



CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY

Updated & Adopted May 2023

404 West Main Street | Paragould, AR 72450 | 870.239.8541 | fumcparagould.org

In April 2000, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at eliminating potential for child abuse and neglect in the church. The resolution includes the following:

1. Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to children and other vulnerable persons. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse."
2. Child Abuse incidents are devastating to all who are involved; the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse.
3. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and other abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From the Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church P. 384-386)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist Congregations, First United Methodist Church of Paragould adopts this policy for the safety of vulnerable persons in our church and its ministries. Our purpose for establishing this Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all the children, youth, and vulnerable persons God has entrusted to our care.

COVENANT STATEMENT: First United Methodist Church of Paragould hereby pledges to conduct the ministry of Jesus Christ in ways that assure the physical and emotional safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth, and vulnerable persons as well as all of our workers (volunteers & staff). We will follow reasonable safety measures when selecting and recruiting workers; we will implement appropriate operational procedures in all areas of programming and care; we will train our workers with children and youth on our procedures and policies; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse consistent with Arkansas state law.

I. DEFINITIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT (ARKANSAS CODE 9-30-103)

- a. Arkansas Code defines a child as being any person under eighteen (18) years of age.
- b. Child abuse is any non-accidental physical injury, mental injury, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitation inflicted by those legally responsible for the care and maintenance of the child, or an injury which is at variance with the history given. The term encompasses both acts and omissions.
- c. Neglect refers to failure to provide, by those legally responsible, for the care and maintenance of the child and the proper or necessary support; education as required by law; or medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for his/her well-being; or any maltreatment of the child.

II. RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

- a. **AGE:** In recruiting volunteers and hiring paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 18 years of age and at least 4 years older than the age of the persons they are working to serve. This standard allows persons to be separated by enough years so as to better have perspective and recognition as an authority figure with the group they are serving. Persons not meeting these standards may not serve in a role of authority; however, they may be utilized as assistants to those in leadership positions. Persons under the age of 18 seeking to volunteer must be trained and approved by the Director of Children Ministry and/or Director of Youth Ministry.

b. **TENURE:** Volunteers must be regular attendees of a local congregation or a member of the Arkansas Annual Conference for a minimum of one year before serving directly with children/youth. Those attending less than one year are welcome to volunteer in a support role, but will not have primary responsibilities for children/youth.

c. **SAFE GATHERINGS TRAINING & CERTIFICATION**

i. All paid staff and any adult regularly engaging with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, must complete the Arkansas Conference of the United Methodist Church “Safe Gatherings” training and certification.

ii. Tutorials & instruction on training can be found on the FUMC website at: fumcparagould.org/resources.html

iii. ARUMC Safe Gathering portal and training is found at: <https://safegatherings.com>.

iv. The ARUMC Safe Gatherings training includes the following background checks: National Sex Offenders; County Court Records; Criminal Background Check; Child Maltreatment; Adult Maltreatment; Motor Vehicle Check. The ARUMC and/or the Church reserves the right to re-run background checks any time.

v. ARUMC Safe Gatherings training and certification is renewed every three years. Trainees will receive a reminder (via email address provided) 90 days prior to their certification expiration.

vi. **SCREENING:**

1. Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry involving children, youth, and/or our vulnerable adults:

a. Child maltreatment, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful.

b. Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, and similar offenses.

c. Drug related conviction (misdemeanor or felony) within the five (5) years immediately prior to application.

2. Persons having a history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver for church-related activities.

3. If there are questions regarding an individual's background check or screening, due to special circumstances (including but not limited to: acquittals, discharges, exonerations, pardons, etc.), please notify the District Superintendent or the ARUMC Safe Gatherings Coordinator for additional information and resources.

4. In the event that a background check reveals activity that calls into question the eligibility of an applicant, the ARUMC Safe Gatherings Conference Coordinator will be notified. The ARUMC Safe Gatherings Conference Coordinator will review the reports and will notify the appropriate District Superintendent, Pastor, and Chairperson of the local church's Board of Trustees of the concern raised. The decision on how to proceed with a volunteer's certification shall remain the responsibility of the local Board of Trustees.

d. **INTERVIEW/APPLICATION:** Applicants for a staff position, must be interviewed by a Supervisor and/or SPRC and/or Senior Pastor. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines including those herein should be discussed during the interview.

e. **CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION:** The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Information will be marked as such and stored in the Church Administrator's office or under their care with limited access afforded only to church staff and others with a need to know.

III. **GUESTS:**

a. Safe Gathering training and certification pertain to Church staff, members, and volunteers who work directly with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

b. Paragould FUMC guest speakers, guest entertainers, guest observers, and worshippers are exempt from Safe Gatherings training and certification. Those who have not completed Safe Gatherings training and certification including guests are not eligible to serve as a volunteer with responsibilities for children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.

i. If a guest adult volunteer or speaker/teacher joins an overnight ministry event with children or youth, that adult would need to present their own child safety training certification and/or background check and/or complete the ARUMC Safe Gatherings training and certification.

- c. Outside parties renting FUMC Facilities are exempt from Safe Gatherings training and certification. Such parties must adhere to the guidelines below, and complete and comply with *Facilities Use Policies-Rental-Indemnity Agreement* found at fumcparagould.org/weddings-facilities--events.html.
- d. Events co-hosted by the church and other organizations shall operate as follows:
 - i. Church members who have completed Safe Gatherings training and certification will oversee participation surrounding children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons.
 - ii. Volunteers from outside FUMC who will be consistently sharing in ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable persons should present their own child safety training certification and/or background check and/or complete the ARUMC Safe Gatherings training and certification.

IV. SUPERVISION GUIDELINES - All meetings of children, youth, and/or vulnerable persons affiliated with First United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

- a. **TWO ADULT RULE** - Two unrelated adults who have completed the ARUMC Safe Gatherings training and certification (above) must be present. When possible, adults will be assigned in teams of two or more to activities with children/youth including on and off campus ministries. Any outside groups who share in children's/youth activities at church should have two or more adults present. When feasible, both male and female adults should be present. See additional specifications for overnight outings below.
- b. **CHECK IN/OUT PROCEDURES** - Parents/Guardians of children 4th grade and younger are responsible for escorting children to/from appropriate class/room/area/activity. Children 4th grade and younger must be accompanied by an adult (parent, guardian, church volunteer) at all times. Children/Youth 5th grade and older are allowed to walk themselves to/from various locations/activities in a safe and efficient manner. For the sake of everyone's safety, it is the responsibility of staff/volunteers & parents/guardians to ensure children and youth do not freely roam around the church campus.
- c. **OPEN DOOR POLICY** - Parents/Guardians of the children/youth served, clergy, and staff have the right to visit and observe children's/youth activities at any time, unannounced.
- d. **DOORS AND WINDOWS** - All classrooms and office doors will have a window or visibility from the hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment that may obstruct visibility. If applicable, windows should be locked at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside should be left open. Any new/replacement doors must include windows.
- e. **ONE-ON-ONE INTERACTIONS** - One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate but care must be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. If an adult must meet with a youth or child alone, another adult (ideally the child's parent) is to have knowledge of the whereabouts of and the participants in the meeting. Children and youth participating in one-on-one interactions should be told they are free to discuss any aspects of the meeting with a parent or other adult, especially if they are uncomfortable about anything that occurs in the meeting. All incidents of suspected abuse and neglect revealed during the meeting will be reported in accordance with this policy.
- f. **TOUCH**
 - i. Physical affection should be appropriate to the age of the child or youth. For example, it is understood that young children may hold hands with or hug a teacher, but it is not appropriate for a teenager and youth leader to behave this way.
 - ii. Touching should be a response to the child's need for comforting, encouragement, or affection. It should not be based upon the adult's emotional needs.
 - iii. Ideally, touching and affection should only be given when in the presence of other children's ministry or youth workers. It is much less likely that touches will be inappropriate or misconstrued as such when two adult workers are present and the touching is open to observation. This is especially important when diapering a baby or helping a young child change clothes or use the restroom.
 - iv. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. Adult behavior must foster trust at all times. Adult behavior should be above reproach.
 - v. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Adult staff/volunteers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others.
 - vi. Adult staff/volunteers should promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other adults with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

V. OUTINGS AWAY FROM CHURCH PROPERTY

- a. All children and youth participating in out of town and overnight outings must have a completed medical release form on file with the church.
- b. There must be access to a phone/cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility. The church office or authorized church representative will be given this number prior to the group's departure from church property.
- c. In no circumstance is one adult (other than the parent) to take a child or children on an overnight outing alone.
- d. **OVERNIGHT OUTINGS**
 - i. There will be a 1:8|adult:youth ration ratio observed including at least two adults.
 - ii. Female adults will supervise female youth and male adults will supervise male youth where applicable.
 - iii. Adults and youth will not occupy the same room/sleeping quarters except in the case of a parent/child combination or communal rooms (see below).
 - iv. When overnight trips include communal housing (bunk rooms or dorms), female adults will board with female youth and male adults will board with male youth. In those cases, a 2:8|m/f adult:m/f youth is preferred so that at least two unrelated adults occupy the communal space.

VI. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE – Teachers and workers will use the following discipline measures

- a. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the teacher or worker will redirect the child to another activity.
- b. When applicable, one on one attention is given to that child.
- c. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g. ridicule, are to be used at any time.

VII. RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE

- a. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children, youth, and vulnerable persons participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for all.
- b. It is our legal and moral responsibility to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to our attention regardless of where that abuse takes place.
- c. If abuse occurs, it is our intention to act as an advocate for all affected persons, providing support, information, assistance and intervention. We seek to provide a supportive atmosphere, offering both objectivity and empathy.
- d. If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, follow these steps:
 - i. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the abused, as the situation requires.
 - ii. IMMEDIATELY contact the Senior Pastor or pastor on call.
 - iii. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor and the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
 - 1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident
 - 2. In the case of minors, contact the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-482-5964. This is a requirement of the law.
 - 3. In the case of vulnerable adults, contact the Arkansas Adult Maltreatment Hotline 1-800-482-8049.
 - 4. If the pastor is the accused party, notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent (1-870-793-5247).
 - 5. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee.
- e. The pastor or designee will notify the parents/guardians of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the person until parents/guardians arrive.
- f. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parents/guardians do not wish the incident to be reported. (Note: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
- g. Having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's attorney, the church's insurance company, and the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop's office.
- h. If the accused is a clergy person and member of an Annual Conference, provision of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.

- i. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults in the church, immediately, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults.
 - j. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults, the pastor or other designated person may tell the accused that a report has been made. If the accused is a volunteer or paid staff of the church, that person shall be relieved temporarily of his or her duties until the investigation is finished. If the accused is a paid staff person of the church, arrangements should be made to either maintain or suspend his or her income until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.
 - k. Any contact with the media should be handled by a predetermined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the conclusion of the investigation would be premature.
 - l. A written report of the basic information shall be kept to ensure on-going ministry to, and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report shall be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. It shall be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. The church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's office of the Arkansas Conference where it shall remain confidential.
- VIII. **VERIFICATION OF READING OF POLICY STATEMENT:** Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will sign a statement that he/she has read, understands, and will comply with the "Children, Youth, & Vulnerable Persons Protection Policy" of Paragould First United Methodist Church.

(page intentionally left blank)



CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY

STAFF/VOLUNTEER AGREEMENT

Paragould First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable persons, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The “CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY” reflects our church’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

- A. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any activity.
- B. All adults involved with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults of our church must be active participants of the congregation.
- C. All adults involved with children, youth, and vulnerable adults of our church shall observe “CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY” at all times.
- D. All adults involved with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults shall complete and renew (when necessary) the ARUMC Safe Gatherings training and certification.
- E. All adults involved with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults of our church shall immediately report any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

I have read and understand the Paragould First United Methodist Church “CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY.” I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth therein.

Name (print)

Signature

Date

(page intentionally left blank)



CHILDREN, YOUTH, & VULNERABLE PERSONS PROTECTION POLICY

ACCEPTANCE AND REVIEW

These policies have been accepted by the Church Council of First United Methodist Church of Paragould and are subject to annual review.

Any policy changes must be approved by the Church Council.

Adopted (month) May (day) 07, (year) 2023 by the Church Council of the Paragould First United Methodist Church.

Church Council Chair (Print & Sign)

Staff Parish Relations Chair (Print & Sign)

Senior Pastor (Print & Sign)