

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
113 West Central Avenue  
Van Wert, OH 45891  
**SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY – 2021**

*“With God’s help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”*

The Congregational Pledge to Baptized Children

The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44 - UMPH, 1989 - Revised August, 2008.

**OUR CALLING:** First United Methodist Church is a sacred place where God’s people of all ages come together for worship, study, service and fellowship. The ministries of First United Methodist Church, Van Wert, OH seek to share the Good News of the Gospel of Christ and make disciples of Jesus Christ that all who enter may come to know God and experience the love of Christ.

**OUR MANDATE:** In 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church has issued a mandate that all churches shall implement a plan to prevent child abuse.

**OUR PURPOSE:** The purpose of this document is to ensure that the members and staff of First United Methodist Church do all they can to provide a safe and secure environment for nursery, preschoolers, children, youth, and all persons entrusted to our care. The following policies and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family at First United Methodist Church, Van Wert, OH.

By establishing these policies and procedures, we demonstrate our commitment to provide a safe environment for our children and youth as they grow in their relationship with God.

Although it is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every circumstance, it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk of abuse by following these procedures.

**OUR COVENANT:** Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the safety of our children and youth as well as of the workers with children and youth.

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers;
- We will implement prudential operating procedures in our ministries;
- We will educate our workers with children and youth regarding the use of appropriate procedures;
- We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of the State of Ohio;
- We will be prepared to respond to the media should such an incident occur.

In all our ministries with Children and Youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be “surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal.”

*The Baptismal Covenant II - Congregational Pledge 2    The United Methodist Hymnal, p. 44*

## DEFINITIONS:

- *Pastor* – The ordained and appointed clergy of First United Methodist Church.
- *Staff* – Refers to any person involved in Children and Students Ministries who is paid, either hourly or salaried by First UMC. This includes teachers hired by the First UMC Pre-school.
- *Volunteer* – Refers to any person who engages in unpaid work at or in the name of First UMC, including but not limited to Sunday school teachers and guides, Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, Ministry Team Members, acolyte coordinators, childcare volunteers (including parents), student ministry team leaders and helpers, parent chaperones. This includes volunteers working during 5<sup>th</sup> Quarter and Wednesday Family meals.
- **Staff-Parish Relations Committee** (SPRC) – The committee which hires, evaluates, counsels and supports staff.
- *Child and Children* – refers to any person ages birth through the completion of 5th grade.
- *Youth* – a person enrolled in the 6th grade through 18 years of age.
- *Vulnerable Adult* – a person over the age of 18 whose mental, emotional, or physical condition makes him or her susceptible to abuse (temporarily or permanently)

## HIRING AND SCREENING STAFF:

1. All staff involved with Children and Students Ministries will be interviewed by the Pastor, a representative of SPRC, Director of Children's & Outreach Ministries, Director of Student & Adult Ministries.
2. All staff apart from pastors assigned by the Bishop of WOC shall be required to fill out background screening information that shall include, but is not limited to: Standard contact information: - Experience and qualifications for the position. - Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and convictions. - Background check authorization form - Valid social security number - Listing of 2 non-relative references with complete contact information (addresses and phone number). If staff position includes direct work with children or youth, 1 of these references must be related to the staff's previous care of or work with children.
3. Before any staff is allowed to work in any capacity at First UMC, the following must be completed; Pastor, a representative of SPRC or Office manager will contact references. Pastor, a representative of SPRC or Office manager will check the candidate's identity. Pastor, a representative of SPRC or Office Manager will complete a background check.
4. Any staff that has a break in service of more than ONE year shall resubmit the background screening information and will re-interview with the Pastor, and or the SPRC.
5. All staff, with the exception of Childcare staff, must be at least 14 years old. Childcare assistants must be at least 12 years old.
6. All records shall be kept in a secured location in the church.
7. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with First UMC for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in activities for children or vulnerable adults. In the case of new staff hires, references deemed adequate by the Pastor, a representative of SPRC may replace the six month waiting rule.

## **GENERAL PROCEDURES:**

{A} First U. M. Church's Safe Sanctuary policy will be approved by the Administrative Board and available to all church members.

1. Staff and Volunteers working with children and youth will receive a copy of First United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy.

2. The Safe Sanctuary Policy will be included in our new member packets, available in the church office and online at [www.vanwertfirst.net](http://www.vanwertfirst.net).

3. The First United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Implementation Manual will be reviewed annually by a task force consisting of persons who fill the following positions:

- Director of Children's Ministry
- Director of Middle School & Outreach Ministries
- Technology Coordinator
- Director of High School Student Ministry
- Director of First Impressions & Worship Arts
- Preschool Director
- Lay Representative of the Nursery
- Lay Representative of the Children's Ministries Team
- Lay Representative of the Student Ministries Team - Middle school
- Lay Representative of the Student Ministries Team - High school
- Lay Representative of the Board of Trustees
- Lay Representative of the Staff Parish Committee

{B} Volunteers with Children and Youth training in regard to the implementation of this policy, will complete a background check, and will sign a Safe Sanctuary participation covenant (Appendix A).

{C} Facility doors will be locked when not in use, including kitchens, classrooms. Christian education classrooms will be opened 15-30 minutes prior to the Christian Education hour and closed 15-30 minutes following the Christian Education hour. Fire doors into the Narthex, Worship Center, and hallways will not be locked at any time.

{D} All staff, leaders and other volunteers will know the location of emergency aid kits and have telephone access for emergency medical assistance.

a. Local access telephones are available around the church's building **419-238-0631**

b. First Aid kits are available in the storage room and in the High school Student's Ministry Room.

{E} No fewer than two leaders will be present at all children and youth events, on or off the property of First Church. At least one leader present will be an adult, 21 years of age or older.

Every adult leader will complete a background check. It is our goal that at least one leader present will have completed a background check and been trained in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures. When it is not feasible to have TWO leaders in every room, such as when a large group has divided into smaller groups, a floater will check on each group.

{F} Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders will be at least FIVE years older than the oldest

person they are teaching or leading.

- {G} Volunteers and staff who work with children and youth will submit to a background check.
- Background checks for First Church employees and volunteers will be paid for through the church budget. Background checks for volunteers for other organizations are the responsibility of such Organizations.
  - Only the Senior Pastor and the Office Manager will see the results of the background checks. Other staff members will receive a list of persons who have been approved for service with children and youth.
  - All background checks will be kept confidential. Files from background checks will be kept in a locked cabinet with other personnel files in the Office Manager's office.
  - Background checks must be renewed every THREE [3] years.
  - A national background check will be performed if the persons has lived outside the state of Ohio and/or lives near the border of another state.
  - Persons who fail the background check will not be allowed to serve as teachers, leaders or helpers/volunteer with children and youth.
  - Persons who have a break in volunteer or paid service of one or more years shall resubmit for a new background screening.

{H} A minimum of one adult for every ten children/youth will be maintained in each situation involving the supervision of children and youth. At least one adult worker present at every event will have received training in Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

{I} Children and youth attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parents and the staff person in charge.

- Children will only be released to persons other than parents if prior contact has occurred between the parents and the staff person in charge.

{J} Permission forms are required for each off-site event involving children and youth.

{K} All outside organizations that use the church facility will abide by First Church's Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures. Such organizations will be asked to sign a covenant that they have read and agree to abide by the church's Safe Sanctuary policies and procedures.

{L} There will be at least two adults of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.

{M} Hallway windows may not be covered when rooms are in use by children or youth.

{N} Liability insurance coverage: First Church's Trustees shall maintain liability insurance coverage of at least \$1,000,000 per event/\$2,000,000 aggregate for activities both on and off church property. Liability insurance should include at least \$1,000,000 per event and \$2,000,000 aggregate coverage for sexual misconduct claims.

## **PROCEDURES SPECIFIC TO CHILDREN:**

{1} **Children** will attend the appropriate grade and age level equivalent to the grade and age level they attend in school or preschool.

a. Preschool children should be placed in classes according to their birth dates. A child must reach the age-level of the class by August 1 of that year to be eligible for attendance. In other words, to attend the 2 Year-Old classes that begin September 1, the child must have his or her 2nd birthday prior to July 30. Parents who want their child to remain in a classroom that does not follow their age, must have the permission of the Director of Children's Ministry.

b. Any child in Kindergarten or above should attend the same grade level of Christian education as they attend in school.

c. If a child repeats or defers attendance of a grade in school, that child will also repeat or defer attendance of that grade in Christian education.

d. Promotion occurs in late August. Children move to the next grade level at that time.

{2} Children Birth through Grade 1 will be signed into and out of any activity by an adult, preferably a parent. It is recommended that signing in and out occur five minutes prior to and five minutes after an event.

a. Children Birth – Grade 1 may not be released to a sibling less than 10 years of age without written parental permission.

b. Children in Grades 2 – 6 may sign themselves in and out of a classroom or event in the presence of a parent or other adult guardian.

{3} Children not currently signed into a classroom or event are the responsibility of their parents and must be attended to by their parents. Children must be supervised at all times while on church property.

{4} Parents are encouraged to remain on the property while their children are signed into First United Methodist Church's ministries. Parents who leave the property while their children are signed into classes or events will provide emergency contact information.

{5} KidCheck records attendance which is loaded into the church database for the permanent record.

## **PROCEDURES FOR REPORTING INCIDENTS OF ABUSE**

{1} According to the laws of the State of Ohio, all persons are mandatory reporters of child abuse. If a person learns of or witnesses an instance of abuse, that person shall immediately

report the alleged incident of abuse or suspected abuse to the appropriate county or state authorities. The telephone number for reporting incidents in the State of Ohio is **1-800-4-A-Child** and in Van Wert County is **419-238-5430**. After hours: **419-238-2462** or **419-238-3866**.

{2} Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of children or youth will also be reported as soon as possible to the Senior Pastor or another First Church staff member, and to the District Superintendent - Northwest Plains District of the United Methodist Church at **1-800/589-7828** or **cell 419/348-4000**.

{3} The person reporting the incident will document, in writing, all known facts and circumstances and will also make a report that documents all steps taken in the course of handling the reported incident using the appropriate forms (See Appendix D).

{4} The pastor and/or staff member will document all actions taken in reporting the incident of abuse using the appropriate forms (See Appendix D).

{5} The confidentiality of all persons involved will be safeguarded.

## **RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

{1} Every allegation will be taken seriously. Adequate care and respect must be offered to the alleged victims and alleged perpetrators until the allegation can be substantiated or cleared.

{2} The safety and security of the alleged victim must be safeguarded before the person accused of abuse is confronted.

{3} The parents or guardians of the suspected victim will be notified immediately.

{4} All procedures listed in the previous section on Reporting will be strictly followed.

{5} All records relating to the matter will be maintained in confidential files.

{6} All efforts in handling the situation will be carefully documented.

{7} The Senior Pastor or his/her designee will notify the liability insurer and the legal counsel for the church about the alleged incident.

{8} The Senior Pastor will be the sole spokesperson for First United Methodist Church and the District Superintendent will be the sole spokesperson for the district insofar as media inquiries are concerned.

{9} Any person accused must be treated with dignity and support. That person will be immediately relieved of further responsibilities, as circumstances dictate, until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

## Response to a Known sex offender in Church

When the Lead Pastor or any member of the church administrative board, is informed that a registered sex offender is attending the church, the following steps will be taken to manage risk. These include the following:

1. Obtain a record of the sex offender's prior criminal convictions by conducting a national criminal records check. The church must be fully informed regarding the sex offender's criminal background.
2. If the sex offender is on probation, identify his or her probation officer and ascertain the conditions that have been imposed. In some cases, sex offenders are not even allowed to attend church. If the probation officer says that the offender is free to attend church, ask the officer if he or she would recommend that the offender be allowed to attend church, and if so, under what conditions. Obtain this information in writing, or, if that is not possible, make a detailed written account of the officer's response.
3. Condition the sex offender's right to attend church services and activities on his or her signing a "conditional attendance agreement" that imposes the following conditions:
  - a. The sex offender will not work with minors in any capacity in the church.
  - b. The sex offender will not transport minors to or from church, or any church activity.
  - c. The sex offender will not attend any youth or children's functions while on church property, except for those involving his or her own child or children, and only if in the presence of a chaperone (see below).
  - d. The sex offender will always be in the presence of a designated chaperone while on church property. This includes religious services, educational classes, activities, and restroom breaks. The chaperone will meet the sex offender at the entrance of the church, and accompany the sex offender on church premises until returned to his or her own vehicle.
  - e. A single violation of these conditions will result in an immediate termination of the sex offender's privilege to attend the church.
  - f. The conditional attendance agreement option will not be available unless the church's insurer is informed and confirms that coverage will not be affected.
4. In some cases, exclusion of the offender from church is the only viable option. This option is advisable if (1) for any reason the conditional attendance option is not feasible or enforceable; or (2) if the offender's crimes are so frequent or heinous that exclusion is the only appropriate option; or (3) one or more of the offender's victims attends the church. This will be a judgment call made by the pastor and board.

## **General Safety Procedures**

These procedures are for all areas of ministry.

1. All volunteers working with children and youth must complete the volunteer application process and participate in Safe Sanctuary training. Each volunteer must resubmit their volunteer application and participate in training every three years.
2. All reasonable efforts should be made to ensure that two adults will be present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event or ministry involving children. One adult must be present at all times.
3. Volunteers who serve as teachers and leaders must be at least five (5) years older than the oldest child in the activity.
4. Children/youth attending a church-sponsored event may not leave prior to the ending of that event without previous contact between the parents and the adult/volunteer/staff person in charge.
5. Permission forms are required for each off-campus event involving children and youth.
6. There will be at least two adults of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single-gender overnight events, at least two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the participating children/youth.

## **Policies for the Supervision of Children & Youth Adult/Staff Ratio in Nursery/Toddler Rooms**

The Nursery/Toddler personnel will maintain a presence and the oversight of the Nursery and Toddler Rooms. A minimum of two adults should be in attendance at all times, with a minimum targeted ratio of one adult for every five children in attendance.

## **Bathroom Use Procedures for Youth**

Adults should check occupancy of bathrooms on a regular basis, with a “knock and enter” protocol.

## **Floater**

At times when multiple groups of children and/or youth are present, the floater will move in and out of the classroom. A ‘floater’ will constitute the second adult in the event only one adult is available.

## **Visualization**

Classroom doors with windows must remain unobstructed at all times. Classrooms with windows must be accessible to viewing at all times. Classroom doors without windows shall remain open at all times when only one adult is present. If there is more than one adult present, the door may be closed. All doors must remain unlocked.

## **Appropriate Interpersonal Boundaries**

A protocol for appropriate dress, language, gestures, humor, physical contact, and other interpersonal behaviors should be discussed with and made clear to all participants.



## **Behavior Guidelines**

All discipline will be handled in a non-physical manner. Behavior that jeopardizes the safety of any person should be handled by removing the child/youth from the situation. In the case of disruptive and/or violent behavior, parents and supervisory staff should be notified. The parents and the leaders should develop a behavioral strategy that the child and/or youth must adhere for future participation in activities.

## **Counseling**

At any counseling session with children, youth, or adult with special needs, an employed staff must notify their supervisor. A volunteer should notify the supervisory staff member or another volunteer. During all counseling sessions the counselor and/or counseled must remain visible from outside the room throughout the entire session.

## **GROUP TRAVEL:**

- **Advance Parent Notification**

Parents should be provided with detailed written information regarding proposed activities involving children and youth. Parents must complete a **Consent and Emergency Care Form** for both one-day offsite and overnight trips. A copy of the Consent and Emergency Care Form should be filed at the church office. Parents will be informed regarding expected duration of each activity and the timeframe for supervision by staff and leaders. Parents must pick up their children and/or youth at the time specified for the end of each event.

- **Overnight Trips/Events**

To minimize the possibility of danger at hotels, dormitories or other accommodations, guidelines for ongoing group supervision, room assignment, and behavior expectations must be clear. Consequences of misbehavior shall be explained and enforced.

- **Interior Rooms**

When possible, hotels will be chosen where the rooms open to the interior of the building, rather than the outside.

- **Adult-Between**

If possible, room assignments will be arranged so that an adult room is between two children and/or youth rooms.

- **Random Checks:** There will be a plan for periodic room checks during the night.

- **Large Group Sleeping Arrangements:** Two approved adults must be present at all times.

- **Driver Checklist.** All adults who volunteer to serve as drivers for children and/or youth activities must possess a valid driver's license and must be at least 25 years of age.

## **FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, Van Wert, Ohio**

### **Background check authorization**

First United Methodist Church is committed to providing an absolutely safe environment in which children can grow and learn. First United Methodist Church, in an effort to prevent any child abuse from occurring during church-sponsored event, has developed a "Safe Sanctuary Policy."

As part of this policy, we are notifying volunteers who work with children that they will be subject to a criminal background check. Any volunteer unwilling to sign this form will not be allowed to work with children at First United Methodist Church, Van Wert, Ohio.

This action is in response to an Ohio law, Senate Bill 187, which went into effect on March 22, 2001. In an effort to care for the well-being of Ohio's children, all prospective and current volunteers with "unsupervised access to a child" may at any time be required to provide a set of fingerprints and undergo a criminal records check. This warning of a possible background check intends to protect children from being served by a person who might cause harm. (The phrase "unsupervised access to a child" means having access to a child when no other adult is present in the same room; or if outdoors, no other adult is within 30 yards or has visual contact with the child.)

Please fill out and sign below, indicating you have been notified of this law and return the entire notification to the church office. An additional copy of this notification is provided for your records.

If you have questions or concerns on this issue, please speak with First United Methodist Church's Pastoral staff or the Director of Children's Ministry or Director of Youth Ministry.

I have been notified that, as a volunteer working with children or youth (anyone under 18 years of age) at First United Methodist Church, Van Wert, Ohio, I may at any time be required to provide a set of fingerprints and undergo a criminal background check.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Print Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Signed

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

## **CHURCH**

### **Policies regarding Abuse**

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children has claimed the attention of our nation and society. The following policies reflect our commitment to provide protective care of all children, teenagers and adults who work with them.

1. Adults who have been convicted of either child sexual or physical abuse should **NOT** serve in any church sponsored activity or program for children.
2. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of our church family. Individuals who have such a history should discuss their desire to work with children with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in service.
3. Child care workers and volunteers should observe the "two adult" rule. This means that workers and volunteers are never alone with the child or children.
4. Child care workers and volunteers should immediately report any behaviors which seem abusive or inappropriate to one of the pastoral staff or the kids and youth ministry directors.

Please answer each question. Your response will be kept fully confidential.

1. As a church child care worker or volunteer, do you agree to observe all church policies regarding working with children?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

2. Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a crime?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

(If Yes, please describe on a separate sheet of paper)

I have read the above policy and agree to observe the safeguards listed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PRINT NAME

\_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE

\_\_\_\_\_  
ADDRESS (IF NOT 18 YEARS OF AGE, A PARENT'S SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED)

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT'S SIGNATURE

# FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

## Screening form for work with children

List all previous church work involving children and youth (list each church's name and complete address, type of work performed, and dates):

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List all previous non-church work involving children and youth (list each organization's name and complete address, type of work performed, and dates):

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List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you to work with children:

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Personal References (no relatives):

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Address \_\_\_\_\_

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Telephone \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for work with children. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by First United Methodist Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind of nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application. I waive any rights under The Federal Privacy Act regarding the released information. Should my application be accepted I agree to be bound by the policies of First United Methodist Church which I acknowledge as having read in their entirety and to refrain from UNSCRIPTURAL CONDUCT in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT.

This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_