



# SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Newnan First UMC  
Newnan, GA

## APPROVAL SIGNATURES:

|                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Senior Pastor:    | Preschool Director:  |
| Associate Pastor: | Music Minister:      |
| Deacon Associate: | Youth Minister:      |
| Program Director: | Children's Minister: |

## INTRODUCTION

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child . . . welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones . . . it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea” (Matthew 18:6). 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, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church--2016*; ¶ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [“ritual abuse” refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be] occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation within churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such 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.

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. (*Adapted from "The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church--2016, pp.182-183. Copyright © 2016 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.*) Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, First United Methodist Church, Newnan, Georgia, (FUMC) adopts this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.

## **PURPOSE**

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and the accompanying procedures, is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our congregants and vulnerable persons.

## **STATEMENT OF COVENANT**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable persons, as well as all the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of Georgia state law; and the church's senior pastor or designated representative will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs. In support of this covenant, First United Methodist Church, Newnan, Georgia, shall review and update this Policy and supporting procedures annually in May in order that the revised Policy be submitted for review and approval by the Church Council in June (or at the next occurring Church Council meeting).

## **PROCEDURES**

### **FACILITIES**

#### **Windows in all Doors**

All doors to rooms that are regularly occupied will have windows placed in them. At no time will the window be covered. The only exception is for storage closets and maintenance closets; these doors should remain locked at all times and are only accessed by staff.

#### **Outdoor Lighting**

Lighting is improved upon on an as needed basis in all areas within and surrounding the church campus and parking areas.

## Secure Entrances

During activities on church grounds, security personnel (typically a hired police officer) will monitor doorways and the general church campus at their discretion. All doors may remain locked, have coded access, or be the designated door for entering or leaving the building for meetings, choir rehearsals, Bible studies, or other activities at the discretion and judgment of security personnel and/or staff.

## Security Cameras

The purpose of the cameras is to provide a means of clarity to security related events and to assist in law enforcement investigations should they be requested. In the interest of our children and vulnerable adults, cameras are not intended to monitor specific classrooms or areas where a reasonable amount of privacy is expected (i.e. classrooms, worship areas, offices, etc.).

Based on professional security assessment, cameras may be placed in strategic locations to further protect the safety of our children, youth, other vulnerable persons, and the employees and volunteers who work with them.

Internal Cameras will be located in areas of entrance/exit to the three buildings (Parish Hall, Main Building, and Annex Building) and external cameras will cover parking lots located on the Newnan FUMC campus.

Audio capture capability of Cameras will be disabled.

Network Video Recorders (NVR) will be stored in secure locations to prevent non-approved persons from viewing cameras. NVRs will store up to--but no more than--20 days' worth of video. Remote access to NVRs will be disabled per their aforementioned purpose.

Camera access will be limited to authorized NFUMC staff and lay leaders.

## **RECRUITING/SCREENING WORKERS**

All persons EMPLOYED or APPOINTED to serve in a SUPERVISORY capacity for children, youth, or other vulnerable persons shall:

- Be at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than the children or youth participating in the activity or event or have prior approval by SPRC
- Provide three character references
- Be interviewed by the director of the particular ministry or program

All employees (full-time, and part-time) including appointed clergy are subject to periodic background checks. These checks will be conducted on each employee every three years.

## **PROGRAM AND EVENT GUIDELINES**

All FUMC ministries with children, youth, or other vulnerable persons shall be governed by these guidelines:

- If both boys and girls are participants, then the adult leaders should also, to the extent possible, include both men and women.
- The number of workers required will be determined by the number and age of the expected participants and the nature of the activities. A minimum of two adults will be present at all activities to the best of our abilities, whether in person or in an online environment.
- Unauthorized visitors (people without background checks) will not be left alone with children or youth.
- Participants will be allowed to leave in accordance with the Drop Off and Pick Up procedures defined on Page 6 of this document.
- During church sponsored events, one-on-one activities shall not be conducted “behind closed doors” or in isolated areas away from trained supervisory persons.
- All church sponsored events will be carried out in appropriate locations with adequate equipment and trained adult supervisors present.
- All counseling will be conducted in a manner that maintains confidentiality and safety of all persons.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Volunteers shall be classified as either Primary or Secondary depending on the nature of the programs or events in which they are participating in. All volunteers under the age of 18 regardless of program or event are considered secondary volunteers. These volunteers must have the approval of the program director for their ministry area before serving.

Primary volunteers are those participating in weekly program events to include, but not limited to Sunday School, Children’s Ministries, Youth Ministries, Bible Studies, choir, support areas, and other programs of a similar nature. These volunteers shall meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 18 years of age and at least 5 years older than the children or youth participating in the activity or event or have prior approval by the program director and designated supervisor.
- Be a full member, affiliate member or associate member, or regular attendee of Newnan First United Methodist Church for at least six months prior to beginning work. This is referred to as the “Six Month Rule.” A letter of reference from the previous pastor may be used to override the 6 month rule.

- Provide three character references from non-family members at the discretion of the ministry area director or supervisor. Recommendations from prior supervisors/ministers may be requested at the director's/supervisor's discretion.
- Complete a Participation Covenant Statement annually.
- Consent to a Criminal Records check, to be renewed every 3 years
- Be interviewed by the director of the particular ministry or program
- Complete basic orientation/training provided by the director or other supervisor before beginning work

Secondary volunteers are those individuals participating in special events at the church. These volunteers shall meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 5 years older than the children or youth participating in the activity or event
- Complete a Participation Covenant Statement annually
- Complete basic orientation provided by the director or other supervisor before beginning work
- Secondary volunteers are never left alone with children

Volunteers transporting children, youth, or other vulnerable persons during church programs and events shall meet the following requirements:

- Be at least 21 years of age
- Be a full member, affiliate member or associate member of Newnan First United Methodist Church for at least six months prior to beginning work. This is referred to as the "Six Month Rule." A letter of reference from the previous pastor may be used to override the 6 month rule.
- Complete a Participation Covenant Statement
- Consent to a Criminal Records check as well as a driver's license records check, to be renewed every 3 years
- A copy of the driver's license shall be kept on file at the church
- Complete basic orientation provided by the Director or other supervisor before beginning work
- Be interviewed by the director of the particular ministry or program
- Observe the requirement for an approximate 8:1 student to volunteer ratio with a minimum of two adults in the vehicle.

## **TRAINING**

All employees working in a supervisory capacity for children, youth, or other vulnerable persons shall be trained in this policy, as well as, trained in safety, first aid, use of the Defibrillator and child abuse prevention.

Employee training shall include, but is not limited to, information, explanation, and discussion of:

- Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems
- Requirements of Georgia law for reporting incidents of abuse
- Procedures for response to incidents of abuse and for reporting incidents of abuse

Nursery workers will receive special training on nursery check-in and pick-up procedures as implemented by the Nursery Director.

Volunteer training shall include, but is not limited to, information, explanation, and discussion of the Safe Sanctuary Policy. Volunteers shall be trained and briefed on proper procedures relevant to any special events involving children, youth, or vulnerable persons. Training sessions for primary volunteers will be offered annually

### **TRAINING RECORDS:**

All records that provide evidence of training shall be maintained in a file in the church office.

## **DROP-OFF AND PICK-UP OF CHILDREN**

All children through 5<sup>th</sup> grade are to be dropped off and picked up from the designated area where the activity is taking place. At no time is a child left alone to enter or leave the buildings. Adult volunteers will be responsible for getting children in and out of the building, unless the child's parent or legal guardian picks them up from the room they are in. At no time will children be left unattended in the hallway, room, or waiting for pick-up inside or outside the building. Additional instructions and details may be required by each ministry area.

## **PUBLICATIONS, VIDEO, INTERNET CONSENT AND RELEASE AGREEMENTS**

In order to guarantee privacy, no minor will have his/her name, picture, art, written work, voice, verbal statements, or portraits (video or still) appear in FUMC publications, videos, or on FUMC websites without an FUMC departmental publication release form signed by the minor's parent or legal guardian. Group pictures of five or more minors, without names, may be published without an FUMC departmental publication release form.

NOTE: In special cases where the minor child's identity is under protected legal status, the parents or guardians of that child must inform the church of any such restrictions in writing.

## **SPECIAL EVENTS**

Parents or legal guardians will be given advance notice of and full information regarding events on and off campus in which their children are invited to participate.

Several special events require numerous volunteers. As such, the following policies will apply:

Great effort will be given to involve as many primary volunteers as possible, spreading these volunteers out so that at least one is in each class or grouping if possible.

In addition, a one-time orientation will be provided prior to the event. As a part of this, a segment will be devoted to Safe Sanctuaries overall safety guidelines.

All volunteers will sign a participation covenant

## **Overnight Trips**

All adults spending the night as chaperones must successfully complete the process for background checks and as such submit to all necessary requirements prior to leaving for the trip.

The suggested adult/child ratio is no less than one adult per every eight children, youth and vulnerable adult;

If a trip involves different genders, a male and female primary volunteer must be present.

Each participating child, youth or vulnerable adult must have a submitted consent form signed by a parent/guardian prior to the overnight trip.

For overnight stays, different genders will reside in separate rooms.

In church sponsored events, if the overnight is in a motel, lodge or some other facility, adults will share rooms with adults only; children, youth and vulnerable adults will share rooms with children, youth and vulnerable adults respectively.

All overnight functions (hosted or sponsored by the church) must be cleared by the Senior Pastor and shared with the Church Council.

Any exceptions to any of the above must be approved by the Senior Pastor and reported to the Church Council.

## **OUTSIDE GROUPS**

Any outside groups using the FUMC facilities must comply with the following:

There must be one person on file who is approved for adhering to the policies of the church and making sure the building is secure after the meeting. This person must sign the Participation Covenant.

If childcare is needed, only a worker from FUMC's approved list may provide childcare at the cost of the outside group.

Proper supervision shall be provided for children under the age of 18.

Entry and exits points will be designated for entering and leaving the building.

Any group or organization misusing FUMC facilities or not abiding by policies and procedures will be given one warning. If the problem persists, that group will be asked to find another meeting facility.

### **REPORTING INCIDENTS**

By Georgia law, all citizens are mandated reporters and are required to report abuse of children and vulnerable adults. All reporting of alleged incidents or actual incidents of abuse must strictly follow Georgia law. Any person (employee or volunteer) who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred is required by Georgia law to immediately report the incident to one of the following staff:

- Nursery Director
- Children's Minister
- Youth Minister
- Music Minister
- Preschool Director
- Program Director
- Associate Pastor
- Senior Pastor

Incidents reported to any of the above persons will then be reported directly to the Senior Pastor (or the pastor-in-charge). Those making a report of incident should adhere to the following:

- Secure the safety of the child, youth, or other vulnerable person, if possible
- Do not confront the accused abuser
- Be prepared to cooperate fully with the investigation conducted

After receiving notice of an incident, the Senior Pastor (or pastor-in-charge) will:

- Notify the parents/legal guardians of the child, youth, or immediate family member of other vulnerable persons, and take any necessary steps to assure the safety of the child,



youth, or other vulnerable person until the parent or family member arrives. The safety of the suspected victim must be the church's primary concern.

- Immediately remove the accused abuser from further involvement with children
- Notify the proper law enforcement or child protective services agency
- Notify the annual conference authorities, the church's insurance agent, and the church's attorney
- Keep a written record of the steps taken by the church in response
- Call upon a designated spokesperson to make necessary statements or responses to the news media
- Prepare a brief and honest statement that can be made to the congregation without giving unnecessary details, placing blame, interfering with the suspected victim's privacy, or violating any confidentiality concerns

## **CONCLUSION**

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable persons, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each will be "surrounded by steadfast love, . . . established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, "United Methodist Hymnal, pp.44).