

Safe Sanctuary – Child Protection Policy

First United Methodist Church, Paragould

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

- I. Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse.”
- II. 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.
- III. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual 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 prevention of child abuse in our church.

Purpose

Our purpose for establishing this Child Protection Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our total and unwavering commitment to the physical, emotional, and spiritual safety of all the children and youth 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 and youth as well as all of our workers with children and youth. 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
 - i. Failure to provide, by those legally responsible for
 - ii. The care and maintenance of the child and the proper or necessary support;
 - iii. Education as required by law; or
 - iv. Medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for his well-being; or

- v. Any maltreatment of the child. The term includes both acts and omissions. Definitions of specific types of child abuse and neglect are further delineated in the Arkansas Code.

II. **Staff Recruitment and Selection Guides.**

a. **Age**

- i. In recruiting and hiring volunteers and 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.
- ii. Persons under the age of 18 seeking to volunteer must apply through as deemed by the Director of Children Ministry, and Youth Minister.

b. **Application**

- i. Applicants must complete and sign related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

c. **Background Checks**

- i. Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth (e.g. youth group leaders) and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment, to determine current or historic child abuse or sexual misconduct, criminal records, violent or pedophilic behavior. Background checks will be kept current (no longer than 5 years old) on all staff and volunteers with children and youth.

d. **Prior Convictions**

- i. Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children or youth.

e. **Interview**

- i. All applicants, for a paid position, must be interviewed by a paid staff/SPRC/Pastor for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work, or by other persons designated by the program leader. A team of interviewers may be used. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

f. **Confidentiality of Information**

- i. The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection 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 other with a need to know.

g. **Required Forms and Signatures**

- i. In addition to application and reference forms, all applicants will sign the following as part of the application process: Authorization and Request for Criminal Background Check and Policy Statement of Misconduct of a Sexual Nature.

III. **Staff Supervision Guidelines** - All meetings of children and/or youth affiliated with First United Methodist Church will be governed by the following guidelines:

- a. **Two adult rule** - Two adults, whenever possible, who have completed the application process outlined above must be present. This applies to classroom activities, activities away from the church facility and when transporting children and youth. Whenever possible, teachers will be assigned in teams of two or more per Sunday School hour to every class of children or youth. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers/leaders to permit such team teaching. Other church sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible. When feasible, both male and female leaders would be present. If the group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group, two or more leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender. See additional specifications for youth overnight outings in a later section of this document.
- b. **Check In / Check Out Procedure** - Parents of children 5th grade and younger will be responsible in getting children to their appropriate class such as: Sunday School, Church Nursery, and all other programs for this age group. Parents will pick-up their children 5th grade and younger at a predetermined location according to their class.
- c. **Open Door Policy** - Further protection for the children requires that an open door policy be followed. This policy shall state that the parents of the children served, the clergy, administrative and professional staff of the church have the right to visit and observe the children's/youth activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced.
- d. **Outside Access** - 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.
- e. **Doors and Windows** - All classrooms and office doors will have a window or visibility from hallway or remain open while occupied. Windows will be kept free from adornment that may obstruct visibility and kept locked at all times. Doors that do not have visibility from the outside will be replaced with doors with window when replacement is needed.
- f. **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.
 - i. **Touch**
 1. 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.
 2. 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 need.
 3. 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.

4. Touching behavior should not give even the appearance of wrongdoing. As ministry workers our behavior must foster trust at all times; it should be above reproach.
5. A child's preference not to be touched should be respected. Do not force affection upon a reluctant child. Church workers are responsible to protect children under their supervision from inappropriate touching by others. Church workers must promptly discuss inappropriate touching or other questionable behavior by other workers with their ministry leader, staff member, or a pastor.

IV. **Outings Away From Church Property**

- a. All children and youth participating in out of town and overnight outings must have a medical release form. (Medical release may be completed for a one-year period and must be renewed annually).
- b. There must be access to a phone/cell phone when groups are away from the 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. On youth overnight outings, there will be a 1:8 staff:youth supervision ratio observed. Female staff will supervise female youth in their sleeping quarters and male staff will supervise male youth. Married couples will not stay together but observe the female/female and male/male sleeping arrangements. With the exception of a parent/child combination, a staff and youth will not occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.

V. **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.

VI. **Training** - A summary of current child abuse statutes and reporting requirements for your legal jurisdiction are to be made available to all clergy, paid staff and volunteers who regularly supervise youth activities, Church Council members and all other church employees.

VII. **Verification of Reading of Policy Statement** - Upon receipt of this policy statement, the volunteer or paid staff person will read and sign a statement that he/she has read First United Methodist Church's Child Abuse Protection Policy.

VIII. **RESPONSE BY CHURCH WORKERS TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE**

- a. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and advocate for children/youth participating in the life of the church. The church is entrusted to provide an emotionally safe, spiritually grounded, health environment for children, youth, and adults in whom they are protected from abuse.
- 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. We shall report suspected abuse.

- d. 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 as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place.
- e. If abuse is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, that person shall report the incident immediately to the pastor or designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:
 - i. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
 - ii. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor or pastor on call.
 - iii. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, designated church child protection representative or the adult in charge of the event.) This person will:
 - 1. Provide written documentation concerning the incident
 - 2. **Notify the Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-482-5964.** This is a requirement of the law. (Note: Do not attempt an investigation. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with these cases.)
 - 3. Notify the pastor in charge. If the pastor is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee and the District Superintendent.
 - 4. Give written documentation to the pastor and/or Chair of the Staff Parish Committee
- f. The pastor or designee will notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the child/youth until the parent(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) does 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. Do not try to handle this without professional assistance. If the accused is a clergy (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provision of Paragraph 359 and Paragraph 2702 of The 2000 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church must be followed.
- h. A list of numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
 - i. If the accused is working in a volunteer or paid position with children or youth in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adult.
 - j. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, 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. A form for this purpose shall be available in the church office. 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.

IX. **Safe Sanctuary Policy Acceptance and Review.**

- a. 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 September 27, 2020, by the Church Council of the Paragould First United Methodist Church.

Stewart Runsick, Church Council Chair

Shelia Ragsdell, SPRC Chair



Dane Wamock, Pastor

Safe Sanctuary – Child Protection Policy - Staff/Volunteer Agreement
First United Methodist Church, Paragould

The congregation of Paragould First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The “Safe Sanctuary – Child Protection Policy” reflects our congregation’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.

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 church-sponsored activity.

All adults involved with children, youth and vulnerable adults of our church must be active participants of the congregation.

All adults involved with children, youth, and vulnerable adults of our church shall observe the Child Protection Policy at all times.

All adults involved with children, youth, and vulnerable adults of our church shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding child abuse. All adults involved with children, youth, and vulnerable adults of our church shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer the following question: Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults?

_____ Yes _____ No

I have read the Paragould First United Methodist Church **Safe Sanctuary – Child Protection Policy** and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Attached background check form must be completed and returned to church offices.

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Arkansas Department of Human Services
Division of Children and Family Services
REQUEST FOR CHILD MALTREATMENT CENTRAL REGISTRY CHECK

THIS FORM WILL NOT BE PROCESSED UNTIL ALL INFORMATION IS COMPLETED.

TYPE OF APPLICANT:

DHS Employee/Applicant [Division: _____] Foster Parent Legal Custodian Adoptive Parent Provisional Foster Parent

Foster Family Support System (FFSS) for: _____
Name of Foster Family whom FFSS will support

Other (This request will be processed for a fee of \$10 made payable by check or money order to DHS. We do not accept cash. This fee may be waived for non-profits who provide proof of 501(c)(3) status. Allow 7-10 business days for processing.)

This information should be addressed to:

_____	_____	
Name/Title (print)	Organization Requesting the Report	
_____	_____	_____
Address (physical)	Telephone #	Fax #

Address (provide mailing, if different than physical)

Name of Applicant: _____ Maiden Name/Other Names Used: _____ Race: _____ Sex: _____ Age/DOB: _____ / _____ SSN: _____

Present Address: (since _____, _____) _____

Previous Addresses (from the last six years):

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) _____

From _____ to _____ | 2) _____

From _____ to _____ |
| 3) _____

From _____ to _____ | 4) _____

From _____ to _____ |

Cities and States of Employment (outside of Arkansas) for last six years:

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1) _____

From _____ to _____ | 2) _____

From _____ to _____ |
|--|--|

3) _____

From _____ to _____

4) _____

From _____ to _____

Children (related or non-related) now residing or who have resided in the home at any time and all biological children, even if they have not resided in the home:

Full Name: _____
DOB/Age: _____ / _____
Relationship: _____
SS# (if known): _____

Full Name: _____
DOB/Age: _____ / _____
Relationship: _____
SS# (if known): _____

Full Name: _____
DOB/Age: _____ / _____
Relationship: _____
SS# (if known): _____

Full Name: _____
DOB/Age: _____ / _____
Relationship: _____
SS# (if known): _____

THE FOLLOWING IS TO BE COMPLETED ONLY WITH A NOTARY

I, _____ verify that the information above is true and complete. I authorize the Arkansas Child Maltreatment Central Registry to release any information their files may contain concerning me as an offender of a true report of child maltreatment.

Signature of Applicant

Date

County of _____ State of Arkansas

Acknowledged before me, this _____ day of _____, _____

Notary Public

My commission expires: _____

THE FOLLOWING IS TO BE COMPLETED BY CENTRAL REGISTRY

The Arkansas Child Maltreatment Central Registry contains no record under the referenced name in a true report of child maltreatment.

Examiner's Initials and Date _____

Please note that whenever there is a determination of child maltreatment, the person identified as the offender has the right to a hearing to contest that determination. The person's name may not be placed in the Central Registry until after the hearing decision. Therefore, the absence of a true report in the Child Maltreatment Central Registry does not imply that the person is or is not the subject of a completed child maltreatment investigation. Please check the Central Registry periodically as names can be added to the Central Registry based on new maltreatment reports and upon final administrative determination.

Information Found

Examiner's Signature and Date _____

Child Maltreatment Central Registry
Slot S 566
P O Box 1437
Little Rock AR 72203