

First United Methodist Church of Tuscaloosa

Safe Sanctuary

Policies and Procedures

First United Methodist Church of Tuscaloosa (FUMCT) believes that all persons are significant to the growth of God's kingdom and should have opportunity to worship, learn and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and growth of others. We seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children and youth. We seek to provide a safe environment in which opportunities for abuse are minimized through proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them.

After much prayer, research and thoughtful consideration, our goal is to strive to be a "Safe Sanctuary" where we can work hand-in-hand growing our children and youth in their faith and a life devoted to Christ.

This policy contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, policies and procedures related to prevention, response and reporting.

Theological Foundation

Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." (Paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) 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)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture the child. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways.

"We uphold the idea that to report abuse is to be a witness to the world of the love and justice of God and fully recognize that reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Simply, to report abuse can help to stop existing and prevent further abuse.

As caring Christians we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children, youth and vulnerable adults participating in the life of our church. The Church is entrusted with the responsibility of providing an emotionally and physically safe, spiritually grounded, healthy environment for our children, youth and adults in which they are protected from abuse. Additionally, we care for abused children and their families by offering resources that will contribute to

healing. Further, we recognize the grace that God gives in upholding Christian community; and we will look for grace-filled ways of dealing with both the victim and the accused.”

(This theological foundation is adopted from the Children Discipleship Team: Report #2, North Alabama Conference Child Protection Policy.)

The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of children or who have opportunity to have contact with children in church facilities or church-sponsored activities.

Windows/Doors : Reasonable efforts will be made to keep doors unlocked and/or windows unobstructed where children are in view during church-related activities. Workers will avoid being alone with without being visible to those in the immediate area.

Local Activities : Compliance with the Child Protection Policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related activity.

DEFINITIONS

Child : a person under 18 years of age (§ 26-16-2, Alabama Code 1975)

Volunteer : a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children’s activities under the supervision of a staff person or is serving in a position involving supervision or custody of minors.

Paid Staff : any person who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis employed by First United Methodist Church of Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Child Abuse: harm or threatened harm to a child’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare, which harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury; sexual abuse, which includes a violation of any provision of Chapter 6, Article 4, Title 13A Code of Alabama 1975.

Neglect : harm to a child’s health or welfare by a person responsible for the child’s health or welfare which occurs through negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care (§ 26-16-2, Ala. Code 1975)

SCREENING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Screening procedures for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children

All persons who intend to work with children and youth at FUMCT must be properly screened and

all screening documents are to be kept on file.

SCREENING PROCESS

Employees

- Complete an application form
- Complete a consent to release confidential information (LexisNexis form)
- Interview with appropriate staff member
- Minimum of three references checked and verified (non-family members)
- Complete background check
- Drug and/or alcohol screening as deemed necessary and/or randomly on demand

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee's confidential personnel file. These files are kept by the Church Administrator and are available to the Pastor, and the employee's immediate supervisor and members of the Staff-Parrish Committee.

Current Volunteer/Member (approved by appropriate staff prior to 12-31-2005)

- Complete a confidential application form and Volunteer Covenant
- Complete a consent to release confidential information (LexisNexis form)
- Recommendation report completed by a supervising staff member
- Background check with a national company
- Spiritual Gift form (non-confidential form to be used by staff)

New Volunteer/Member (new volunteers and those who volunteer after 12-31-2005)

- Complete a confidential application form and Volunteer Covenant
- Complete a consent to release confidential information (LexisNexis form)
- Interview with appropriate staff member
- Background check with national company
- Spiritual Gift form (non-confidential form to be used by staff)

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the church's confidential *Child Protection Policy* filing system. The files will be maintained by the Church Administrator or by a designated person at the Senior Pastor's or Church

Administrator's discretion. No other person will have access to the files without prior written consent from the Pastor or Church Administrator.

PROTECTION POLICY

The vitality of our ministries demands active volunteers who use their God-given gifts in service of others. The following rules are designed to give a structure to volunteers while providing adequate care for our children.

Six-month Rule : Volunteers are welcome to serve in a support role which entails interacting with, singing with and talking to children under the guidance of two adults in the classroom. A volunteer must be a member or regular attendee of FUMCT for a minimum of six (6) months to work in a supervisory role with children. Only with approval of the appropriate children's or youth minister, senior pastor or church administrator may a volunteer who does not meet the six-month rule serve as supervisor.

Two-adult Rule : Two non-related adult workers will be present with children and church-related activities whenever possible except in emergency situations and where not reasonably feasible. The adult supervisor will make unannounced visits frequently when the two-adult rule is not feasible. In a room where there is a husband and wife team, they will be considered as one worker for purposes of this policy.

Minimum Age Rule : Persons who are in a paid or volunteer supervisory position must be at least 18 years of age.

Minors : Volunteers under the age of eighteen (18) will be allowed to volunteer in children's ministry in a support function but not in a supervisory role. A support role would entail playing with, singing with and talking to children under the guidance of two adults in the classroom. We will strive to limit the circumstances for a minor to be left alone with children. Volunteers must complete a separate application form that will be submitted for approval by the children's minister. Parents or guardians must sign the application stating that the parent or guardian knows of no reason that the minor should not be allowed to work with other minors.

Out-of-town

Activities : A written parental consent form and notarized medical release form will be required on all participants. A consent form may be kept on file for the period of one year and will be considered valid until expiration at the end of that said year. Compliance with the Child Protection Policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related non-local activity.

Overnight Activities : Males and females will have separate sleeping areas, including a separate sleeping area for chaperones and children to the extent possible. There will be male and female chaperones if there are male and female children.

Parental Responsibility : Parents are responsible for the direct supervision of their children except when children are participating in a church-related activity.

Transportation : Any activities that require transportation of minors will adhere to both the policies contained within this document and the Vehicle Usage policy.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

FUMCT Child Protection Policy (Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures) requires that in addition to mandated/required and permissive reporting to duly constituted authorities, incidents of child abuse and/or neglect should first be reported to local and district church and conference authorities.

§ 26-14-3, Code of Alabama (1975) requires that certain persons, including but not limited to daycare workers or employees, members of the clergy or any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child, report known or suspected child abuse or neglect.

In addition to the requirements set forth in § 26-14-3, Code of Alabama (1975), § 26-14-4, Code of Alabama (1975) permits any person to make a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect if such person has reasonable cause to suspect that a child is or has been abused or neglected.

Allegations of suspected child abuse or neglect shall further be reported to the Department of Human Resources and local law enforcement.

Nothing in the accomplishment of this policy is intended to call upon a pastor or other clergy to violate the confidentiality of confession or clergy counseling relationship.

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously. Appropriate action for reporting an allegation will be taken immediately by church staff in accordance with the reporting laws of the State of Alabama, insurance policies and the advice of legal counsel.

The official spokesperson for FUMCT will be the Pastor or his appointee. No other staff members or church members will speak to the media in an official capacity.

FUMCT church staff will be responsible for written documentation in regard to any and all efforts in response to an allegation. All documentation will be dated and have a signature.

The FUMCT church staff will not deny, minimize or blame any individual involved in allegations and will minister to all involved parties as well as cooperate with authorities.

All means shall be taken to ensure confidentiality of all parties and information throughout this process. Disclosure of information in relation to allegations is prohibited except as required for reporting purposes.

RESOLUTION OF DISPUTES

FUMCT believes that the Bible commands Christians to make every effort to live at peace and resolve disputes with each other in private or in the Christian church (Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 6:1-8). We seek to resolve issues in a fair manner while preserving or restoring relationships fractured by a dispute and allow the Church to continue its ministry to all people