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First United Methodist Church
Gastonia, NC

PO Box 218
190 E. Franklin Blvd.
Gastonia, NC 28053
Phone: 704-864-4371

www.fumcgastonia.org

First United Methodist Church
Gastonia, NC

Safe Sanctuaries Policies & Procedures



Introduction to Church Policy

OUR CALLING AND OUR MANDATE IS TO ENSURE A SAFE SANCTUARY FOR ALL GOD'S PEOPLE.

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God's people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalm 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As Christians, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. Churches must be holy, safe and protective communities for all God's children, regardless of age or ability.

First United Methodist Church, Gastonia recognizes the need to have a formal, written policy with procedures in place (1) to help prevent the opportunity for the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse of children and youth and (2) to help protect workers from false accusations and/ or suspicions. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children, youth and workers at all on and off- site functions sponsored by First United Methodist Church, Gastonia or organizations using the church facilities. The following policies and procedures are in no way based on a lack of trust, but are intended to protect the entirety of our community. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

SCOPE OF CHURCH POLICY

This policy goes into effect on **December 31, 2006**. The Safe Sanctuary Policy shall apply to all persons, including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with children and youth, who participate in any activities or events sponsored by First United Methodist Church, Gastonia or by other organizations or individuals which occur on property under the control of First United Methodist Church, Gastonia or while on events being sponsored by First United Methodist Church, Gastonia. Examples include, but are not limited to: Sunday School, sporting events (games and practices), music

training annually.

COMMUNICATION AND ADVANCE NOTICE TO PARENTS: Parents should always be kept abreast of the programs their children or youth are involved in, and be given advance notice and information regarding any activity which deviates from the traditional classroom instruction offered at the church during Sunday School, UMYF, Vacation Bible School, or other regular activities at the church. Permission forms with medical information should accompany children/youth for any activity involving travel or extreme sports activity (skiing, etc.). A Safe Sanctuary informational training time will be held for the parents and family of our children and youth, with copies of the policy for our church, available.

AGE AND ACTIVITY APPROPRIATE EQUIPMENT: A periodic check of the safety and appropriateness of the equipment we are using in our nursery, classrooms, youth room, fellowship hall, gym and playground will occur.

ADEQUATE LIABILITY INSURANCE COVERAGE: Our church maintains a $1,000,000 policy for sexual misconduct.

TRANSPORTATION: No youth may drive to any out of town church-sponsored event or transport others. Church policy specifies the insurance guidelines regarding adults using their personal vehicles for transporting children and youth. The Trustees have specific guidelines for drivers of the church van, in agreement with their insurance policy, and will do DMV checks on anyone permitted to drive the church van/bus. A photocopy of your license will need to be on file after completing training for driving the 15-passenger mini-bus. (Be aware of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration guidelines for operating 15-passenger vans more safely.)

SUPERVISORY RATIOS: The following ratios will be adhered to as a rule for programming on and off the church property for church sponsored events: 1 adult for every 5 Elementary children, 1 adult for every 7 youth, 1 adult for every 3 infants.

The First United Methodist Weekday Preschool maintains ratios as follows: - 1 adult for every 3 Infants/Toddlers, 1 adult for every 5 two year olds, and 1 adult for every 7 three/four year olds.

BASIC ESSENTIAL OPERATING PROCEDURES

IMPLEMENT A POLICY FOR RECRUITING, SCREENING, HIRING, AND REGULAR TRAINING YOUTH AND CHILDREN'S STAFF AND VOLUNTEER WORKERS: Criminal background checks, as well as previous employment and all references will be checked for those in supervisory capacities with children and youth, including but not limited to paid staff. Training sessions for all workers with children and youth will be held annually.

TWO ADULTS: Two adults must be in the room or vehicle whenever possible, and one of those adults must have at least 6 month's experience with FUMC. We will not create a situation where a child/youth is alone with an adult. No adult shall be in a supervisory position that has been a member of our congregation for less than 6 months. Any Leader must be an active church participant, and cleared the screening process. Leaders of outside agencies using our facilities with children/youth under 18 years of age must also be 'cleared' through a background check or other "Safe Sanctuaries" type policy (see *Scouting Ministries)*.

AGE LIMITS: Volunteers should be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth being supervised.

VISIBILITY IN ROOMS: Every room that is used for activities and teaching of children and youth should have a window in the door, or a half door, that gives visibility to all areas of that room. The window must be left uncovered. If there is no window, the door must be left open at all times.

OPEN DOOR COUNSELING: Pastoral counseling is expected to be confidential in nature, but it is for the protection of both parties that such sessions take place where other people are nearby even through not within hearing distance. Ministerial Offices should have a small glass window in it or be connected by a door to an adjacent office.

ROVING MONITORS: In the event where there are not two adults in the classroom, a roving monitor will be available during the meeting or teaching time, and the door must be left open. Ushers will be asked to rove the hallways during any worship services.

FIRST AID & CPR: At least one adult present at every church activity should be certified in basic First Aid and CPR. The church will offer

lessons, Scouting programs, UMYF, Confirmation, Bible Studies, Vacation Bible School, Sunday School parties, work camps, etc.

In addition to the Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures, the rules and regulations under which the First United Methodist Church, Gastonia Weekday Preschool operates under guidelines established by the North Carolina Division of Child Development. The Weekday Preschool adheres to the highest standards for childcare although not licensed due to building limitations.

THE SAFE SANCTUARY EXECTUTIVE COMMITTEE (SSEC)

The day-to-day administration of the Safe Sanctuary policy of First United Methodist Church, Gastonia (FUMC) shall fall largely under the responsibility of the Director of Children's Ministries, The Director of the Weekday Preschool, The Family Life Center Director, The Minister of Programs, and The Director of Youth Ministries. In such capacity, these individuals will be called upon to make tough decisions in adhering to First United Methodist Church, Gastonia's Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures.

The Safe Sanctuary Executive Committee (SSEC) shall be comprised of the Director of Children's Ministries, The Director of the Weekday Preschool, The Director of Youth Ministries, the Family Life Center Director, The Minister of Programs, and the Senior Minister. An attorney, the Church Business Administrator, or others may be added to this committee at the discretion of the Executive Committee members. The purpose of the Safe Sanctuary Executive Committee shall be to meet to discuss situations that arise regarding Safe Sanctuary issues and to make decisions regarding the disposition of those situations. The Executive Committee will work in consultation with the Children's Council, Youth Council, and Weekday Preschool Board regarding budgetary needs connected with Safe Sanctuary, conducting audits to ensure Safe Sanctuary compliance, and advocating for continued Safe Sanctuary involvement on the part of FUMC for the safety of our congregation and community. In addition, the SSEC shall undertake an annual review of the Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures of First United Methodist Church, Gastonia and submit revisions as needed for approval.

DEFINITIONS OF ABUSE

1. **VERBAL ABUSE** - Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.

2. **PHYSICAL ABUSE** - Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child or youth.

3. **SEXUAL ABUSE** - Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for the satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in church sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include but are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing and sexual intercourse. (# 6 taking from Resolution #30 *Book of Resolutions 2000*).

SCREENING OF THOSE WORKING WITH CHIDLREN AND YOUTH

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children and youth. Screening calls for a careful gathering and review of information in search of those who can provide safe and caring supervision in a safe environment.

Therefore:

1. As a condition of employment, all employees of First United Methodist Church, Gastonia, both lay and clergy will sign the necessary forms and submit to a criminal history and background investigation as desired by this local congregation and/or the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Physical boundaries are most important when dealing with youth. Those working with youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate whereas an older child or youth sitting in a leader's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses form a toddler to a leader are way different than the same from a youth.

Emotional boundaries are also important. As a child grows older it is important for the leaders to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the older person to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When a leader recognizes that there might be issues with these boundaries they should allow great space to come between them and the youth in questions.

SCOUTING MINISTRIES

FUMC supports a number of Girl Scout Troops and Boy Scout Packs. All leaders must meet and adhere to the requirements of the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America guidelines and their standards are adequate and fulfill our standards for operating as a Safe Sanctuary program. Scout leaders will be asked to fill out a FUMC Covenant Statement affirming their commitment.

The items in this section are still being written…

SPECIAL CLASS AND UMAR

INTERFAITH HOSPITALITY NETWORK

All persons serving as after dinner hosts (7 p.m. to 9 p.m.) or as night hosts (9 p.m. to 7 a.m.) must be Safe Sanctuary certified.

THEATER

Any performances that involve children and/or youth under the age of 18 shall have extra adults on set at all times.

HALLMARKS OF YOUTH
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICIES & PROCEDURES

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

All individuals assuming any position of leadership within Youth Ministry must be Safe Sanctuary certified as of January 1, 2007.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one leader can be in contact with multiple youth (6th-12th grades). One-on-one contact with youth in a closed environment is of concern.

SUPERVISION OF YOUTH

In most cases, proper supervision will demand multiple adults at youth events. However there are times where small groups divide from the larger group and only one adult will be present with multiple youth in these settings. Remember that there is safety in numbers, this is permissible as long as there is no one-on-one contact with adults and youth.

a. Youth Sunday School is held in an open environment with each room having windows so that one adult can teach multiple youth.
b. The youth office is an open environment and a one-on-one session can occur between adults and youth as long as doors are open and others are present in the office area.
c. Transportation issues will occur where one adult will be driving multiple youth. If caravanning should occur and if possible, the adult should have a cell phone and emergency contact numbers in case of a problem.

OVERNIGHT ACCOMODATIONS

At events that require overnight accommodations, we recommend that at least two (2) counselors be present in every room. When staying in a hotel, adults shall sleep in separate rooms from youth; or if necessary for youth to share a room with an adult, adults shall sleep in separate beds from youth so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one youth. Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one adult is adequate, so long as any one adult shall not be alone with any one youth.

2. Prior to acceptance as a volunteer with children or youth at First United Methodist Church, Gastonia, an individual will sign the necessary forms and submit to a criminal history and background investigation as desired by this local congregation and/or the Western North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. By signing the forms, the applicant gives permission to FUMC and its employees to contact references and perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application.
3. Once references have been received and a background check has been completed, First United Methodist Church, Gastonia reserves the right to turn away any persons from service in working with children and youth.
4. If the applicant (whether paid or unpaid) is found to have been involved in any activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children or youth, the applicant will not be approved. Any conviction of a crime against children or youth shall disqualify any applicant. Furthermore, other offenses, depending on how recent, the frequency and nature, may also preclude an applicant from serving with children and youth.
5. The SSEC will make the final call on the acceptance or disqualification of any applicant.
6. The results of screenings shall be kept confidential.

The First United Methodist Church, Gastonia Staff Parish will handle screenings for staff of First United Methodist Church, Gastonia. The Director of the Weekday Preschool will handle screenings for the staff of the First United Methodist Weekday Preschool.

PORTALS OF ENTRY INTO FUMC

There are four portals of entry for volunteers wishing to serve with children and or youth. All volunteers wishing to serve in areas of Sunday School, Child Care/Nursery, Vacation Bible School or other areas allowing them contact with children (fifth grade and younger), will be processed through the Office of Children's Ministries. All volunteers wishing to serve in the areas of Sunday School, UMYF, Mission Trip or other areas allowing them contact with youth (sixth grade and older), will be processed through the Office of Youth Ministries. All volunteers wishing to serve as a coach who has not been previously processed through the Office of Youth or Children's Ministries will be processed through the office of the Family Life Center. All volunteers wishing to serve as a choir leader/assistant who have not been previously processed though other offices will be processes through the office of Music Ministries.

CERTIFICATION PROCESS

First United Methodist Church, Gastonia shall provide to staff and laity a process for certification which includes the following steps:

1. All staff shall complete an application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to have references checked and background screening completed by FUMC.
2. All laity wishing to work with children and/or youth shall complete an application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to have the background screening completed by FUMC.
3. Laity are responsible for distributing reference forms and asking that they be returned as indicated.
4. The application will be processed by FUMC. The background check will be completed through an outside company with which the church has contracted. References will be collected as they arrive. At least two references must be received on a volunteer applicant.
5. All applicants must attend a Safe Sanctuary training.
6. Final Safe Sanctuary certification comes under the authorization of the SSEC.

All information shall be kept in a locked location forever. All background check reports shall be reviewed by the Sr. Minister and if no cause for

behavior is unacceptable. ("Blocks are for building, not throwing. Let's throw this ball instead.")

- Children should be helped to understand why their conduct is not acceptable rather than to be attacked regarding their personhood. For instance, do not say, "You are a bad boy." Instead say, "Let's use the blocks for building instead of for throwing. Try throwing the ball instead."

APPROPRIATE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES

Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children and youth. Those working with children and youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change, as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate whereas an older child or youth sitting in a leader's lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to a leader are very appropriate and much different than the same from a youth.

Emotional Boundaries are also most important. As a child grows older it is important for the leader to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children and youth not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important that the older person be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When a leader recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries they should allow great space to come between them and the child in question. If that does not solve the problem then the supervising Director shall be alerted so that the issue can be addressed.

ALTERNATIVES TO PHYSCAL PUNISHMENT

- Children should have good behavior recognized and encouraged.
- Children should be taught by example through the use of fair and consistent rules.
- Children's behavior should be anticipated. If children are beginning to become unruly, it is time to switch activities or to capture their attentions elsewhere.
- Children should be nurtured within a relaxed atmosphere.
- Children should be disciplined in a way that is relevant to the behavior involved.
- Children should be given directions that are clear and on their level of understanding.
- Children may be held firmly (yet gently) if their behavior will harm themselves or others.
- Children should be redirected by stating alternatives when their

concern the report will be filed in a locked location. If there is cause for concern regarding an applicant, the supervising staff person will be brought in for discussion with the Sr. Minister regarding the eligibility of the applicant for working with the children and/or youth at FUMC.

REPORTING OF INCIDENTS

1. Secure any needed emergency medical help. Address any needs the child may have.
2. Immediately contact the Director of Children's Ministries, Director of Youth Ministries, Director of the Family Life Center, Director of the Weekday Preschool, or the Senior Pastor as soon as possible. Report to the parents/guardians. Report to the Insurance Company. Report to the appropriate civil authorities.
3. Remove with dignity the person suspected of abuse from further contact with children/youth until an appropriate investigation has taken place. This is done for the safety and well being of the children/youth.
4. Preferably using a form provided by the church, carefully document the incident.
5. It shall be the goal to provide supportive care to both the victim and the respondent and to restore such persons to wholeness. Supportive care can include the procedures of the criminal justice system, provisions of the current Book of Discipline, appropriate counseling, referrals and continued pastoral visitation.
6. Confirmed reports of proven incidents of abuse shall be retained in confidential First United Methodist Church, Gastonia SSEC files for future screening purposes.
7. It is the responsibility of each individual involved in an alleged incident to follow all legal requirements. This may include calling 911 when needed.

MEDIA RESPONSE

The Senior Minister shall be informed of all investigations or allegations of abuse. If investigations of abuse should come to the attention of the media, a response shall come from a spokesperson as assigned by the Senior Minister. Refer all inquires to that spokesperson. DO NOT GIVE OUT ANY INFORMATION. SIMPLY STATE THAT ALL INQUIRES WILL BE ANSWERED BY OUR SPOKESPERSON.

HALLMARKS OF CHILDREN'S SAFE SANCTUARY POLICIES & PROCEDURES

LEADERSHIP BY EXAMPLE

All individuals assuming any position of leadership within Children's Ministry must be Safe Sanctuary certified as of January 1, 2007.

TWO BY TWO

There shall be two leaders present when children are present.

LINE OF SIGHT

If for some reason you find yourself in a situation where you are alone with a group of children, make sure that you are visible to others. For instance, open the door to your room, alert the teacher next door, etc.

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

a. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, avoid situations in which you are alone with a child. If for some reason there is no other adult available, make sure that there are numerous children in attendance rather than a one-on-one situation.

b. There may be times when a non-trained or non-background check individual will be allowed to temporarily work with children. An example of this might be as a substitute teacher or parents chaperoning a particular event. This is allowable only when Safe Sanctuary certified individuals are in attendance and monitoring the situation.

RESTROOM ASSISTANCE

Most of our classrooms are without a restroom, therefore, children in first grade and up may be sent to the restroom in pairs. If an adult needs to accompany the child, please remain outside the restroom in the hallway while the child is in the restroom. Should a situation arise in which an older child (first grade and older) needs direct assistance, enlist the help of another adult so that two adults are present with the child. If this is a situation which is likely to be 'ongoing' (such as with a child with special needs), please make sure that the Director of Children's Ministries is alerted so that a more permanent system can be put into place.

At any time, please alert the Office of Children's Ministries or the teachers in a neighboring classroom if you need additional assistance.

FIRE ALARMS

In the case of an alarm, evacuation must immediately take place if Sunday School or other event involving children is in session. Evacuate the building and stay outside until an all-clear signal has been given (usually this will come from a staff member).

HEALTH EMERGENCIES

First Aid kits are located in numerous areas such as the Office of Children's Ministries, the Office of the Weekday Preschool, the main floor Work Room, and behind the FLC desk. Phones are also located in these locations, each staff person's office, as well as the Canteen. If you call 911, please try to get word to a staff member or adult volunteer who can go to the parking lot to guide the emergency personnel to the correct location. It is imperative to alert the clergy and supporting Director as soon as possible so that the necessary support can be given to the situation. Once the situation has been handled, please fill out an injury report form. Even if an accident is minor, please fill out an injury report from and turn it into the Children's Ministries Office.

APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE

Children and Youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all local, district and conference events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In cases where behavior has to be addressed, it is best if persons knowing the child (such as the child's Sunday School teacher, coach or choir leader in the case of a large group setting) are Safe Sanctuary trained and called in to help handle the situation. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems except in the rare situation of having to gently restrain a child who is threatening harm to him/herself or to others. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping Safe Sanctuary guidelines in mind. Keeping parents involved is important. They need to be kept up-to-date on their child's behavior. For serious offenses, the appropriate response will be to send the child home immediately. Parents and the Director or his/her assignee will make the proper arrangements.