

Safe Sanctuary Policy
First United Methodist Church
(Original policy approved by Administrative Board on 9.18.05)

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

-Mark 1:13-16

I. Scope of Safe Sanctuary Policy:

- A. Application – This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any responsibility for children or youth who participate in any activities or events sponsored by First United Methodist Church Missouri City (hereafter referred to as FUMCMC).
- B. Protection for all – The following policies are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers and congregation.

II. Definitions

- A. Child – Any person from birth through 5th grade.
- B. Youth – Any person in 6th through 12th grade.
- C. Verbal Abuse – Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.
- D. Physical Abuse – Any act of omission or an act that endangers a person's physical or mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child or youth.
- E. Sexual Abuse – Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of same for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of any individual enrolled as a child or youth in FUMCMC sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include but are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing and sexual intercourse. (#6 taken from Resolution #36 Book of Resolutions 2004).

III. A Safe Environment

- A. Appropriate Discipline – Children or youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all church events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work then discipline needs to move to the next step. In no

case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of “time out” for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision keeping the safe sanctuary policies in mind. Keeping parents/guardians involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on the behavior of their child or youth. For serious offenses, the appropriate response may be to send the child or youth home immediately.

- B. Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries – Physical boundaries are most important in dealing with children or youth. Those working with children or youth have to understand and respect those boundaries. Obviously these boundaries change, as children grow older. A young child sitting in the lap of a caregiver is most appropriate whereas an older child or youth sitting in a leader’s lap would not be acceptable. Hugs and kisses from a toddler to a leader are much different than the same from a youth. Emotional boundaries are also most important. As a child grows older it is important for all persons to maintain appropriate boundaries in relationships. It is important for those working with children or youth to not step outside of those lines and allow the younger person to become too attached to them. It is important for the adult person in authority to be careful where conversations might lead and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When an assistant leader or leader recognizes that there might be an issue with these boundaries, greater space should be allowed to come between that person and the child or youth in question. If that does not solve the problem then the staff person in charge should address the issue.
- C. Creating a Safe Physical Environment – Only an adult who is either a parent, grandparent, guardian or conservator of a child/youth attending and/or a Safe Sanctuary trained leader/assistant leader is allowed in rooms where child/youth programming is taking place. An exception would be an adult who is making a presentation but does not have responsibility for the children/youth. Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure the safety of children/youth regarding physical surroundings.

IV. Definition of Leader and Assistant Leader

- A. Leader – someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.
- B. Assistant Leader – someone 18-20 years of age with a high school diploma or equivalent, who is supervised by a leader. An Assistant Leader can be considered the second adult in situations where they’re at least three years older than the oldest child or youth present.
- C. In situations concerning infants through 5th graders, youth aged 16-18 can be considered the second adult when the first adult is twenty-one (21) years of age or older. For example, in the Nursery caring for toddlers age three and under, it is acceptable for the first caregiver to be 25 years old and the second caregiver to be 17 years old.
- D. The Three-Years Older Rule – There must be at least a three-year difference between the ages of the Leader (as defined above) and the children/youth being supervised. The three-year difference in ages shall apply to the age of the Leader and the age of the oldest child/youth present. Persons being closer in age to the children/youth may be acceptable Assistant Leaders (as defined above).

V. Plan for Reducing the Risk of Abuse or Incident

- A. Requirements for Serving as Paid and Unpaid Leaders, Assistant Leaders and Childcare Providers.

1. FUMCMC membership for six months or more prior to beginning of volunteer service. Exceptions can be made for spouses of staff members, for persons who were active in previous church, for Vacation Bible School and for some off-site activities. Exceptions will be allowed only if applicant provides a letter from pastor and/or relevant staff person at prior location or if written recommendations are received from three current FUMCMC six-plus-months members.
2. Paid and unpaid persons serving with children and youth are required to attend an initial Safe Sanctuary training and subsequent training and educational events provided by the church.
3. A safe and secure environment is best achieved by using two or more adults when supervising any child or groups of children and youth. The “two adult” rule will be used in classroom settings. The “two adult” rule will be a core value for all settings for children and youth. It is recognized that there may be cases where this is not practical and that these instances will be reviewed on an individual basis and a decision made by the Staff Member in charge of the Ministry Area sponsoring the event. For example, the second adult teacher in a children’s Sunday School class is ill. The Director of Children’s Ministry may decide that the adult teacher of the class may continue class with the door open and the Director will check on the class from time to time.

B. Screening for Paid and Unpaid Leaders, Assistant Leaders and Childcare Providers

1. Application/Consent Form – Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader or assistant leader or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the staff person in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent form. By signing the form, the applicant gives permission to FUMCMC to perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application. All application/consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet. (Appendix A)
2. Criminal Records Check – A criminal background check through appropriate law enforcement and information agencies will be conducted by the relevant staff person and must be completed prior to beginning of service and yearly thereafter. (Appendix D) No exceptions will be made.
3. Results of Background Check – All information generated in this process shall be maintained in strict confidence. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in FUMCMC giving a negative recommendation shall be made by FUMCMC in its sole discretion. If a background check comes back with concerns raised by the company about the applicant, the following steps will be taken:
 - a) The company that ran the background check will be contacted by the staff person running the report and asked to investigate the concern further.
 - b) All conversations and communications will be documented. (Appendix B)
 - c) If questionable results come back from the background company, the Senior Pastor, the staff person who ran the background check and one member of the Safe Sanctuary Team will meet with the applicant who will be given the opportunity to respond to the concern, being careful to use open-ended questions.
 - d) The applicant will be asked to respond in writing to the accuracy of the report.

- e) The Senior Pastor will then consult with the church attorney to determine what action, if any, is needed.
 - f) Without in any way limiting those crimes which FUMCMC may determine to be serious, the following examples are offered as guidelines: Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses or charges pending shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth.
 - Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglectful.
 - Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
 - Persons having a criminal history of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application.
 - Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
4. Statistics show that adult survivors of childhood sexual, physical or verbal abuse have an increased likelihood of repeating the abuse on children or youth they interact with. Adult survivors need the love and acceptance of this church family. Individuals who have such a history are encouraged to discuss their desire to work with children or youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in any volunteer service.

C. The Use of FUMCMC Facilities by Outside Groups

1. FUMCMC-chartered Boy and Cub Scout Troops
 - a) The Boy Scout training program (Youth Protection Training) can be used as a substitute of FUMCMC's Safe Sanctuary training. All adult leaders must submit proof that they have completed the Boy Scout program to FUMCMC Scouting Liaison.
 - b) FUMCMC will conduct and fund the background checks for adult, officially trained leaders of our chartered Boy Scout and Cub Scout Troops if requested by the troops.
2. All Other Groups – Each group requesting the use of FUMCMC facilities will be required to read our Safe Sanctuary policy and submit the signature page prior to using said facilities. The signature page will require a signature from an authorized representative from the group, agreeing to the fact that they have read the Safe Sanctuary policy and that they will comply with it. (Appendix C)

D. The Use of FUMCMC Facilities by the Methodist Day School – The Methodist Day School of FUMCMC is licensed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Its operation is governed by the Minimum Standards for Licensed Childcare Centers and will be held accountable to meet these standards as well as standards required by the local Fire and Health Department to ensure a safe environment for children. Background checks are conducted on all staff and volunteers.

VI. Action Plan for Response to Suspected or Alleged Incident – Conduct that is abusive or inappropriate according to this policy should be reported immediately. Anyone who suspects abuse must report the event to an appropriate FUMCMC staff person or person in charge, who will then:

A. Provide Emergency Care for the Victim

1. Notify parents and/or guardians of the child/youth in question.
2. Provide emergency healthcare as needed. The care and safety of victim is the first priority.
 - a) First Aid
 - b) Emergency Services
 - c) Hospital Emergency room
3. Arrange for crisis counseling/therapy and/or long-range counseling where deemed appropriate.

B. Secure the Area

1. Maintain the integrity of the area and protect all evidence for the professional investigation.
2. Separate all parties involved.

C. Assist the Victim and Victim's Family

1. Take all allegations seriously and do not prejudge the situation.
2. Offer and provide pastoral resources as needed.
3. Provide care and support as appropriate to prevent further hurt.

D. Deal with the Accused

1. Remove the accused from any further contact with children, youth and staff.
2. Treat the accused with dignity and respect:
 - a) Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or youth member is secured.
 - b) Offer and provide pastoral care to family of accused as appropriate.
 - c) Refer to outside clergy if deemed more desirable or as requested by the family.

E. Determine Communication Goals

1. Notify legal authorities as required.
 - a) Report incident to Children's Protective Services (Fort Bend County Rosenberg office at 281.341.7753; or TX State office at 1.800.252.5400).
 - b) Cooperate fully with civil authorities under the guidance of church legal council.
2. Senior Pastor or designated representative will be informed of all details of the incident and will release any information that is to be disseminated to the media.
 - a) Immediately contact church's insurance carrier.
 - b) Inform the FUMCMC Board of Trustees, Church Council and church legal council.
 - c) Inform Church staff of incident on a "need to know" basis to ensure privacy of the victim and/or accused and enlist their support as needed.

F. Document Actions Taken

1. Document all your efforts at handling the incident within 24 hours. (Appendix B)
2. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation.
 - a) This should be left to professionals who are familiar with this type of case. This is to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.
3. Individual files will be kept documenting all actions, conversations, etc.
4. Files will be retained in a locked and secure area to insure privacy and confidentiality.

VII. Policy Administration

- A. A Safe Sanctuary Team shall be made up of the following persons: Church Council Chairperson, SPRC Chairperson and Church Lay Leader. This Team will meet quarterly with staff members running background checks. Staff members will report the number of checks run and any incidents reported. This Team will also address any policy concerns brought up by the staff.
- B. The Safe Sanctuary Team along with appropriate staff members will be responsible for implementing this policy.
- C. Changes to this policy may only be made with approval of the Children's Council, the Council for Youth Empowerment and the Church Council.

Policy Revised on 03/05/07

Safe Sanctuary Policy – Appendix A

FUMCMC – Application/Consent Form

CONSENT TO PERFORM CRIMINAL HISTORY/BACKGROUND CHECK IN COMPLIANCE WITH THE FCRA (FAIR CREDIT REPORTING ACT)

Last Name _____ First Name _____ Middle Name or Initial _____

Maiden or other name(s) used in any and all other records of birth or records of residence. _____

Address _____ Apartment # _____

City _____ County _____ State _____ Zip _____

**Date of Birth _____ Place of Birth _____ Social Security # (optional) _____ **Gender _____ Race _____

Drivers License Number _____ State _____ Photo ID? Yes ___ No ___

Phone Number Home _____ Work or Cell _____

E-mail _____

Emergency Contact _____ Phone _____

**To be used for criminal history check only and not a part of the personnel file.

I, _____, am an applicant for employment/volunteer work with FUMCMC and have been advised that as a part of the application process, the church conducts a criminal history background check. I do hereby consent to the church use of any information provided during the application process in performing the criminal history check. The church has informed me that I have the right to review and challenge any negative information that would adversely impact a decision to offer employment/volunteer work. In addition, I have been informed that I will have a reasonable opportunity to clear up any mistaken information reported within a reasonable time frame established within the sole discretion of the church. Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act, I have been advised that upon request I will be provided the name, address and telephone number of the reporting agency as well as the nature, substance and source of all information.

The following are responses to questions about my criminal history (if any).

1. ___ Yes ___ No Have you ever been convicted or plead guilty before a court for any federal, state or municipal criminal offense? (Exclude minor traffic misdemeanors) If yes, please provide details below.

State: _____ County: _____ Date of Offense: _____

Details of Conviction: _____

2. ___ Yes ___ No Have you ever received deferred adjudication or similar disposition for any federal, state or municipal offense? If yes, please provide details below.

State: _____ County: _____ Date of Offense: _____

Details of Conviction: _____

3. ___ Yes ___ No Have you ever received probation or community supervision for any federal, state or municipal offense? If yes, please provide details below.

State: _____ County: _____ Date of Offense: _____

Details of Conviction: _____

4. ___ Yes ___ No Have you ever been convicted of any criminal offense in a country outside jurisdiction of the United States? If yes, please provide details below.

Country: _____ City: _____ Date of Offense: _____

Details of Conviction: _____

5. ___ Yes ___ No As of the date of this consent form, do you have any pending charges against you? If yes, please provide details below.

State: _____ County: _____ Date of Offense: _____

Details of Conviction: _____

This section is to be used to list all counties and states of residence since High School graduation or age 18.

City/Town	County	State	Country
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

I hereby certify that all information provided in this consent form is true, correct and complete. "All offers of employment/volunteer placement are contingent upon applicant's successful completion, as determined by FUMCMC's sole discretion, of this criminal history/background check."

Signed this _____ day of _____, 20_____

Applicant (Print Name) _____

Applicant's Signature _____

This portion to be completed by FUMCMC Staff member requesting check.

Authorized person requesting check:

Print Name _____

Signature: _____

Date Check performed: _____

Safe Sanctuary Policy – Appendix C

Safe Sanctuary Policy Signature Page

Attached you will find the Safe Sanctuary Policy for FUMCMC. Please review this policy carefully. A copy of this policy is kept in the church office. It is your responsibility to read and incorporate the policy in your group meetings and activities.

Thank you!

I acknowledge that I have received, read and that I understand the information in the Safe Sanctuary Policy. I clearly understand that FUMC MC may change or modify these policies and procedures at any time and without notice.

Group requesting meeting space: _____

Authorized representative of group:

Name (Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Safe Sanctuary Policy – Appendix D

Annual Background Check Consent Form

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

My signature below signifies that I give FUMCMC permission to run my annual background check. It also signifies that I have been informed of any changes made to the original Safe Sanctuary Policy of FUMCMC. Any changes to information (specifically address and phone number) that I gave on my original form are listed below:

Signature

This portion to be completed by FUMCMC Staff member requesting check.

Authorized person requesting check:

Print Name _____

Signature: _____

Date Check performed: _____