

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Approved by Church Council September 10, 2002; Revised June 13, 2006; January 17, 2012; November 18, 2014
July 16, 2015; September 23, 2016

PREAMBLE:



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.(1a). When the disciples tried to keep the children away from Jesus, he was quick to respond, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.” Luke 18:16 (NIV). Jesus taught that children were to be included and provided for within the community of faith. Today, the church may be the only place where some children find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow, to thrive, and to become faithful people. (1) As Christians, we must take this responsibility to all children very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent child abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do just that for First United Methodist Church. It is based on our understanding of the widespread problem of abuse throughout our country.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected. (2) Often abuse occurs in settings where children and youth should have been able to feel safe—homes, schools, camps, and most sadly, the church. In more than three-quarters of the reported incidents of child abuse, the victim was related to or acquainted with the abuser. (3) The purpose of this policy is to protect all the children that come to us, to protect both our paid and volunteer staff from potential false allegations of abuse and to limit the extent of legal liability of our local church. Safe Sanctuaries applies to activities, programs, and/or ministries in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians. Presented herein is a comprehensive plan that will include all the areas of the issue: Screening, Supervision, Reporting Procedures and a Response Plan. These delineated policies are the MINIMUM necessary precautions for protecting children.

DEFINITIONS:



“Adult” means a person 18 years of age or older.

“Child” means any person under the age of 18.

“Child abuse” as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law means any of the following:

- (i) Any recent act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age.
- (ii) An act or failure to act by a perpetrator, which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- (iii) Any recent act, failure to act or series of acts or failures to act by a perpetrator, which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age.
- (iv) Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide essentials of life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child’s life or development or impairs the child’s functioning.

No child shall be deemed to be physically or mentally abused based on injuries that result solely from environmental factors that are beyond the control of the parent or person responsible for the child’s welfare, such as inadequate housing, furnishings, income, clothing and medical care.”(4)

“Children’s activities” means any activity, program, or ministry in which children are outside of the direct

supervision of their parents/guardians and are under the supervision of responsible adult staff persons or volunteers at or sponsored by the First United Methodist Church.

“Church” means the First United Methodist Church, 604 Market St, Williamsport, PA 17701, (570)322-3572

“Conference” means the Susquehanna Conference, The United Methodist Church, P.O. Box 2053 Mechanicsburg, PA 17055, (717) 766-7441.

“Mandated reporter” an individual who paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child is required to report, if they have cause to suspect child abuse.

“Staff person” means any person employed by First United Methodist Church

“Roamer” means an adult staff person or volunteer who intentionally circulates throughout the First United Methodist Church facility and/or children’s activities, programs, or ministries in a random rotation.

“Perpetrator” means someone who has committed child abuse and meets the definition of one of the following four relationships to a child: a parent of a child; a person responsible for the welfare of a child; an individual residing in the same home as the child, or a paramour of the child’s parent.

“Staff person in charge of a children’s activity” means the adult church staff person responsible for the conduct of this activity, program, or ministry.

”Volunteer” means a responsible adult who assists in conducting church activities, programs, or ministries under the supervision of a staff member or any adult person responsible for any children’s activities, programs, or ministries that use the First United Methodist Church facilities.

“Vulnerable Adults” means any adult with circumstances that may make them at increased risk for abuse, including but is not limited to, the elderly and individuals with developmental disabilities.

“We” means the First United Methodist Church, 604 Market St, Williamsport, PA 17701, (570)322-3572

SCREENING PROCEDURES:



Careful screening is one way of trying to prevent the abuse of children. It can be time consuming and expensive, but well worth the effort in peace of mind that the most reliable, committed and experienced staff and volunteers are in place for every activity, program, and/or ministry that involves children. The Susquehanna Conference of the United Methodist Church is also encouraging the networking of Conference agencies and local churches because staff persons and volunteers may serve in a variety of places and roles.

We propose these **MINIMUM** standards:

1. All staff and volunteers who have direct contact with children or vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out a Volunteer Application yearly (6) that shall include:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Experience and qualifications for the position
 - c. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
 - d. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church or non-church organization to secure the background checks necessary for the position being applied for.
 - e. Listing of two non-related references. This list shall have complete contact information for all references. This portion of the application process is considered incomplete if full contact information for the references is not provided.
 - f. Complete and submit the following clearances to First United Methodist Church every 5 years (21)- employees submit originals to the church office, volunteers shows originals and the church keeps copies.
 - 1) Pennsylvania State Police Clearance at <https://epatch.state.pa.us>.
 - 2) Pennsylvania Child Abuse Clearances (Act 33) at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/findaform/childabusehistoryclearanceforms/>
 - 3) FBI Fingerprints <https://www.pa.cogentid.com>
 - g. Demonstrate a continuous and active relationship with this church of at least six months before being allowed to volunteer in children’s activities, programs, and/or ministries.
2. Volunteers may not be require to do the FBI Fingerprints if the following requirements are met. (21)

- a. The volunteers are not paid
 - b. The volunteers has lived in Pennsylvania for the previous 10 years
 - c. The volunteer signs and has notarized an affidavit swearing that he/she is not exempt from working with children for any reason. (the affidavit is to be filled out in front of the notary)
3. All new applicants, persons who have a break in service of 18 months or more and those with 5 or more years since their last background check shall submit to the screening procedures.
- a. All applicants for hired positions at First United Methodist Church shall provide originals of the completed PA State Criminal Clearance, PA Child Abuse Clearance and the FBI Fingerprints at the time of application for employment.
 - b. All volunteer applicants for children's activities, programs, and/or ministries will submit to the screening procedures prior to their service. This includes, but is not limited to, volunteer applications, Clearances (PA State Criminal Clearance, PA Child Abuse Clearance and the FBI Fingerprints or a signed Affidavit), a continuous and active relationship with First United Methodist Church for at least 6 months, and a FULL Safe Sanctuaries training.
4. All clearances shall be kept in confidence and on file with the staff member assigned and overseeing the Safe Sanctuary clearances. (7)
5. The staff person in charge of the children's activity(ies), program(s) and/or ministry(ies) and/or their designee is responsible for reviewing and verifying each applicant's information prior to service. All applications and related forms must be completed. (8) When a reference follow up is accomplished by phone, detailed notes of the conversation should be kept on the Form for Reference Check.
6. When the church is hosting an activity, program, and/or ministry for which staff members and/or volunteers are required, we recommend that all brochures and other written material contain language specifying these procedures as MINIMUM BASIC GUIDELINES for all adults serving at the activity, program and/or ministry. (For example, we are a Safe Sanctuaries Congregation.)
- a. For all Non-First United Methodist church activities that use the building, each group will be given the Safe Sanctuaries policy and will be expected to follow the policy while using the building.
7. Any person who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, and/or emotional abuse), whose name appears on Megan's List, is a convicted sex offender, or has been charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children will not work in any church-sponsored activity or program for preschoolers, children, youth or vulnerable adults.
8. Convicted sex offenders and individuals who have been charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children who are, or wish to become, part of the ministry of First United Methodist Church must covenant with the church according to the *covenant for convicted sex offenders wishing to join in church activities*.
- a. The covenant process will begin at the offender's initial contact with First United Methodist Church and shall be completed and in operation within 30 days of initial contact. This process can also be initiated by the Pastor(s) if the Pastor(s) becomes aware of the offender's attendance at First United Methodist Church activities, ministries, or programs and/or is on church property. It is the responsibility of the offender to furnish a list of willing covenant group participants within 30 days of initial contact. The covenant group coordinator and covenant group members shall be members or regular attendees of First United Methodist Church and shall submit to clearances (PA State Criminal Clearance, PA Child Abuse Clearance and the FBI Fingerprints or a signed Affidavit)
 - b. Traditional keys, if previously issued, that give access to the church facility shall be returned to First United Methodist Church immediately. Such keys shall not be issued to individuals who have been charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children.

SAFETY PROCEDURES



The second step for providing a safe place for children is conscientious and intentional safety procedures. These procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to the children and to protect staff persons and volunteers from unwarranted accusations when children are outside of the direct supervision of their

parents/guardians. Again, these are MINIMUM standards and each children's activity, program and/or ministry may adopt more stringent requirements.

1. Training is a requirement for all staff persons and volunteers working with children in church children's activities, programs, and/or ministries. New staff members and volunteers will attend an initial training orientation that includes information regarding this policy, safety procedures, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse. After the initial orientation session, all current staff members and volunteers shall attend an annual policy update session (refresher).

a. First Aid/CPR training will be offered as able.

2. Only adults may supervise an age group, he/she must be at least 5 years older than the children with whom he/she is working. (9)

3. All staff and volunteers working with children and vulnerable adults shall sign a participation covenant.(13) In a situation that an activity, program, and/or ministry is continuous, this covenant can be in the form of clear, posted, or printed rules that are explained to the participants at the outset of the program.

4. In addition to other clearances, volunteer application, and participation covenant, drivers of children need to fill out a driver clearance form.

a. When transporting children for ministries of First United Methodist Church, if using an individual's vehicle, that person must have insurance for at least \$100,000/\$300,000 bodily injury and \$100,000 property damage.

5. Each passenger should have a seat belt and the use should always be enforced. Car seats or booster seats are required for children up to the age of 8 years.

6. If possible two unrelated adults should be in each car. If only one adult is taking a carload of children, the group should all meet at the church, travel together and return to the church so the children can be picked up by a parent or guardian. Where possible, use caravans of cars as you travel.

7. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule". The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group or the setting, there will always be at least two unrelated adults present. This may include the presence of an adult "roamer" who moves in and out of rooms, through the church's halls, checks the playground, etc.(11)(12)

8. Each room or space designated for children's activities, programs, and/or ministries shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open such as a restroom, if an adult's presence is required. All activities, programs, and/or ministries should occur in open view. Should the children's activity, program and/or ministry be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this Policy, the staff person in charge of the activity, program and/or ministry shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity, program, and/or ministry and the children are properly supervised.

9. Adults will not sleep in the same bed with a child or children. In a hotel-type or dormitory setting it is recommended that, if possible, an adult room is between two children's rooms. (In order to minimize the possibility of danger from within the group as well as from strangers, choose a hotel where the rooms open to the interior of the building rather than the outside, if possible.) In camping situations, adults will not sleep in the same tents as children. In a setting where adults and youth are in a large open area, adults will sleep in a separate area of the room from the children. No permission for boys to enter the room where girls are sleeping and no permission for girls to enter the room where boys are sleeping will be given. (13)

10. Registration materials for activities, programs, and/or ministries in which children are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require a signed written permission forms renewed annually. These forms should include pertinent health information, permission to use photos of children (on or off line) and be completed in order for the child to participate in the activity, program, and/or ministry.

a. Children (5th grade and younger) will be signed into ministry each time by an adult, thus giving permission for this child to be in ministry at First United Methodist Church.

b. Any child 6th grade and older, will sign themselves into ministry at First United Methodist Church.

11. Parents will have advance notice and full information regarding the activity, program, and/or ministry in which their child will be participating.

12. Staff persons and/or volunteers should be conscious of safety concerns when leading activities and games. Proper equipment and adequate supervision of the activity, program, and/or ministry should always be in place.

13. No drugs, alcoholic beverages, weapons or fireworks will be allowed.

14. No permission or opportunity for children to separate themselves from the group, with or without an adult, will be granted or provided.
15. No inappropriate touching creating the perception that the personal space and privacy of the individual is being violated will be allowed.
16. Images of children should not be used without written parental/guardian consent.
17. Advanced parental/guardian permission to communicate with children including, but not limited to online, telephone or messaging.
18. Staff persons and/or volunteers must be respectful in all communications, related to or referencing First United Methodist Church and its ministries, employees, other volunteers, congregants, families and children.
19. Staff persons and/or volunteers must not use online communication to harass, bully or intimidate children, volunteers, staff or families of First United Methodist Church.

REPORTING:



Once an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that it be dealt with speedily and in a clearly outlined manner. The adult who observes alleged abuse or to whom such alleged abuse is reported shall report the incident immediately to the staff person in charge of the children's activity. The staff person in charge of the children's activity in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately remove the alleged victim and perpetrator from the situation. Necessary information will be obtained using the First Church IR-SA (incident) report form, such as the alleged victim's name, his/her age and address, the alleged perpetrator's name, age, address, and relationship, if any, to the alleged victim, type of abuse, place of injury, and location of incident.(20)

Upon completion of the form, the person to whom the report was made will call the Pennsylvania Childline and Abuse Registry (14) to make a report. A written CY47 form (15) will be submitted to the Lycoming County Children and Youth within 48 hours.(20) All adults involved will submit a First Church IR-SA form to the staff member in charge.

Persons who are the objects of the report shall be required to refrain from all activities at the church until the incident is resolved. In any removal of a person from any children's activities, care should be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, documenting all conversations and recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

RESPONSE PLAN:



A quick, compassionate and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the staff and volunteers of that activity shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

If the allegation is against a local church staff person or volunteer, or if it occurred in the course of a children's activity, the Local Church's Crisis Management Team (17) and Conference's Crisis Management Team(18) shall be contacted immediately only if they are non-offenders of the incident. The individuals about whom the allegations are made shall not enter or come upon the premises located at First United Methodist Church or attend church sponsored programs, activities, or ministries and shall return all traditional keys that give them access to the church facility. The Conference Crisis Management Teams will contact the District Superintendent and advise the Conference's insurance carrier. The staff person in charge of the children's activity will contact the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) immediately and take any necessary steps to assure the child's safety until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrives. The safety of the child must be the church's primary concern. An in-person meeting with the parent(s) or guardian(s) will be arranged as soon as practical. The accused perpetrator should be treated with dignity and not confronted with anger and/or hostility. A written record of the steps and actions taken will be kept.

If the allegation concerns activities or persons outside any relationship to a church related event or activity, it is the responsibility of the staff person in charge of the church activity or the volunteer to whom the report was made to make the initial contact with the Childline and Abuse Registry(14). An example would be a youth telling a Youth Pastor about abuse by a relative. The Youth Pastor will call immediately Childline and an incident report (CY47) will be filed within 48 hours of the report and should be sent to Lycoming County Children and Youth. (20)

The Media Director of the Central Pennsylvania Conference (16) and his/her designee is the only person/s authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Lead Pastor. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of church staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the “official spokesperson” is often helpful.

Pastoral support (19) will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.

An incident report will be filled out in case of an accident and be kept in the appropriate staff member’s files. A copy will be available to the parent(s) or guardian(s) upon request.

REFERENCES:



(1a) Resolution from the General Conference of the United Methodist Church, April 1996. The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church-1996. Used by permission (pp.384-386)

(1) Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1998) Rev. Melton is an ordained deacon the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church who is both a Christian educator and a lawyer.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law 23 Pa.C.S.A.6303. Note that this section of state law also provides that, “If, upon investigation, the county agency determines that a child has not been provided needed medical or surgical care because of seriously held religious beliefs of the child’s parents, guardian or person responsible for the child’s welfare, which beliefs are consistent with those of a bona fide religion, the child shall not be deemed to be physically or mentally abused. The county agency shall closely monitor the child and shall seek court-ordered medical intervention when the lack of medical or surgical care threatens the child’s life or long-term health.”

(6) Sample forms are found in Chapter Nine of Safe Sanctuaries

(7) Files kept regarding volunteers will be accorded the same status as personnel files of staff persons with any applicable exceptions required by the *Discipline* regarding clergy volunteers.

(8) Sample forms may be found in Chapter Nine of Safe Sanctuaries.

(9) Melton 31-32.

(10) Abusers thrive on secrecy, isolation and their ability to manipulate victims. When abusers know they will never have the chance to be alone with potential victims, they will quickly lose interest. The two adult rule also protects local church staff persons and volunteers from false allegations.

(12) While in some situations, younger counselors and aides may provide excellent help, people under the age of 18 cannot be expected to have developed the maturity and judgment that is needed to be fully responsible for younger children. Putting children in charge of children invites disaster.

(13) The covenant is a statement in which the participants and leaders/chaperones agree to: take part in the ministry; give their best efforts to the ministry; respect the other participants and leaders; treat others as well as they would wish to be treated. (Appendix H)

(14) 1-800-932-0313

(15) CY47- Children and Youth Form (Appendix E)

(16) The Conference Media Director may be reached at 717/766-3607.

(17) The First United Methodist Church Crisis Management Team would include the Senior Pastor, the Pastor of Discipleship, the Director of Student Ministries, the Director of Children’s Ministry and the staff person who is responsible for the program where the alleged incident occurred.

(18) The Conference’s Crisis Management Team can be contacted through the Conference Council on Ministries Director at 717/766-3601.

(19) Either through the local church or the Conference as appropriate.

(20) “Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse: Mandated Reporter Training Workbook”. Parents Anonymous of Pennsylvania.

(21) House Bill No. 435 on October 22, 2014 and House Bill 1276 on July 1, 2015.

APPENDIX A



THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE PLAN TO CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS And persons charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children

The following actions should be taken so that sanctuary, protection, and grace may be offered to all.

1. When a person within our church congregation becomes a convicted sex offender, has been charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes, or crimes against children, grace and care must be extended to the convicted individual as well as any family members associated with the church. Under the Pastor(s)'s direction, a covenant group of church members and regular attenders will be formed to support and nurture both the convicted individual and the family. A covenant group coordinator will be named whose responsibilities include, but are not limited to: responsibility for coordinating contact and support of the individual while he/she is incarcerated and on probation, and communication with the Pastor(s) and staff member overseeing Safe Sanctuaries. The covenant group coordinator cannot be related to the offender by blood or marriage. Accompaniment of the individual while at church activities or on church property will be the responsibility of members of the covenant group. This covenant group will be actively involved in this ministry during incarceration, probation, and while the individual is listed as a convicted sex offender. While family members may be part of this covenant group, they cannot be the only person to accompany the convicted individual during church activities or on church property. Covenants are to be reviewed and signed each year.
2. When a convicted sex offender, a person charged with sexually deviant crimes, or crimes against children, not previously connected with First United Methodist Church, wishes to connect with the church, the Pastor(s) should make an appointment and visit with the individual as quickly as possible. This conversation must be welcoming but honest. Included in the conversation should be the need to protect the individual as well as children. Information should be gathered into the nature of the offense and an understanding of the probation restrictions.
3. In either case, the Pastor(s) should be in contact with the probation/parole officer to verify the parole restrictions. Information should be sought specifically regarding church attendance and guidance in how to best incorporate the individual into the congregation setting.
4. In every case, the church and the individual should enter into a written covenant:
 - The church will covenant to:
 - Provide assistance in developing a covenant group, where one or more members will support the individual with attendance when they are on church property, or at church activities, programs and ministries. This should be a quiet support, but will include someone being present with him/her at all times, including when using the restroom.
 - The individual will covenant to:
 - Uphold the mission of First United Methodist Church and their design to provide safe sanctuary for all children by respecting, and abiding by, the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
 - Cooperate by giving needed information as requested and accept full benefit of the covenant group as provided.
 - Seek volunteer work, only if allowed by parole restrictions, which would be limited to adult activities. Opportunities that provide isolated or one on one contact with children would not qualify.
 - Avoid areas where children's programs occur. These areas should not be entered, even with a covenant group member.
 - Use only the designated restroom – single stall restrooms only.
 - If this covenant is not kept, the individual will not be permitted in or on the premises located at First United Methodist Church or at any of the activities, programs, or ministries. Spiritual guidance can still be extended to the individual by both the Pastor(s) and the covenant group in another location.

Covenant for Convicted Sex Offenders, persons charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes, or crimes against children, wishing to join in First United Methodist Church activities, programs and ministries.



This covenant should only be signed after a detailed conversation occurs with the pastor(s) including facts of the offense, the sentence, the conditions of probation, the name of the probation/parole officer and contact information for the officer. Secondly, the pastor(s) is to contact the probation/parole officer to verify the information received from the individual. Probation restrictions may include presence on church property or attendance at church activities, programs, or ministries, and should be clarified. The probation officer is to be interviewed as a reference as to the qualities of the individual.

Assuming no specific probation restrictions exist, specific conditions mandated by First United Methodist Church must exist in order for participation, including:

- Being accompanied by one or more members of the covenant group at all times, even to a single stall restroom, while on church property and while participating in church activities, programs and ministries.
- No entry into areas designated to be used by children.
- No participation in activities that would provide isolated or one on one contact with children.
- Yearly review of the covenant, including but not limited to, a yearly signing of the covenant.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Describe your commitment to uphold the mission of First United Methodist Church:

Do you covenant to agree with all conditions as outlined above?

The conditions must be upheld, and, if not upheld, attendance at First United Methodist Church activities, programs, and/or ministries shall be denied and you shall not be permitted in or on the premises located at First United Methodist Church. Spiritual guidance and support can still be extended by your pastor and covenant group in another location. Your signature below indicates your understanding of this covenant.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Pastor's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Covenant group coordinator's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Covenant Group Members:

APPENDIX B



CLERGY AND MANDATED REPORTING

Clergy are specifically named as required reporters in the Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Act, in Section 3490.4 Definitions. However, because a specific exemption is mentioned for confidential communication (42 Pa.C.S. 5943), some clergy erroneously believe they are not mandated to report. This confusion is increased because clergy are not defined as mandated reporters in every state. The Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence states that “only about half of the states require clergy to report suspicion of child sexual abuse to law enforcement” (www.cpsdv.org).

In Pennsylvania, clergy are mandated to report if they have “reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been abused (3490.11).” If the congregation operates school or other type of facility, “the person in charge, or the designee, shall be responsible and have the obligation to make a report of the suspected child abuse (3490.13).” This could range from a child directly telling the clergy about the abuse or a member of the staff reporting suspicion of abuse to the clergy based on comments, drawings, bruises, etc.

The exception to mandated reporting granted to clergy in Pennsylvania only applies if the information is received as part of a “confession.” This generally means that it is the offender confessing to the clergy. A particular gray area for clergy is hearing a confession in which the offender indicates urges, yearnings, or the intent to abuse again. While the law grants many helping professions privileged communication status, there are exceptions under which one must report knowledge of imminent harm to self or others. The privilege granted to clergy is based on ecclesiastical law and is total. There are no exceptions. Some clergy will choose to break the bonds of the confessional and others will not.

“Reaching Out to Communities of Faith: Partnering to Prevent and Respond to Sexual Violence.”

(A publication by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

**First United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant**

The congregation of First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statements reflect our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others. (Refer to Safe Sanctuaries Policy for clarification and definitions.)

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse), or has been charged with or accused of sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children; will be allowed to work with children in any church-sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children of our church must have had an active relationship with the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. Adult volunteers with children shall observe the "two adult rule" at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children.
4. Adult volunteers with children shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse. This includes a yearly policy refresher training.
5. Adult volunteers will immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. As a volunteer/staff member in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and to notify the staff person in charge of the ministry area if you are unable to do so? Yes ___ No ___
2. As a volunteer/staff member, do you agree to observe the "two adult rule" at all times? Yes ___ No ___
3. As a volunteer/staff member, do you agree to abide by the six-month rule before beginning a volunteer assignment? Yes ___ No ___
4. As a volunteer/staff member, do you agree to participate in training (yearly policy refresher) and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment? Yes ___ No ___
5. As a volunteer/staff member, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to your supervisor? Yes ___ No ___
6. As a volunteer/staff member, do you agree to inform a minister of this congregation if you have ever been convicted of child abuse Yes ___ No ___

I have read this Participation Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the Safe Sanctuaries Policy.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____