

# Safe Sanctuary Policy



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**First United Methodist Church  
Clinton, MS  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Description</u>	<u>Page(s)</u>
Safe Sanctuary Committee Members	3
Why Write a Policy Statement on Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse for Our Church?	5
Policy Statement of Covenant	6-7
Glossary of Terms	8-9
Mississippi Code Definitions	10-11
Educating the Congregation	12
Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff	13-14
Procedures for Hiring Paid Staff	
Recruitment of Volunteer Workers by Church Staff for Age Level Ministries	
Recruitment of Volunteer by Volunteer	
Recruitment of Volunteer for Leisure Ministries	
Orientation and Training Content and Procedures	15-16
Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in Programs for Children and Youth	16-19
Standards for Accepting, Reviewing and Renewing Child Abuse Policy	
Standards for All Staff While On-Site	
Standards for Staff While Off-Site	
Standards for Diapering and Restroom Activity	
Discipline	
Post Activity: Child/Youth Pick-up	
Reporting Procedures and Mississippi Code	20-21

3. The Senior Minister or Church Administrator will telephone the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse. In case of emergency, staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to the child's county of residence. (See previous list)

4. If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.

5. Senior Minister or Church Administrator should indicate on the bottom of the *Incident Report Form* how the situation was resolved.

6. Any staff member (paid or volunteer) who is implicated on a *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* or an *Incident Report Form* should be removed from direct involvement with children immediately after the report is made until the situation is adequately investigated and resolved.

7. The victim and victim's family shall receive immediate ministry support from FUMC if needed.

## CONCLUSION

We take our policies to reduce risk of child abuse seriously and we are committed to their enforcement for the safety and security of all our children, youth, and those who work with them. All ministry events should strive to comply with these policies. Each ministry event shall be subject to review by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and the staff person related to that event.

The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall review these policies and procedures at least annually.

Training procedures will continue in conference and district events annually.

## Reporting Procedures and MS Code

### A. When a FUMC Staff Member Suspects Child Abuse:

1. Any FUMC staff member (paid or volunteer) who suspects child abuse should immediately report suspicions to the Senior Minister.

2. The Senior Minister should complete *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form*.

3. The Senior Minister will contact the district Superintendent and the Insurance Company.

4. The Senior Minister will call the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse. In emergency situations staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to (601)359-4991.

5. If staff observes an incident of concern which does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, but does warrant further investigation by the Senior Minister, (i.e. FUMC staff observing parent hitting own child) an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.

6. The family shall receive immediate ministerial support from FUMC by the Senior Minister. Support will also be provided for the abuser and the abuser's family if needed.

### B. When member or visitor suspects child abuse at FUMC by a staff member – Paid or Volunteer:

1. The staff member – paid or volunteer who is contacted by a member/visitor reporter should immediately refer the Reporter to the Senior Minister. If the Senior Minister is not available, the reporter should be directed to Church Administrator.

2. Immediate action and contact with church staff person is recommended. The Senior Minister or Church Administrator should complete the *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form* and if the incident occurred on FUMC property, an *Incident Report Form* should also be completed.

## Why Write a Policy Statement on Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse for Our Church?

The Mississippi Conference recommended that a Safe Sanctuary policy be submitted by our church. The Safe Sanctuary Committee was created to establish a Safe Sanctuary Policy. *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999 was used as a guide. In addition, the Committee reviewed the Dunwoody United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy. This committee of youth staff, clergy, social workers, attorney, and parent volunteers worked for several months to compile and refine information.

It is our task as Christians to provide a safe and loving environment for children and youth to come and grow in their faith, without fear of physical or emotional harm. Safeguarding procedures are in place, not only to protect our children, but also to protect our paid and volunteer workers with children and youth from false allegations.

The Safe Sanctuary Committee presents this information to Clinton First United Methodist Church with the pledge to provide *Safe Sanctuary* for all who worship and grow in our ministries.

## Policy Statement of Covenant

Safe Sanctuary Committee's  
Policy Statement on *Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse*

The 2006 Annual Conference approved a resolution that the conference "shall develop safety and risk-reducing policies and procedures for the purpose of providing protection to children, youth, and vulnerable adults that come to us, to staff and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of abuse, and to limit the extent of legal liability." A task group developed the following policy, which was presented and adopted at the 2007 Annual Conference.

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes a child...welcomes me" (Matthew 18:5). He 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 those who cannot protect themselves. We affirm this responsibility for the safety of children at each child's baptism by our congregational response, pledging: "With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal," (*Book of Worship*, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge, 11).

E. Ratios: Day Care/Nursery Programs (in compliance with MS State Regulations)

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Adult to Child</b>
<u>Infants (non-handicapped &amp; not walking)</u>	<u>1 to 5</u>
<u>Toddlers (walking, non-handicapped)</u>	<u>1 to 9</u>
<u>2 years of age</u>	<u>1 to 12</u>
<u>3 years of age</u>	<u>1 to 14</u>
<u>4 years of age</u>	<u>1 to 16</u>
<u>5 years of age</u>	<u>1 to 20</u>
<u>6 years of age &amp; older</u>	<u>1 to 25</u>

F. Discipline - Under no circumstances should paid or volunteer staff administer corporal punishment. Training will be provided and will include, but not be limited to these topics:

1. Using positive words
2. Establishing rules and behavior expectation
3. Informing parents of positive and negative behaviors- (Sandwich Rule\*)
4. Determining when to involve church staff with regard to discipline issues
5. What to do when child threatens safety to self or others

G. At the conclusion of on- or off-site activities, and before leaving the facility, supervising adults should make sure all children have been claimed by the appropriate person.

\**Sandwich Rule* – Public relations tip: When informing the parents about a child's or youth's negative behavior, say something positive before saying what the child or youth did wrong. End with a positive statement.

4. If there are both male and female participants, then the adult leaders should also include both males and females.

5. Trip information, including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure and return times, must be made available to the parents before departing.

6. If personal vehicles are used to transport youth to off-site location, at least two children/youth should be present. (An exception may be made when a staff member/volunteer takes a child/youth home, after an event, and attempting to notify the child/youth's guardian.)

7. When sleeping away from home, no adult may share a bed with a child/youth other than his/her own.

D. Standards to be applied to diapering or restroom activity:

1. Procedures for all workers with children in diapers
  - a. Make sure another adult is in the room, when possible, when a diaper is being changed
  - b. Diapering should occur in a visible area.
2. Procedures for all workers with preschool children using restrooms
  - a. If a toilet adjoins the room in use, teachers must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
  - b. If there has been a potty "accident" and a worker needs to assist a child (changing clothes, clean up etc.), two adults must be present, when possible, and a parent may be notified if further cleaning is necessary.
3. Procedures for all workers with elementary age children
  - a. Tell another adult you will be taking children to the rest room.
  - b. Take more than one at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible. Allowing two children to go together to the restroom is permissible.
  - c. Inform other adult when you have returned.

## Purpose

Building on our theological and spiritual foundation, our purpose for establishing this policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to create a safe environment that will foster the comprehensive health, growth, and development of all within our charge and care.

## Intent

As a Christian community of faith, the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that foster the safety and spiritual growth of all. Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported, or confirmed violation of any Mississippi criminal laws.

We hereby declare our intent to:

1. Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of staff and volunteers.
2. Provide adequate training for staff and volunteers regarding the implementation of our policies and procedures.
3. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events that will encourage the development of our adults and children.
4. Design a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse in accordance with the requirements of state and federal laws.
5. Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury, or abuse.
6. Review our policies and procedures regularly to meet changing legal, health, and safety standards.

## Conclusion

*In all of our ministries, the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person is "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).*

## Glossary of Terms

### Definition of Age Levels:

Children – Birth through 5<sup>th</sup> graders  
 Nursery age – Birth through age 2  
 Preschool age – 3 through 5 year olds  
 Elementary age – Kindergartners-5<sup>th</sup> graders  
 Youth – 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders  
 Adult – any person 18 years old or older

### Approved Adult/Supervisor to Child/Youth Ratios (in compliance with MS State Regulations)

Age Group	Adult to Child
Infants (non-handicapped & not walking)	1 to 5
Toddlers (walking, non-handicapped)	1 to 9
2 years of age	1 to 12
3 years of age	1 to 14
4 years of age	1 to 16
5 years of age	1 to 20
6 years of age & older	1 to 25

Mixed Age Groups	Adult to Child
6 weeks to 30 months	1 to 5
2 to 4 years	1 to 8
2 to 3 years	1 to 8
2 ½ to 3 years	1 to 10
2 ½ to 5 years	1 to 12
3 to 5 years	1 to 14
4 to 5 years	1 to 16
Grades 1-4	1 to 16
Grades 5-12	1 to 20

Residential Camping	Adult to Child
Grades 1-3	1 to 8
Grades 4-8	1 to 10
Grades 9-12	1 to 12

5. Workers should be older than the children or youth they are supervising.

6. All workers will be designated, by badges, clothing (shirts, smocks or aprons), or nametags while working with children and youth.

7. All children in the Nursery and Preschool age group should be registered and/or signed in at the room where parents drop them. Parents pick up child in the same room.

8. Adults supervising elementary and youth programs should expect children and youth to remain with them, unless special written permission is given by the parents to leave that group. Exception: trips to the restroom, which should be permitted at leader's discretion.

9. Parents should receive advance information about the event that their child/youth is attending.

10. Appropriate touch must be used when the need arises to have physical contact with child or youth.

11. If there are both male and female participants, then the adult leaders should also include both males and females.

C. OFF SITE program standards to be applied by paid and volunteer staff of children and youth when leaving church property.

1. Two-adult rule. There will be two adults present.

2. Written permission must be obtained from parent before child/youth leaves with individual(s) or a group on a church sponsored event, with emergency contact information provided. (Example: Confirmation class member meeting off site with mentor, etc.)

3. Adequate supervision must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc.

Residential Camping	Adult to Child
Grades 1-3	1 to 8
Grades 4-8	1 to 10
Grades 9-12	1 to 12

## Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in Programs for Children and Youth

A. Standards for accepting, reviewing and renewing Child Abuse Policy:

1. Policy and Operating Procedures will be reviewed annually.
2. Criminal Background Checks will be repeated on individuals periodically, at a minimum every 24 months.

B. Operational Standards to be applied by all paid and volunteer staff while working with children/youth ON SITE:

1. Two-adult rule – There will be two adults present. If one adult needs to leave the room, the classroom door should remain open.

Mixed Age Groups	Adult to Child
6 weeks to 30 months	1 to 5
2 to 4 years	1 to 8
2 to 3 years	1 to 8
2 ½ to 3 years	1 to 10
2 ½ to 5 years	1 to 12
3 to 5 years	1 to 14
4 to 5 years	1 to 16
Grades 1-4	1 to 16
Grades 5-12	1 to 20

2. Rooms where children or youth are gathered should have a window in the door or half-door open when children or youth are present. If there is not window or half door, the door should remain open.

3. When a last-minute substitute is needed, reasonable effort will be made to select one from a list of volunteers who have been cleared through Reference and Criminal Background Checks.

4. All Nursery workers, paid and volunteer, must be at least eighteen years old. Teens under eighteen years of age may assist in an activity, but may not be in charge of a room. Two adults must still be present.

*Children's activities* - any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

*Conference* - the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church.

*Residential camping* - any overnight event is considered residential camping. This includes but is not limited to residential camping settings, conference camps, a conference or district lock-in, youth related overnight events, or mission work outside the boundaries of your residential dwelling.

*Staff person* - any person employed by the Conference who is responsible for youth or children's activities.

*Supervisor* - the person who has direct and immediate oversight and responsibility for any event.

*Volunteer* - a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting youth or children's activities under the supervision of a staff person.

*Vulnerable adult* - any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

*Locations:*

- Off Site – Church sponsored activities that take place away from the church property (Retreats, trips to other locations)
- On Site – All church sponsored activities that take place on First United Methodist Church of Clinton's property, in the buildings or on the grounds

### Mississippi Code Annotated § 43-21-105; Definitions.

The following words and phrases, for purposes of this chapter, shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the context clearly otherwise requires:

(d) “Child” and “youth” are synonymous, and each means a person who has not reached his eighteenth birthday. A child who has not reached his eighteenth birthday and is on active duty for a branch of the armed services or is married is not considered a “child” or “youth” for the purposes of this chapter.

(e) “Parent” means the father or mother to whom the child has been born, or the father or mother by whom the child has been legally adopted.

(f) “Guardian” means a court-appointed guardian of the person of a child.

(g) “Custodian” means any person having the present care or custody of a child whether such person be a parent or otherwise.

(h) “Legal custodian” means a court-appointed custodian of the child.

(l) “Neglected child” means a child:

(i) Whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, neglects or refuses, when able so to do, to provide for him proper and necessary care or support, or education as required by law, or medical, surgical, or other care necessary for his well-being; provided, however, a parent who withholds medical treatment from any child who in good faith is under treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglectful under any provision of this chapter; or

(ii) Who is otherwise without proper care, custody, supervision or support; or

(iii) Who, for any reason, lacks the special care made necessary for him by reason of his mental condition, whether said

## Orientation and Training Content and Procedures

### 2. TRAINING

2.1 Training must become a component of each event’s design. The design team shall be responsible for assuring that adequate insurance for the specific event and/or activities either from the conference or the district is in place.

2.2 The design team must have a person available at the event who is trained to receive any report of allegations of abuse and follow through according to the conference guidelines and the requirements of state law.

2.3 All workers shall be trained periodically in safety and risk-reducing policies and procedures.

2.4 Training shall include information, explanation, and discussion of:

2.4.1 The FUMC Safe Sanctuaries policy

2.4.2 Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems

2.4.3 Requirements of Mississippi law for reporting incidents of abuse

2.4.4 Procedures for response to incidents of abuse and for reporting incidents of abuse.

2.5 All persons serving as directors shall complete certification training for processing allegations and reports of child abuse.

2.6 All workers and leaders will sign a covenant to abide by the church policy at the conclusion of training.

1.3 All volunteers serving in a helping capacity for children/youth shall:

1.3.1 Complete an application/commitment form

1.3.2 Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program

1.3.3 Consent to a criminal records check and driver's license records check

1.4 In the event that a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last-minute circumstances, that person must:

1.4.1 Complete an application/commitment form

1.4.2 Complete a basic orientation/training provided by the director or other supervisor before actually beginning work.

1.5 All information obtained from background checks will be received and reviewed by the Conference Director of Connectional Ministries or their designee, who may, in their discretion, share applicable information with the appropriate supervisory staff person(s). Additionally, if the record of a staff member or candidate for a staff position shows a criminal conviction, the conference director of Connectional Ministries or their designee will consider the employment on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise all such information will be held in confidence, except for any disclosure required by lawful court action.

1.6 Any prospective volunteer or candidate for a staff position with a conviction for a sex offense or abuse or neglect of a minor is prohibited from work with children or youth. All other convictions will be considered on a case by case basis.

**All information from Background and/or Reference Checks will be kept confidential!**

mental condition be mentally retarded or mentally ill; or

(iv) Who, for any reason, lacks the care necessary for his health, morals or well-being.

(m) "Abused child" means a child whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, whether legally obligated to do so or not, has caused or allowed to be caused upon said child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, non-accidental physical injury or other maltreatment. Provided, however, that physical discipline, including spanking, performed on a child by a parent, guardian or custodian in a reasonable manner shall not be deemed abuse under this section.

(n) "Sexual abuse" means obscene or pornographic photographing, filming or depiction of children for commercial purposes, or the rape, molestation, incest, prostitution or other such forms of sexual exploitation of children under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened.

(o) "A child in need of special care" means a child with any mental or physical illness that cannot be treated with the dispositional alternatives ordinarily available to the youth court.

(v) "Any person responsible for care or support" means the person who is providing for the child at a given time. This term shall include, but is not limited to, stepparents, foster parents, relatives, non-licensed babysitters or other similar persons responsible for a child and staff of residential care facilities and group homes that are licensed by the Department of Human Services.

## **Educating the Congregation**

### **Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

Educating the Congregation is key to the success of the Safe Sanctuary Committee's efforts. Dissemination of information will include, but not be limited to:

1. Articles in Publications
  - Sunday Bulletin
  - Weekly Newsletter
  - Voice
  - E-mail
  - Staff/Employee Handbook
2. Children and youth parent meetings
3. Information given in adult Sunday School classes
4. Pulpit announcements
5. Letters to all potential workers with children and youth
6. Orientation and training sessions for workers with children and youth
7. Personal telephone calls
8. Wednesday night suppers and classes
9. Educational displays/bulletin boards
10. Parent seminars with guest speakers
11. Literature from Mississippi Conference

## **Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff**

1.1 All persons employed to serve in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall:

1.1.1 Be at least 21 years of age (in certain circumstances, such as Vacation Bible School and other church activities, 18 years shall be the acceptable minimum age when combined with adequate training in the conference policies and procedures and competent oversight by a qualified adult, such as the camp director.)

1.1.2 No one shall be employed in a supervisory capacity unless he/she is at least four years older than the oldest student

1.1.3 Complete an application/commitment form

1.1.4 Provide three character references with full contact information

1.1.5 Demonstrate an active relationship with their local church for at least 6 months prior to employment

1.1.6 Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program

1.1.7 Consent to a national criminal records check and a driver's license record check

1.2 All volunteers serving in a supervisory capacity for children/youth shall:

1.2.1 Be at least 21 years of age

1.2.2 Complete an application/commitment form

1.2.3 Demonstrate an active relationship with their local church for at least 6 months prior to serving in a supervisory capacity

1.2.4 Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program

1.2.5 Consent to a criminal records check and driver's license records check