



SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Our Purpose

The purpose of this policy, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations and the Arkansas Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, is to provide a safe and nurturing environment for staff, certified volunteers, members and guests of all ages. These guidelines are intended to reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving the church as a holy place where all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others. This policy applies to all church-sponsored events or programs, whether on or off the church premises.

I. Definitions

A. Definitions of Abuse

1. Arkansas Code of 9-30-103 States:

- a) **Child** or **children** means a person(s) under the age of eighteen (18) years
- b) **Child abuse** is any non-accidental physical injury, mental injury, sexual abuse, or sexual exploitations inflicted by those legally responsible for the care and maintenance of the child or any injury, which is at variance with the history given. The term encompasses both acts and omissions.

2. General Abuse is categorized in five primary forms:

- a) **Physical Abuse** is abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child.
- b) **Emotional Abuse** is abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.
- c) **Neglect** is abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety, or welfare through negligence.
- d) **Sexual Abuse** is abuse in which sexual contact between a child and adult (or another older and more powerful child) occurs.
- e) **Ritual Abuse** is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse.

B. Other Definitions

- 1. **Clergy** in The United Methodist Church are individuals who serve either full-time or part-time as commissioned ministers, deacons, elders, and local pastors under appointment of the bishop, who holds membership in an Annual Conference, and who are commissioned, ordained, or licensed.

2. **Staff** includes any employee of First United Methodist Church of Mountain Home (hereafter referred to as FUMCMH), who is charged with the care or supervision of a *child* at an event.
3. **Participants** are *children* who are registered, enrolled, attending or otherwise involved in an event. At FUMCMH, children are classified from birth to 5th grade. Youth are 6th through 12th grade, or 18 years.
4. **Certified Volunteers** are those adults charged with the care or supervision of *children* who have completed all requirements for certification.
5. **Helpers** are any volunteers who are charged with the care or supervision of *children* at an event who have not completed the requirements for Certification.
6. **Events** include all activities which are planned for *children* and are intended to involve *children* and which are funded, in whole or in part, by FUMCMH and which are planned and implemented by persons representing FUMCMH, whether the activities take place on or off campus.
7. **Sanctuary** is a place of refuge, safety, and rest.

II. Responsibility

A. Team Members

1. The FUMCMH Safe Sanctuary Team (hereafter referred to as Team) will be comprised of 11 members, 6 of whom are to be elected by the Charge Conference and 5 of whom will be Staff Members including the following: Children Ministry Director, Student Ministry Director, Music Ministry Director, Nursery Coordinator, and the Church Administrator. In addition to these 11 members, a *clergy* member will serve as an ex-officio member.

B. Policy Review

1. The Team will be responsible for reviewing and updating the Safe Sanctuary Policy on an annual basis or as needed. Any revisions require the approval of the Board of Trustees and Administrative Council.

C. Application Process and Confidentiality of Records

1. Program *staff* will be responsible for asking and assisting with the application process and the completion of the Certified Volunteer Packet. The Church Administrator will be responsible for processing all background checks. After processing, all records will be kept in a secured location.

2. Access to these records will be limited to the Church Administrator and Senior Pastor. Under special circumstances, access to the records can be granted by the Church Administrator or Senior Pastor to members of the Team, law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, and legal advisors.
3. All files will be kept indefinitely from the date of their receipt.

III. Approval, Disapproval, and Revocation of Certification

A. Approval of Certification

1. After submission, review and approval of the Certified Volunteer Packet, the interview with and recommendation of a program *staff* member, and the completion of training, a volunteer will be classified as a *certified volunteer* to serve in FUMCMH events.
2. Certification shall be for a period of three (3) years, at which time it may be renewed based upon the requirements and guidelines established by the Team.

B. Disapproval of Certification and Appeals

1. Under no circumstances will an individual who is reported to have a criminal history be approved as a *certified volunteer*.
2. When a report is received that an individual has a criminal history the following course of action will be taken:
 - a) The Church Administrator will report to the Senior Pastor that a criminal background check has reported that the individual has a criminal history.
 - b) Senior Pastor will notify the program *staff* member who recommended the applicant.
 - c) After a discussion between the pastor and the program *staff* member, and the applicant, the applicant may choose to appeal the disapproval of certification. Following a review of the information provided by the application, the pastor may decide either to approve or disapprove the appeal or to refer the appeal to the Team for its review of the information.
 - d) After careful review of the information and documents, the Team shall confer and decide to approve or disapprove the appeal via a vote of at least two thirds of the members of the Team.
 - e) The pastor and program *staff* member will notify the applicant of the determination.
 - f) Written documentation of the appeal process and decision will be added to the applicant's file.

C. Revocation of Certification

1. If an allegation of *child abuse* is brought against a *certified volunteer* or *staff member*, the following procedures will take place:
 - a) The *certified volunteer* will be suspended immediately and removed from the service as a *certified volunteer* or *helper* until an investigation is completed.
 - b) A pastor and/or program *staff member* will investigate the complaint or complaints.
 - c) The pastor and program *staff member* will review all information and make a determination whether to dismiss the allegation or refer to the Team for review.
 - d) If the allegation is referred to the Team, one of the following will happen:
 - (1) If the Team, in its discretion, determined that the allegation has sufficient merit, certification will be revoked. Persons who have a “revoked certification” status will not be allowed to assist as a *helper* during *events* at FUMCMH.
 - (2) If the Team, in its discretion, has determined that the allegation has no merit, the suspension will be revoked and the volunteer will be allowed to continue working with *children* as a *certified volunteer*.

IV. Certified Volunteer Requirements

- A. **Be 18 Years or older.** (Volunteer helpers under the age of 18 can serve but as *helpers* and are at least 4 years older than the oldest *child* in the room)
- B. **Interview with the staff person in charge of the event or program.** All applicants must be interviewed to determine their suitability for the work they desire to do. Church policy, guidelines, and job descriptions should be discussed during the interview.
- C. **Receive the recommendation** of a *staff* or *clergy* member to serve as a *certified volunteer* based on the interview.
- D. **Complete a *Certified Volunteer Packet*.** By completing the following forms, the applicant will give FUMCMH permission to undertake the inquiries necessary to complete the review of the application. The Packet shall consist of the following:
 1. **Volunteer Application**
 2. **Volunteer Affirmation**
 3. **Safe Sanctuary Participation Covenant**
 4. **Completed Reference Checks**
 5. **Recommendation of Pastor or Program Staff**

6. **Criminal Background Check** Criminal Background checks shall be completed for all applicants who are to be considered as *Certified Volunteers*. The background check shall include any criminal history involving offenses classified as felonies or class A misdemeanors under Arkansas law. If an applicant has already completed a criminal background check for a United Methodist Church, district or conference, the Team may accept that report; however, they reserve the right to request a recent or more comprehensive check. (See Appendix)
7. **Arkansas Department of Health and Services Maltreatment Registry Check.**
This check will allow for applicant's names to be checked in the Child or Adult Maltreatment Registry. This registry will notify FUMCMH in writing if there have been any reports of child abuse, neglect, or abandonment for the applicant. (See Appendix)
8. **Certified Volunteer Training Certificate** FUMCMH will be responsible for providing all training as designated by the Team. Training should be completed to become a certified volunteer. Training should occur on an annual basis.

V. Safe Sanctuary Guidelines and Practices

- A. **Two Adult Rule** — At least two (2) adults, who are either *clergy*, *staff* or *certified volunteers*, must be present at any *event*. When necessary, a *helper* may be used to move in and out of separate rooms in which an *event* is being held and where only one other *staff*, *clergy*, or *certified volunteer* is present. If it simply not feasible to do so, doors will be open and/or windows will be in doors with one adult and a helper that floats between rooms.
 1. It is highly encouraged that for every 10 *children* there is one adult leader. The Two adult rule will still apply for groups under 10.
- B. **Four Year Rule** — Lead Adult Volunteers must be at least 4 years older than the oldest age of the person they are serving with. (This does not apply to *staff* or *clergy*). Volunteers under the age of 18 must receive written notification from a parent or guardian prior to serving.
- C. **Open Door Policy** — The parents of the *children* served, the *clergy*, and the *staff*, of the church have the right to visit and observe *events*, classrooms, or church-sponsored programs at any time, unannounced.
- D. **Windows in All Classrooms** — It is recommended that all rooms used for *children* have a window in the door or to the side of the door, or a dutch door. All windows viewing into rooms used for *children* must remain unobstructed at all times.

- E. **One on One Counseling or 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. During counseling of *children*, doors may be closed if there is an unobstructed window viewing into the room. If there is no window the door must remain open for the entire counseling session.
- F. **Classroom Discipline** — All *clergy, certified volunteers, and helpers* will work to protect the dignity of a *child*. If a *child* must be corrected, this will be done privately. If necessary, time out and others measures can be used at the discretion of the *clergy, staff, certified volunteer, or helper* while being in discussion with the *child's* parents or guardians about the necessary means to discipline. **No physical punishment or verbal abuse is to be used at any time.**
- G. **Bathroom Procedure** — When a *child* or impaired adult needs restroom assistance, *staff* and volunteers will not be alone with them in the restroom or stall with the door closed. *Certified Volunteers* and *staff* are preferred to diaper and/or assist.
- H. **Check in/Out Procedures** — *Children* will be checked in and out for events on and off campus. *Staff* or a Volunteer will take attendance, in their chosen format, at the beginning of each event. For Children's ministries, a parent or guardian will sign out. For Nursery, a parent or guardian will sign in and out. For Youth ministries, youth will be signed in and out via a staff or volunteer.
1. If a parent or guardian is having another person pick up their *child*, they will contact the respective ministry leader a head of time to let them know.
- I. **Outings away from Church Property**
1. All *children* participating, in off-campus, out-of-town, and over-night outings must have written consent and a medical release form.
 2. There must be access to a phone, *staff* cell phone preferred, when groups are away from the church property.
 3. There must be two (2) *certified volunteers, helpers, staff or clergy* on any overnight outing away from the church property. Under no circumstance is one adult to take a *child or children* on an overnight trip alone.
 4. Trip leaders will gather all forms and documents, the itinerary for the trip, address and locations, and names of all participants and contact information, and leave a copy with the Church Administrator in case of emergencies.
 5. A copy of contacts and locations, as well as an itinerary will be given to all parents/guardians prior to the event.

6. At an event that requires an overnight accommodation:
 - a) We strongly recommend that at least 2 adults leaders be present in every room. Female volunteers will supervise female children in their shared sleeping quarters and male volunteers will supervise male children in their sleeping quarters. Married couples will not stay together but will supervise the children their respective sleeping arrangements.
 - b) When staying in a hotel, leaders will sleep in separate rooms from *children*.
 - (1) If necessary, *children* and leaders can stay in a room, if leaders can sleep in a separate bed, and no one leader will be alone in a room with one *child*.
 - c) With the exception of parent/guardian/child relationship, an adult and *child* are not to occupy the same bed or sleeping bag.
7. Drivers during church sponsored events:
 - a) Drivers must go through the same selection and training process as other *staff/certified volunteers*.
 - b) Drivers should be at least 25 years of age or a member of *staff*.
 - c) Volunteers and *staff* driving children, youth, and impaired adults must have:
 - (1) A valid drivers license on file
 - (2) Provide proof of Current Insurance Coverage
 - (3) Complete a Motor Vehicle Record Check
 - d) At no time should drivers be one-on-one with a *child*.
 - e) Personal Vehicles may be used on trips if there is a need. While on trips, these vehicles become a Church van. Personal Vehicles will be driven by their owner.
 - f) If two drivers per vehicle is not possible (such as in the case of Ozark Mission Project), the same gender as the driver will ride in the vehicles. Vehicles will caravan together to event.
8. Any vehicle use requirements adopted by the Board of Trustees shall be followed in addition to this policy.
- J. **Social Media Policy.** Church Leadership may post pictures of *children* on Church's Social Media Platforms and website only after they have obtained permission from the *child's* parent or legal guardian. Photos or Comments will not include names such that the person may be identified. See Addendum on Virtual Ministries and Communication for more information.

- K. **Accident Reporting** — In the case an accident occurs on church grounds or a church sponsored *event*, an accident report will be filled out and filed with the Church Administrator. A paper or electronic copy shall be given to the parent or guardian upon request. (See Section VI for reporting in cases of Abuse)
- L. **Other Policies** — Any facility, transportation policies or guidelines adopted by the Board of Trustees shall be followed in addition to this policy.
- VI. Responses by Clergy, Staff, Certified Volunteers, and Helpers to Allegations of Abuse
- A. Reporting *abuse* is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. If *abuse* is suspected or 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 empathy and objectiveness as we seek to create a climate in which healing can take place. If *abuse* is suspected by, observed by, or disclosed to a *certified volunteer, helper, clergy or staff member* of the church, that person shall do the following:
1. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the *child*, as the situation requires.
 2. IMMEDIATELY notify the proper authorities (immediate supervisor, staff member, senior pastor or the adult in charge of the event) and only this person. This person will then, as a mandated reporter:
 - a) 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.) If the victim is an adult, notify the Arkansas Adult Abuse Hotline 1-800-482-8049
 - b) Notify a pastor at FUMCMH. If a pastor or *staff* is the accused party, the designee will notify the chair of the Staff Parish Relationship Committee, who will then notify the District Superintendent.
 - c) Give written documentation to a pastor, the Church Administrator, and/or the Staff Parish Relations Committee Chair. Documentation should include:
 - (1) Name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time, and place any action taken by this person
 - (2) The victim's name, age, and date of birth
 - (3) Any statements made
 - (4) Name of the accused, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the accused

- (5) Any action taken
 - (6) Date and time of call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to and content of that conversation
 - (7) Date and Time of any other contacted made regarding this indecent
3. The pastor or designee will notify the parents or guardian of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety of the *child* until parent(s) or guardian(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s)/guardian(s) does not wish the incident to be reported. (NOTE: if one or both of the parents/guardians is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities listed above. Follow their advice about notification of the parents.)
4. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the incident is to be reported immediately to the church's insurance company if the incident occurred during a FUMCMH event. Then, the incident must be reported to the District Superintendent. The District Superintendent will report the allegation to the Bishop's office. Do not try to handle an incident without professional assistance.
5. **Other important information regarding allegations of abuse**
- a) If accused is a *clergy* (deacon or elder) member of an annual conference, local pastor, or diaconal minister, provisions of Paragraph 361 and Paragraph 2702 of the 2008 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church must be followed.
 - b) A List of emergency numbers will be available to the *staff* at all times
 - c) If the accused is working in a volunteer or staff position with *children* in the church, immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the person, remove the accused from further involvement with children.
 - d) Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined 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.
 - e) A confidential written report of the basic information will 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 will be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It shall be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. If the incident involved a *clergy* or *staff member*, the church must also file a copy of the report with the Bishop's office of the Arkansas Conference where it shall remain confidential.

Addendum — Daycare/Preschool

- In addition to the requirements set forth in this policy, the church's Headstart program, shall also adhere to the requirements established by the State of Arkansas. Where the two requirements are in conflict, the guidelines set forth by the State of Arkansas should be followed.

Addendum — Nursery

- Should be 16 years of age to serve as a Nursery Worker
- First Aid and Infant CPR is highly encouraged for all Nursery Staff
- Emergency contact information should be on file for all children in the nursery. It is up to the nursery coordinator on how they would like to gather said information.
- A parent/guardian will check in and out their child. While checking in, they will leave name and contact information to contact in case of emergency while their child is in the nursery.

Addendum — Children

- Children Ministries range from Birth to 5th grade
- Volunteers/Helpers must be 15 years of age and 4 years older than the oldest child they are serving
- First Aid and CPR are strongly suggested
- Parent/Guardian will fill out a registration/contact form for each child in the group.
- Volunteers and Helpers with you should be aware of:
 - Befitting use of language
 - Clothing appropriate for the event they are helping/attending
 - Proper demonstration of encouragement and affection

Addendum — Youth/Students

- Youth/Student Ministries range from 6th to 12th grade
- Volunteers/Helpers must be 18 years old and 4 years older than the oldest child they are serving
- Parent/Guardian will fill out a registration/contact form for each youth in the group.
- Youth will be asked to fill out an information sheet
- First Aid and CPR are strongly suggested
- Volunteers and Helpers with you should be aware of:
 - Befitting use of language
 - Clothing appropriate for the event they are helping/attending
 - Proper demonstration of encouragement and affection

Addendum — Missions

- First Aid and CPR Training is highly encouraged.
- Background Checks are required for any missions at FUMC that the people serving come in direct contact with anyone under the age of 18.
- Volunteers who serve with anyone under the age of 18 or impaired adults are responsible for implementing this policy.

Addendum — Outside Groups/Scouts

- Any outside group that uses any space of FUMCMH for their event, should adhere to our Safe Sanctuary Policy if children will be present.
- Adults working with scouts will adhere to the FUMCMH Safe Sanctuary policy, as well as any requirements established by their respective national organizations. Representatives from each troop that uses the space will sign the Safe Sanctuary Covenant, as well as participate in training for Safe Sanctuary. These adults who sign the covenant are responsible in making sure all volunteers adhere to the policy.
- Any adult working with children shall following State Guidelines in reporting abuse.

Addendum — Pandemic

- In respect to all in person activities:
 - Follow all guidelines given from the CDC and/or World Health Organization
 - Follow all state and local guidelines
 - Listen and take into consideration the advice given from the Arkansas United Methodist Conference Office
- Adhere to any policy changes from Administrative Board and the Board of Trustees.
- Clean and Sanitize after any in person activities in any space in FUMCMH
- Keep accurate attendance records of who was in attendance at each in person event for contact tracing for the Department of Health
- If a person attends who has become/is positive with virus:
 - Contact Senior Pastor and Head of Trustees giving them the pertinent information needed
 - Contact parents of those students who were in attendance and were potentially exposed.
 - Consider moving all in-person activities online/virtually for two weeks to give proper social distancing and proper sanitation of the space.
- Consider updating the check in and check out system if chance of cross contamination.
- Consider changing the way lessons are taught. Refrain from sharing objects, or playing games where children may come in contact with one another.
- Remember to follow Safe Sanctuary Guidelines to the best of your ability and transfer them into the space that you will be serving in ministry.

Addendum — Virtual Ministries

- Remember to follow Safe Sanctuary Guidelines to the best of your ability and transfer them into the space that you will be serving in ministry
- Use platforms that will allow for two or more adults to be logged in at the same time. Some platforms will have the ability to record that will help see the “window in a door” policy.
- If able, use ministry based accounts instead of person accounts. Create an activity log for which adults are logged in and at what times. If not, make sure adults use their names and not screen names.
- Make sure every student has a picture/video sharing release form. Don’t share pictures, videos, or audio without these permissions.
- Do not tag young people in pictures or posts. Allow the youth to choose to tag themselves in the picture.
- Keep a log of all interactions with youth, in the meetings, one-on-one counseling, etc.
- Consider temporarily using lower adult to youth ratios and revising the check in and check out system as needed.

Addendum — Communications

- Communication is very important in the success of all ministries.
- When communicating with youth or children, the best way is to do large group texting, that way parents or guardians know about communication.
- Try to keep a record of all communication with youth/children.
- When communicating over direct messaging over social media, try to use a church/ministry associated account.