

# **SAFE SANCTUARY**

**First United Methodist Church of Murrysville, Pennsylvania**

***ABUSE PREVENTION GUIDELINES:***

***For the Benefit of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults***

*Working 2016 Edit*

## **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 reminds us that Jesus lovingly and strongly advocates for the welfare of the “little ones” whom we understand to mean children, youth and vulnerable adults. Sadly, we realize that churches have not always been safe places and that sexual abuse and exploitation of many kinds occur with disturbing frequency.

We recognize that the congregation of First United Methodist Church in Murrysville, Pennsylvania is called to be faithful to God’s mandate to provide a safe place for children, youth and vulnerable adults. Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt these guidelines for the prevention of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults and those who serve them.

## **Purpose**

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing these Abuse Prevention Guidelines and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as protecting those who serve them.

## **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 of our children, youth and vulnerable adults, as well as those who serve them by implementing:

- \*Safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers.
- \*Prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- \*A defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law.
- \*Educational Standards for all who serve children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding Safe Sanctuary Policies.
- \*A media response plan to handle inquiries if an incident occurs.

## **Conclusion**

In all of our ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person 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, p. 44*).

## 1. SCREENING PROCEDURES

- All prospective volunteers working with children, youth or vulnerable adults will be required to provide to the church office the following:
  - (1) Child Abuse History Clearance (PA Childline)
  - (2) Pennsylvania State Criminal History Clearance
  - (3) Certification of Completion for Mandated Reporter Training
  - (4) Volunteer Participation Form or Volunteer Staff Application
  - (5) Three (3) Personal References
  - (6) Signed Covenant of Participation or Volunteer Staff Expectations
- Links for necessary clearances can be found at [murrysvilleumc.org/clearances](http://murrysvilleumc.org/clearances)
- No volunteer will be invited to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults before they have been actively involved in the life of the church for at least six months.

## 2. ANNUAL ORIENTATION FOR WORKERS

- All individuals working with children, youth and vulnerable adults, whether they are paid, volunteer, part-time, full-time, clergy, or lay, will be required to complete an annual orientation session in which they are informed of the
  - Church's Guidelines for Abuse Prevention.
  - Procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
  - Appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse.
  - Details of the state laws regarding abuse.
- Those who serve with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be required to read and sign a covenant to abide by and cooperate with the church's Guidelines for Abuse Prevention and procedures for reporting suspected incidents of abuse.
- Annual renewal of the Covenant of Participation will be required.

## 3. TWO PERSON /FIVE YEARS OLDER RULE

- Two or more adult leaders will be required for any church sponsored or community group of children, youth or vulnerable adults who meets at the church.
- If a group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more adult leaders must be present and must include at least one male and female if the group is mixed gender.
- An adult leader is defined as being at least eighteen (18) years old and at least five years older than the children or youth whom they are supervising.
- No persons under the age of eighteen (18) may be in a primary leadership role.

## 4. WINDOWS IN ALL CLASSROOM DOORS/OPEN DOOR COUNSELING

- All classrooms and offices will have a door with an unobstructed window made of safety glass. All doors that have locks that use a key may only be keyed from the outside and must be able to be opened from within.
- Counseling sessions with children, youth and vulnerable adults will be conducted in an open environment (*i.e., when others are around, in a public place, during office hours*).
- When a situation arises where you are alone with a student, quickly move that situation to a visible public setting.

5. OPEN CLASSROOMS
  - Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by First UMC church staff.
  - Families are encouraged to make arrangements with a member of First UMC staff to visit classrooms or pick up a student prior to check-out time.
  - Unauthorized persons (including parents) will not be permitted to enter classrooms at any time while classes are in session.
  - Periodic observations of child care room and classrooms of children or youth will be conducted by a member of First UMC staff or an assigned hall monitor while in use.
  
6. CLASSROOM DISCIPLINE
  - If a child's behavior is disruptive, the child may be taken to his/her parents or guardians at any time at the discretion of the teacher.
  - If parents or guardians are not in attendance, the child will be kept in the room and the situation will be discussed with the child's parents or guardians at the earliest opportunity.
  - No physical punishment, or verbal abuse, is to be used at any time.
  
7. ADVANCE NOTICE TO PARENTS/PERMISSION SLIPS
  - Parents will be given advance notice and full information regarding the event(s) in which their children will be participating. Events for children and youth requiring overnight stays or leaving the First United Methodist Church facility/property must have written parental permission for the child's participation.
  
8. TRANSPORTATION
  - Drivers providing transportation for children, youth or vulnerable adults during any church sponsored events must be 21 years of age or older, have a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
  - Youth transporting themselves during any church sponsored events must have written consent from a parent and permission from a member of First UMC staff. Students will not be permitted to transport other students during a church sponsored event.
  
9. FIRST AID/CPR TRAINING
  - First aid and CPR training will be offered periodically for those working with children, youth and vulnerable adults.
  - First UMC Staff with responsibility for overseeing programs for children, youth and vulnerable adults will have current CPR and First Aid certifications.
  
10. PARENTAL/GUARDIAN RESPONSIBILITY
  - Because it is impossible to provide child care at all times, we expect parents/guardians to assume responsibility for their children's safety when on church property.

## PLAN FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE AND MEDIA INQUIRIES

We understand the following procedures, provided by the Western PA Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, to be applicable to the First United Methodist Church of Murrysville.

1. Treat any allegations of abuse seriously. Do not ignore the allegations in the hope that they will go away.
2. All persons working with children, youth or vulnerable adults, whether paid or unpaid, are considered mandated reporters under Pennsylvania state law and are required to make a confidential report to PA Childline within 24 hours of hearing an allegation.
3. If the allegations in any way concern a member of the clergy, the chair of the Staff -Parish Relations Committee should report the alleged incident(s) immediately to the District Superintendent in writing.
4. If the allegations do not concern a member of the clergy, immediately notify the Pastor. The Pastor should notify the District Superintendent and, if the accused is a staff member, the Pastor should also notify the Chairperson of the Pastor-Parish Relations Committee.
5. The District Superintendent should notify the Ministry Team on Clergy and Congregational care consistent with R.S. 1006 adopted by the Annual Conference in 1997 and also notify the Chancellor.
6. The District Superintendent or the Pastor should notify the responsible caregiver if it appears that they have no previous knowledge of the matter.
7. The conference chancellor will report the allegations to the appropriate law enforcement authorities as is required by state law.
8. Either the District Superintendent or the Pastor should immediately notify the church's insurance company. *(This notification should also be confirmed in writing.)*
9. No one should confront the accused with the allegations unless advised to do so by the Ministry Team on Clergy and Congregational Care representatives. No one should be drawn into a discussion of confidentially of the truth or falsity of the allegations. No one should assess blame.
10. Everyone involved should observe confidentiality for both the victim and the accused.
11. The accused should be immediately suspended from his or her duties. *(Issues of compensation should be dealt with on a case by case basis.)*
12. All media inquiries should be referred to the Resident Bishop and, if the Resident Bishop is unavailable, to the Assistant to the Bishop.
  - a. Members of First UMC will direct all media inquiries toward a member of First United Methodist Church staff.
  - b. First UMC staff will use the following statement when handling members of media:  
In an effort to show God's love to all, and in maintaining the confidentiality of those involved in this matter, we decline to comment at this time but would direct you to the office of the Bishop of the Western Pennsylvania Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.
13. Always show care and comfort for the alleged victims, the accused and their families. Communicate a sincere commitment to their spiritual and emotional well-being. Explain the procedure to the victim's family.
14. The accused should be advised to seek legal or other counsel.

From the Offices of the Resident Bishop and Chancellor of the Western Pennsylvania Conference –  
The United Methodist Church

*(Adopted August 27, 2001)*