



May 9, 2023

Greetings Paragould FUMC,

At this past Sunday's Church Council meeting your leadership adopted a joint policy recommendation from the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and Trustees titled "**CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY**". The new policy is posted at: [fumcparagould.org/resources.html](http://fumcparagould.org/resources.html). Hard copies are available at the church office as requested.

This updated policy reflects the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church's new staff/volunteer training and certification titled "Safe Gatherings." Previously each church did their own training including for example background checks. This new training and certification will be uniform across all churches and is far more thorough. The Conference is paying for the shared service.

What does this mean for Paragould FUMC? Our policies for protecting children, youth, and vulnerable persons on campus are largely the same. We follow common guidelines such as: one adult is never alone with children/youth; doors should be left open or have windows in them; adult staff/volunteers should always observe appropriate boundaries with vulnerable persons; and any concerns around these matters should be reported immediately. Details are outlined in the document linked above. I highly encourage each FUMC member to familiarize themselves with the church's policies.

The change for FUMC is the new training and certification program. Going forward, any church member who volunteers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults is **\*REQUIRED\*** to complete the "Safe Gatherings" training and certification. This program is an online module that can be completed over multiple sessions. Before completion you must submit a notarized form for a background check. (Our Church Administrator Denise Chipman is a Notary Public.)

Rev. Chase and I, plus a handful of staff and volunteers, have completed the training. It is educational and helpful. We really hope to have most of our volunteers certified in the next few months. It would be great if Vacation Bible School volunteers would complete training before VBS!

Go to [fumcparagould.org/resources.html](http://fumcparagould.org/resources.html) for a tutorial and link to begin the training.

I fully support our new policy including this training. These changes are in response to the disturbing number of abuse cases across churches in the last few years. We are thankful the Conference is helping to strengthen our efforts to provide a safe environment for all peoples. Of course this is and should be a top priority for our local church. Thank you for your support of these matters and completing this certification in a timely manner. If you have any questions or need help accessing the online material, reach out to the church.

Grace & Peace,  
Rev. Dane Womack  
Senior Pastor