

**Safe Sanctuary**  
**First United Methodist Church**  
**Mountain Home, Arkansas**

**Our Purpose**

The members of this church are committed to providing a safe and nurturing environment for staff, members and guests of all ages, to taking reasonable precautions to reduce the risk of child or adult maltreatment for all who participate in our programs or events. 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.

**1. Selection and Training of Staff and Volunteers:**

- a. In recruiting and hiring volunteers and paid staff to work with children and youth in any position of authority, they must be at least 15 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 separate by enough years to 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.

- b. First United Methodist Church, Mtn. Home, will not use anyone as a worker for children or youth in the church unless they have been involved in the church for at least six months. In the case of paid staff workers, the applicant will be exempt from this policy.

This time of interaction between ministry leaders and the applicant allows leaders to better evaluate the suitability of an applicant. In some situations, this rule is not feasible and may be waived. If the six-month rule is waived, program leaders may take additional steps to screen the applicant at their own discretion.

- c. Application:  
Applicants must complete an information sheet and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.

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d. **Background Checks:**

Criminal background checks shall be made of all clergy, paid staff, and volunteers who have supervisory program responsibility for youth and children and all other church employees, to the extent permitted by law, prior to employment or volunteering.

e. **Interview:**

All applicants must be interviewed 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.

f. **Applicants with Substance Abuse Backgrounds:**

An applicant with substance abuse recovery or “clean” (i.e. not utilized any controlled substances) less than two years will not be permitted to work unsupervised with youth/children.

g. **Confidentiality of Information:**

The church will keep confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Selection information will be marked as such and stored in a locked location with limited access afforded to only to church staff and others with need to know.

**2. Interacting with Children, Youth and Impaired Adults**

Whenever a church-sponsored event involves working directly with children, youth or impaired adults, the following will be observed:

**Supervision:**

No child, youth or impaired adult will be left unsupervised at any time.

**Two Adults:**

a. Two unrelated adults will be present at all times; or if it is simply not feasible to do so, one adult will be present with the window in door.

b. When children or impaired adults need restroom assistance, staff and volunteers will not be alone with them in the restroom or stall with the door closed.

c. One-on-one counseling with children, youth and impaired adults will take place where other adults are immediately available and in a room with an open door and/or in sight of others.

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During church-sponsored events:

- a. Drivers must go through the same selection and training process as other staff/volunteers.
- b. Drivers must be at least 25 years of age.
- c. Youth will not be permitted as drivers during church-sponsored events.
- d. Drivers must have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
- e. Drivers must have their driver's license on file in the church office.
- f. Church owned vehicles will be insured.

**3. Off Campus/Overnight**

At events that require overnight accommodations:

- a. We strongly recommend that at least 2 leaders be present in every room.
- b. When staying in a hotel, leaders will sleep in separate rooms from children/youth; or if necessary for children/youth to share a room with a leader, leaders shall sleep in separate beds from children/youth so long as any one leader shall not be alone with any one child/youth.
- c. Recognizing accommodations may be restrictive in some cases, one leader is adequate, so long as any one leader will NOT be alone with any one child/youth.

**4. Social Media:**

With respect to all church-sponsored events:

- a. Staff leadership may post pictures or comments reading children/ youth/or impaired adults on the church's Facebook page or website but only after obtaining permission from the child/youth/impaired adult's parent or guardian. Photos or comments will not include names such that the person may be identified.
- b. Use of social media will conform to these guidelines as with any other behavior.

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**5. Response by Church Workers to Allegations of Abuse:**

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 the designee. (If the accused is the pastor, see information below.) Be prepared to do the following:

- a. Ensure the protection of and tend to the immediate needs of the child, as the situation requires.
- b. IMMEDIATELY contact the senior pastor immediate staff member, or the adult 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.
- c. This person will provide:
  1. Written Documentation including:
    - The name of the leader observing or receiving the disclosure of abuse, including the date, time and place any action taken by this person.
    - The alleged victim's name, age, and date of birth
    - Any statement made by the alleged victim.
    - Name of the accused, the date, time and place of any conversation or any statement made by the accused.
    - Any action taken.
    - Date and time of the call to the appropriate agency, name of worker spoken to content of that conversation.
    - Date and time of call to law enforcement agency, name of officer spoken to, content of that conversation.
    - Date and time of any other contacts made regarding this incident.
  2. Hotline information:
    - Arkansas Child Abuse Hotline: 1-800-482-5964
    - Arkansas Adult Abuse Hotline: 1-800-482-8049
- d. Give written documentation to the Pastor and/or chair of the Staff Parish Committee.

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- e. 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.)
- f. After 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.
- g. A list of emergency numbers will be available to the staff at all times.
- h. 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 and/or youth.
- i. 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 will 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.
- j. 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.
- k. A confidential written report of the basic information will be kept to insure on-going ministry to and advocacy for, victims and others involved. The report will be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It will be filed in a secure place in order to ensure confidentiality. The church must also file a copy of the report with the bishop's office of the Arkansas Conference where it will remain confidential.

**Policy Approved By:**

Keith Dodson

Signature of Senior Pastor

11-06-2019

Date

Keith Dodson

Printed Name of Senior Pastor

Michael Cannon

Signature of Trustees Chair

11-06-2019

Date

Michael P. Cannon

Printed Name of Trustees Chair