

First United Methodist Church Of Lincolnton, NC Safe Sanctuaries Policy and Procedures

As a community of faith, we believe the church should be a safe place for all ages to learn, serve, and grow. With the intent of providing a safe environment for children, youth and adults who participate in programs designed to help them grow in their faith, First United Methodist Church of Lincolnton enforces this Safe Sanctuary Policy. This document affirms policies and procedures set by the First United Methodist Church for the physical and emotional safety of our congregation. This policy is also designed to protect our adult staff and volunteers as well as the church as a whole from unfounded allegations of misconduct. By definition, volunteers are unpaid persons serving in ministry with children, youth and adults. Children are defined as those persons from birth through fifth grade. Youth are persons from sixth grade through age 17. Adults are persons age 18 and older.

SAFE SANCTUARY RESPONSE TEAM: A Safe Sanctuary Response Team (or SSRT) shall be formed to respond to any alleged allegations of misconduct. The SSRT shall consist of the Senior Minister, the Chair of Trustees, the Chair of the Safe Sanctuary Committee and the Chair of the Safe Sanctuary Response Team. The Chair of the Safe Sanctuary Response Team shall be appointed as needed by the Nominating Committee. The Chair of the Safe Sanctuary Response Team shall be from the field of law or law enforcement with knowledge of child abuse and response laws in the State of North Carolina. The SSRT is not intended to advocate for any party; conduct a full-scale investigation; act as legal counsel; determine guilt or innocence; or replace the functions of the Book of Discipline. The purpose of the SSRT is to respond to any violations to this policy and enforce procedures. Should any member of the SSRT be associated with a complaint, they will be dismissed from this committee.

SAFE SANCTUARY COMMITTEE MEETINGS: The Safe Sanctuary Committee shall continue to be in existence in order to insure implementation of this policy, including updated said policy as needed. Membership shall be selected by the Nominating Committee as directed by the Senior Minister. The Safe Sanctuary Committee shall meet twice a year (Spring and Fall) to ensure compliance with all requirements of the Safe Sanctuary Policy, including but not limited to a walkthrough of the physical facility, review of room logs in classrooms and other rooms, training, equipment compliance, items stated on checklist attached, escape routes, fire extinguishers, and tornado plan, etc.

THE FOLLOWING ARE GENERAL POLICY STATEMENTS THAT WILL BE FOLLOWED FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE ENTIRE CONGREGATION:

- 1. SCREENING PROCEDURES:** Nationwide Criminal Background Checks and reference checks will be done for all those who are directly involved in the care of children and youth (counselors, employees and teachers, paid or volunteer.) The church will primarily concern itself with any charges and/or sex offenses, child abuse, substance abuse or other crimes of violence or moral turpitude, felony or misdemeanor. The results of these background checks will be held in highest confidentiality. The pastor and an attorney as designated by the Nominating Committee shall be the only individuals who see the results of these checks. The background checks will be retained by an outside agency employed by the committee. A background check should be completed prior to employment or being allowed to volunteer. Follow-up background checks will be performed approximately every four (4) years for volunteers. Church employees are subject to follow-up background checks every two (2) years.
- 2. TRAINING SESSION:** A training session will be required for all teachers, counselors, and employees who work with children and youth to educate them on the reality of child abuse and sexual misconduct, risk factors leading to child abuse, and strategies for prevention, as well as an in-depth review of our church's Safe Sanctuary Policy. These training sessions will be made available for new volunteers and will be documented to include the time, date, and persons attending the training sessions. Persons completing a training session will be required to retrain every two (2) years. Training will take place twice annually in the spring & fall.
- 3. AGE LIMITS:** Staff and volunteers should be **at least five years older** than the oldest child or youth being supervised. No one under the age of 18 should be given supervisory capacity.
- 4. TRANSPORTATION:** One adult may transport children or youth out of necessity so long as there are two or more children in the vehicle. No child or youth should be alone with one adult at any time. Anyone requesting to use the church van for the purpose of transporting children, youth or adults are subject to an additional background check for driving records and must be added to the church's insurance policy. They are also subject to the rules for van usage set forth by the Transportation Committee and the Trustees.
- 5. TWO ADULTS:** Two adults should be in the room with children or youth at all times. Trained youth volunteers may be in the room to assist adults. In order to further reduce risk, it is recommended that the two adults be unrelated.
- 6. SIX-MONTH RULE:** Adult volunteers working with any groups in a ministry context must be a member and actively attending FUMC for a period of **six months** and been through required training for their position, as well as appropriate background checks. This rule is subject to review with the understanding that outside organizations use our facilities and may not be members of First UMC. ({Please See item #13})
- 7. ROVING MONITORS:** In the event that there are not two unrelated adults in the classroom, there must be a roving monitor during the meeting or teaching time, as well as worship services where a nursery is provided, and the room door must be kept open. This may also serve as an additional security measure as the monitors would report any suspicious activity

or individuals to the pastor or other staff persons, or member of Trustees, while making their rounds through the church and campus.

- 8. VISIBILITY IN ROOMS:** Every room that is used for activities and teaching of children and youth should have a window in the door that gives visibility to all areas of the room. The window must be left uncovered. If there is no window, the door must be left open at all times.
- 9. BEHAVIORS:** All children, youth, and adults, as well as all volunteers working with various age levels in the context of ministry, are expected to behave in a Christ-like manner during all on or off campus activities sponsored by First United Methodist Church. If discipline issues do arise, the adult working with the children or youth should make one effort to resolve the issue with another adult present or as a witness. If the negative behavior continues, the adult is to contact a parent and have the child or youth removed from the activity or event. No form of verbal abuse or physical discipline should be used.
- 10. 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 though not within hearing distance. The pastor's study should have a glass window in the door and not be covered.
- 11. FIRST AID AND CPR:** It is recommended that at least one adult present for every church activity or program be trained in basic first aid and in CPR.
- 12. FIRST AID KITS:** First aid kits are located in the downstairs hallway, the Vestibule in the Sanctuary, each FUMC vehicle, in the Fellowship Hall Kitchen, the Youth Room, and storage unit located upstairs in the Children's Sunday School area. Small First Aid Kits are placed in each Sunday School Room to be restocked monthly by parish nurse. If a non-church vehicle is used for transporting children or adults, a small first aid kit should be in the vehicle as provided by the church through the FUMC business office. There are two AED (Automated External Defibrillator) devices located on our church campus. One is located on the main level of the Educational Building near the restrooms, and the other is located behind the Sanctuary near the sacristy.
- 13. OTHER ORGANIZATIONS:** Other organizations that use the Church premises for children and youth-oriented activities (for example, Boy or Girl Scouts, etc.) shall comply with and follow the FUMC Safe Sanctuary Policy as it applies to the organization. The organization shall also provide FUMC with a copy of its policy. (Please see Item #6)

THE FOLLOWING ARE POLICY STATEMENTS WHICH ARE SPECIFIC TO AGE LEVEL AND WILL BE FOLLOWED FOR THE PROTECTION OF THOSE IN THE CHILDREN AND YOUTH DEPARTMENT:

- 1. BATHROOMS:** Because nursery children may require complete assistance with their bathroom activities, all staff members and volunteers will observe the following practices:
 - Best practices of childcare suggest that only female nursery workers or the child's parent or legal guardian will undertake the diapering of children of either sex.
 - Changing of diapers should be done in plain sight of other nursery workers.
 - Children should be changed on changing stations only and never be left unattended on changing tables.

- Any special instructions given by parents leaving children in nursery will be recorded on the registration cards (“Seth Adams has a medicine in the bag for rash.”)
- Children should be re-diapered and re-clothed immediately upon the completion of changing their soiled diaper.

Toilet trained children may be accompanied to the restroom for supervision and assistance when needed.

- Staff members and volunteers should never take a lone child to the restroom. The 3 rule is best practice: 2 adults/1 child or 2 children/1 adult
- If a staff member or volunteer must go into the restroom to check on an individual child, he or she should seek out another worker to accompany him/her. If another worker is not available to accompany, he/she should go to the exterior bathroom door, knock, and ask if the child needs assistance.
- If the child requires assistance, the worker should leave the exterior bathroom door open when entering the bathroom area and try to verbally assist the child in completing their activities, while the child remains behind the door of the bathroom stall.
- Any assistance with the straightening or fastening of garments should be done in the presence of another staff member or volunteer.

- 2. COMMUNICATION AND ADVANCE NOTICE TO PARENTS:** Parents should always be kept abreast of the programs their children and youth are involved in, and be given advance notice and information regarding any activity, which deviated from the traditional classroom instruction offered at the church during Sunday School, UMYF, Vacation Bible School, or any other regular activity at church. Permission forms with medical information should accompany the children and youth for any activity involving travel or sports participation.
- 3. RECORD OF ATTENDANCE:** Adult leaders are required to keep a record of attendance of children and youth while attending church events. Additionally, the journal shall reflect any injuries noticeable on the child when entering the classroom and any injuries that occur during the class time or event. Date, time, and nature of injury should be noted in the journal and information shall be pointed out to the parent before or after the event or class. Extreme injuries shall be reported to the parent immediately and so noted. Journals will be provided and placed in each classroom. The Safe Sanctuary Committee will review these journals every six months.
- 4. BACKGROUND CHECKS:** A background check must be on file for any chaperone who is spending the night with a children’s or a youth group, whether it be a lock-in at the church or an overnight trip elsewhere. Other adults who attend an overnight trip must submit to a background check at their own expense. This provision is mandatory for conference-sponsored youth trips, according to the conference’s Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- 5. OVERNIGHT EVENTS/TRIPS:** No adult chaperone should **share a bed** with a youth member or members during overnight trips unless it is with their own child.

SAFE SANCTUARY – RESPONDING/REPORTING

Because the best response is the one which is planned in advance, First United Methodist Church should also plan for enforcing the following procedures in the event of an allegation as follows:

1. IT'S THE LAW: NC REPORTING LAW GS 7B-301 "Any person or institution that has cause to suspect that any juvenile (under the age of 18) is abused, neglected, or dependent as defined by GS 7B-1-1, or has died as a result of maltreatment, shall report that cause to the director of the Department of Social Services in the county where that juvenile is found."

2. REPORTING: Anyone witnessing or learning of child abuse shall immediately report the incident to the Senior Minister and/or Chair of the SSRT.

3. RESPONSE:

a. The first person to learn of an incident of abuse shall not make inquiries about the incident alone. The person should assure the immediate safety of the child and promptly report the incident to the Senior Minister and/or Chair of the SSRT.

b. The person witnessing or learning of abuse shall complete a "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form. The Chair of the SSRT shall insure that the form is properly completed. The Chair of the SSRT shall keep a written record of all steps taken by the church in response to the allegations. These records shall be kept in a secure place and marked confidential.

c. If the incident occurs in North Carolina, the Senior Minister and Chair of the SSRT shall assist the reporter in immediately notifying the Director of Social Services in the county where the incident occurred. If the incident occurred outside of North Carolina, the appropriate authority in the state where the incident occurred must be notified immediately if deemed appropriate.

d. The appropriate government agency shall be notified of the incident by the Senior Minister and the Chair of the SSRT. Report to DSS is not actively witnessed. Report to police/sheriff's department if actively witnessed at or during church events.

e. The Senior Minister and the Chair of the SSRT shall contact the District Superintendent within twenty-four hours of a reported incident. The Senior Minister and Chair of the SSRT shall keep the District Superintendent informed throughout the process. The church's insurance agent and attorney shall also be immediately informed of the incident if deemed appropriate by the SSRT.

4. RESPONSE TO VICTIM AND ACCUSED:

a. The alleged victim's parents shall be notified immediately of the incident and all necessary steps shall be taken to assure the child's safety until the parents/guardians arrive. If one or both parents/guardians are the accused, the advice of authorities shall be followed. Pastoral support will be available to the victim and family.

b. The accused abuser shall not be confronted with anger or hostility. The accused shall be treated with dignity, but immediately removed from further involvement with children or youth activities until completely cleared. Pastoral support will be available to the accused and family.

c. The victim and the accused shall be informed that the church is required by law to report to the proper authorities any accusation where evidence of abuse is present.

5. RESPONSE TO PUBLIC AND MEDIA:

Before making any reports to the congregation or the media, the SSRT shall consult with the church attorney, law enforcement, and the Department of Social Services as to what can be released in order to protect the victim, accused, and the investigation.

The only spokesperson for the church to communicate with the media and make any public comment will be the Senior Minister or the Chair of the SSRT. Response to the media shall be in the form of a written statement if possible. No one other than the designated spokesperson shall respond to the media. After consultation with the SSRT, an informational meeting may be scheduled at which time the Senior Minister and the Chair of the SSRT may present necessary details about the alleged incident without releasing unnecessary information, placing blame, interfering with the victim's privacy or violating confidentiality. The information meeting may be waived by the SSRT if deemed appropriate after careful deliberation and consideration.

6. PRIVACY: All necessary steps must be taken to protect the privacy and confidentiality of both the victim and the accused. That being stated, it may be necessary for the Chair of the SSRT and the Senior Minister to have confidential discussions with other workers, volunteers, or observers to discern what they might have seen or heard.

This draft completed by Robert Combs, Director of Ministries, with the input and approval of the Safe Sanctuaries Committee – June 28, 2021.