends a minimum of two unrelated adults be present at all times during any church-sponsored program or event for children and youth. Among the factors that should be considered are the ratio of adults to children or youth, the physical structure of the facilities, the duration of the event, etc. It may be that more than two adults would be required for an event to be conducted safely.

The recommended ratio for the First United Methodist Church of Quitman is at least two approved adults per every 10 children or youth if there are sufficient numbers of trained adults to fill this ratio. In the event there are

not sufficient numbers of trained adults, then one trained and approved adult will act as monitor by checking each room periodically during the duration of the event.

3. Three-Year Older Rule

Another important principle to be observed is requiring at least a three-year difference between ages of the primary on-site adult leader and the oldest age of the supervised. The three-year difference in ages shall apply between the on-site adult in charge and the oldest age of the supervised.

4. Workers Eighteen (18) or Older

In accordance with the state minimum standards, Primary Adult Leaders with full responsibility for children must be eighteen years of age or older. Primary Adult Leaders working with church Senior High Youth must be at least 21 years of age (to satisfy the 3-Year Older Rule if the oldest youth present is 18). Nursery Leaders must be at least 21 years of age. Nursery Assistant – must be at least 16 years of age.

5. Sign in / Sign out of Activities

All children below 4th grade level will be required to be signed in and out of activities by their parent/guardian (or to another individual only with advance parental permission). (See Section XI, 8)

6. Volunteer Work Record

A record will be kept listing the names of volunteers who work with children/youth, the area(s) in which they volunteer, and the date of service. This information will be gathered by the Nursery Adult Leader, Sunday School Coordinator, or other appropriate individual, depending on the activity, and turned in to the church office for the Safe Sanctuary files. (See Section XI, 12)

7. Clear Sight Lines

As much as possible, there should be unobstructed visibility to all activities where children and youth are present. Classroom doors should have windows in them or remain open. Changing a diaper and assisting a

young child with the bathroom as needed should take place where the worker and the child are in sight with the child's privacy protected.

8. Open-Door Counseling

Any counseling sessions with children or youth should be conducted in a room with a window in the door or with the door open.

9. Advance Notice to Parents/Guardians

Activities for children and youth need clear communication with parents/guardians prior to the event including full information about the event, and written parental/guardian permission for events specified by the First United Methodist Church of Quitman (lock-ins, off-site events, overnight trips, etc.). The children's and youth Leaders should make every attempt to notify parents/guardians of any change in the event at least one week in advance, if circumstances allow. If the change of the event occurs on the day of the event, the parents/guardians should be notified by phone of the change, if at all possible.

Parents/guardians will be required to fill out and sign a Consent to Participate, Liability Release form (Section XI, 6) and Data and Medical Release form (Section XI, 5) giving their children permission to attend and participate in the children's or youth events sponsored by the First United Methodist Church of Quitman. The Leaders of the children's and youth groups will provide these forms to the parents/guardians.

10. Drivers of Vehicles for Church Events

All drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events described herein must be at least twenty-five (25) years of age and possess a current, valid driver's license, have proof of insurance at the State minimum limits, and not be otherwise legally disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication and the like).

No youth will be permitted to drive another child or youth (other than their siblings) home, to the store, or any other location unless a written consent form from the parent/guardian of the child or youth who is being driven home is submitted to the Adult Leader prior to the event. Prior written consent must also be given to the Adult Leader from the parent/guardian

of any child or youth wishing to walk home from a church sponsored event.

Under no circumstances will any youth be asked to serve as a "runner" for any church sponsored event (i.e., driving to the store for supplies, picking up material from the church, etc.). It is the Adult Leader or assigned adult supervisor's responsibility to obtain adult support for this type task. Exceptions may be made by written or verbal permission and must be documented.

If there are not enough church vehicles or approved volunteer vehicles to accommodate the number of children or youth safety, the event may be canceled.

11. Activities/Gatherings Away from Church Property

Activities/gatherings scheduled to take place away from church property will require supervision by at least two unrelated adults. If not enough approved adult chaperones are available, the event may be canceled.

12. Co-Ed Overnight Activities

Co-ed overnight activities require male and female Leaders. The two-adult rule will be enforced, and if not enough approved adult chaperones are available, the event may be canceled.

13. Children and Youth Leaving Church Sponsored Events/Church Property

Once a child or youth has arrived at the church property or on site of an offproperty event, he/she will sign in with the appointed Adult Leader. If a child or youth wishes to leave the event, he/she will sign out with the appropriate Adult Leader and their parents will be called to pick them up. No child or youth will be allowed to leave the property (i.e., to walk to the store, go outside to talk, etc.). If any child or youth is caught leaving the event without signing out, his/her parent/guardian will be contacted and the child or youth may be sent home. This decision will be left to the discretion of the Adult Leader in charge of the activity. (See Section XI, 8)

14. Appropriate Discipline Procedures

Appropriate discipline procedures which focus on the behavior and not the child will always be used. Physical punishment or verbal abuse will never be used at any time.

If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will tell the child the specific behavior that is unacceptable and state what the acceptable behavior is.

If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. (Redirection of activity.)

If the inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at the table to work alone away from the other students.

If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child's parent/guardian will be located to remove the child from the activity.

VII. Basic Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse / Misconduct

Response and Reporting of Alleged Abuse

- # If an allegation of abuse in the church is made, the parents/guardians of that person will be notified immediately. The person who receives the report of the allegations of abuse will place the person who is the alleged victim of the abuse in a secure area, with the supervision of at least two adults not involved in the abuse incident, until the parents/guardians arrive.

- # The person who receives the report will determine if the victim's injuries require administration of basic first aid. If necessary, the person will contact emergency medical personnel to manage the victim's injuries. The person will also complete the Incident Report form (Section XI, 6). The completed form(s) will be given to the Pastor, or in the event the Pastor is the alleged abuser, the completed form(s) will be given to a member of the Safe Sanctuary Committee.

- # The alleged abuser will be told of the allegation immediately. The accused abuser shall not be confronted with anger or hostility. He or she will be treated with dignity but will be removed immediately from the further participation in church-sponsored programs that involve children and youth. Based on the final outcome of the abuse allegation, the person's further involvement in church-sponsored programs involving children and youth will be the decision of the Safe Sanctuary Committee.
- # The Pastor will be notified immediately of the abuse allegation, or in the event the abuse allegation is against the Pastor, the Safe Sanctuary Committee will be notified immediately of the abuse allegation. A designated member of the Safe Sanctuary Committee will be responsible for notifying the appropriate authorities of the annual conference, the church's insurance agent, the church's attorney, and the church's designated media spokesperson.
- # The person who receives the allegation of abuse will complete the Report of Suspected Child or Youth Abuse (Section XI, 7) immediately upon receiving the allegation. The completed form will be given to the Pastor, or if the allegation is against the Pastor, the form will be given to the Safe Sanctuary Committee. The Pastor or designated member of the Safe Sanctuary Committee will share the completed form with appropriate state and annual conference representatives to support the investigation of the abuse allegation. The form will be kept in a locked file in the church office.
- # The person receiving the allegation of abuse will immediately call the appropriate state agency and report the alleged incident. (Any person with responsibility for the care of children is required by Texas state law to make a report of any alleged abuse if they have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse or if they have observed conditions that would reasonably result in child abuse.)

The church's designated media spokesperson will make any necessary statements or responses to the news media. The identities of the person who is the alleged victim, the parents/guardians, and the alleged abuser will be kept confidential.

The Pastor or designated member of the Safe Sanctuary Committee will prepare a brief statement about the allegation of abuse to share with the congregation. This statement will inform the congregation that an allegation of abuse has been made without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, or revealing the identities of the person, the parents/guardians or the alleged abuser.

VIII. Non-Retaliation

This policy prohibits retaliation against anyone whom, in good faith, reports allegations of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct or assists in investigating charges.

Anyone found to have participated in retaliatory actions will be confronted by the Safe Sanctuary Committee and appropriate action will be taken, which may include termination as a volunteer or employee of First United Methodist Church of Quitman.

IX. General Provisions

The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be reviewed annually by the Safe Sanctuary Committee and Board of Trustees. Proposed revisions shall be submitted in writing to the above groups.

X. Implementation

This policy shall be effective September 25, 2005, with a goal of full implementation by December 31, 2005, for all church related activities, events and functions.

****Revisions made 2/2015 to delete special provisions of teachers in the FUMC Quitman nursery school. School was closed at end of 2014.**

*Call
Andrea King*

