SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Introduction

Why this policy is important

1. It seeks to reduce the risk of abuse in the church. Abuse is a reality and people who abuse are not easily identified. It is estimated that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are sexually abused before they turn 18 years old. When abuse happens, 90% of abusers are people a child knows. A policy provides helpful boundaries that prevent “grooming” by abusers and access to those who are vulnerable. 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.
2. It helps us live into our vision. Above all else, First Church seeks to foster transformation in Christ. To experience Transformation in Christ, all people (especially children, youth, and vulnerable adults) must find the ministries and facilities of First Church to be a “safe sanctuary.”
3. It is biblical and it protects the gospel. Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5). When abuse happens in the church, it often results in people turning away from Jesus.
4. It is required by the General Conference and the Susquehanna Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. The General Conference requires churches to have a Safe Sanctuary policy. As a part of the Susquehanna Conference, the First Church policy must be in compliance with the Conference policy.
5. It protects paid and volunteer staff and limits the liability of First Church. This policy will protect the people of First Church from potential false allegations of abuse

Who decided on this policy?

All official policies that have church-wide impact are set by the Lead Council, the governing body of First Church. The Safe Sanctuary policy is managed by the staff who comprise the Discipleship Team plus the Office Manager and First Nursery School Director.

The policy is understood to be MINIMUM standards for keeping children, youth, and vulnerable adults safe. Additional safety measures may be taken if they are deemed necessary in a specific ministry context.

When does the Safe Sanctuary Policy apply?

1. Safe Sanctuaries applies to activities, programs, and/or ministries of First Church in which children and/or youth are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians.
2. Safe Sanctuaries applies when a First Church ministry is happening off-site.
3. Safe Sanctuaries applies for all groups that use First Church facilities, even if they are not directly connected with the church. When outside groups request to use First Church facilities, they are given the Safe Sanctuaries policy and are expected to follow the policy while using the building.

**SCREENING and TRAINING**

1. **“Six Month” Rule.** All adult volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults must have had an active relationship with the congregation for at least six months in order to be eligible to begin a volunteer assignment.

2. **Clearances.** All staff and volunteers who have direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall be required to complete clearances every 5 years. All clearances shall be kept in confidence and on file in the church office. Clearances must include

* Volunteer Application with references
* Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant (see Page 11)
* Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check Clearance
* Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
* FBI Fingerprinting

*Volunteers do not have to do the FBI Fingerprinting if all the following requirements are met:*

* The volunteer is not paid.
* The volunteer has lived in Pennsylvania for the previous 10 years.
* 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.
* Persons who have a break in service of 18 months or more need to resubmit their clearances and be retrained, even if they have been completed within the 5-year timeframe.

If clearances reveal a background that raises concern about contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, a conversation with an appropriate staff member will be arranged to determine if there are any limits on how this person is able to serve in ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

3**. Interviews.** All staff and volunteers will be interviewed by an appropriate staff person prior to serving in a ministry that involves direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

4. **Sex Offender.** Any individual who is aknown sexual offender is required to follow the process described in “Protection and Integration of Known Sexual Offenders.” (See page 8.)

5. **Ministry Safe Training.** Safe Sanctuaries Training will be administered through MinistrySafe, an online awareness training. This training is offered through the Susquehanna Conference and is free. Contact the Church Office to request a link for this training. The Church Office receives a certificate when this training is completed.

6. **Safe Sanctuary Policy Refresher Training.** All current staff members and volunteers will receive an annual policy refresher.

SAFETY PROCEDURES

In order to keep people safe, obtaining clearances and offering training is not enough. Less than 10% of sexual predators encounter the criminal justice system. The best way to prevent abuse is to consistently follow procedures that have been put in place to offer protection.

1. “Two Adult” Rule. Minimum supervisory standards for children and youth will include the two adults. 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.
2. Ratios. In addition to the Two-Adult rule, recommended ratios will be observed for children and youth activities.
3. “Five Years Older” Rule. Only adults may supervise children and youth. Supervisors and Assistants must be at least 5 years older than the oldest child or youth in the group.
4. Permission from Parents/Guardians
   1. Registration materials for activities, programs, and/or ministries in which children and/or youth are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require a signed written permission form, renewed annually. Advance notice and information about what the children or youth will be doing will be provided to parents.
   2. Permission forms should include pertinent health information, permission to use photos of children and/or youth (online or off-line). Images of children or youth should not be used without written parental/guardian consent.
   3. Permission from a parent/guardian is required to communicate with children and youth including, but not limited to online contact, telephone calls or text messaging, or any social media platform. All communication with children, youth, or vulnerable adults must be respectful and appropriate.
5. “Constant Coverage” Rule The church will provide appropriate age-level supervision for the entire time a child, youth or vulnerable adult is in our care.
   1. Children (5th grade and younger) will be checked-in to ministry each time by an adult, thus giving permission for this child to be in ministry at the church.
   2. Students (6th grade and older) may sign themselves into ministry at the church.
   3. Children, youth, and vulnerable adults may not separate themselves from the group, with or without an adult.
6. Physical touch. No inappropriate touching creating the perception that the personal space and privacy of the individual is being violated will be allowed.
7. Driving Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults.
   1. Drivers must complete the Safe Sanctuary screening process.
   2. Drivers must be at least 25 years old and have a valid driver’s license and registration.
   3. Drivers must complete a “Driver’s Record.” (https://apps.pa.egov.com/idr)
   4. When an individual’s personal vehicle is used, that person must have insurance for at least $100,000/$300,000 bodily injury and $100,000 property damage. Proof of insurance or a declaration page should be submitted to First Church.
   5. Two unrelated adults should be in each car. When possible, travel with at least one other car.
   6. Drivers must follow safety precautions, including use of seat belts and observing speed limits.
8. Open doors, open windows. All activities, programs, and ministries should occur in open view.
   1. *Windows.* 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.
   2. *Outdoors.* When outdoors, the staff person in charge should take appropriate measures to make sure that the children and youth are properly supervised.
9. Assisting with bathroom needs. Whenever possible, children should be encouraged to take care of their own bathroom needs. A volunteer who has not completed all aspects of the screening process should *never* assist with bathroom needs.
   1. *Young children*. The outer door should remain open while a volunteer or staff person assists the child, with an additional volunteer roaming.
   2. *Elementary children.* When accompanying a child to the bathroom, the volunteer will check the bathroom and the stalls. The outside door will remain open. Assistance should be limited to fastening and unfastening clothing.
   3. *Youth.* Youth are encouraged to use the buddy system when using the bathroom.
   4. *Special needs.* If additional assistance is needed for a child, parental permission should be secured in advance.
10. Rules about sleeping.
    1. Adults will not sleep in the same bed with a child or youth.
    2. 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.)
    3. In camping situations, adults will not sleep in the same tents as children or youth. 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 youth.
    4. 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.
11. No drugs, alcoholic beverages, weapons, or fireworks will be allowed.
12. Respectful Communication.
    1. Staff persons and volunteers must be respectful in all communications, related to or referencing the church, its ministries, or any person connected with the church.
    2. Staff persons and volunteers must not use online communication to harass, bully or intimidate any person connected with the church.

REPORTING AND RESPONDING TO ABUSE

*If an incident of child abuse occurs or allegation of an incident is made, it is crucial that a quick, compassionate and unified response is made. All allegations will be taken seriously.*

1. Should I tell someone?
   1. If you are uncomfortable with something you have seen or heard that you think may involve “abuse,” please speak to the staff person in charge immediately.
   2. Staff and volunteers who work in a church setting with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are *mandated reporters.* This means that you are required by law to report suspected child abuse.   
      (For details about clergy confidentiality, see the Clergy and Mandated Reporting document available in the church office.)
2. Take steps to ensure safety.
   1. The staff person in charge in which the alleged abuse was observed or disclosed shall immediately remove the alleged victim and perpetrator from the situation. Care will be taken to do this in a discrete manner.
   2. The accused perpetrator should be treated with dignity and not be confronted with anger and/or hostility.
   3. The accused perpetrator will not be permitted on church property or attend church sponsored events until the accusations are dismissed or the accused perpetrator is formally charged.
   4. Accused perpetrators shall return all keys that give them access to the church facility.
3. Communicate with those who need to be aware.
   1. *Staff person.* Immediately contact the staff person in your area when you suspect or become aware of abuse.
   2. *Parents.* If the alleged victim is a minor, the staff person in charge will contact the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) immediately unless the parent is the alleged perpetrator. Necessary steps will be taken to assure the child’s safety until the parent(s) or guardian(s) arrives. The safety of the child is the church’s primary concern. An in-person meeting with the parent(s) or guardian(s) will be arranged as soon as practical.
   3. *Pastor.* If the allegation is against a local church staff person or volunteer, or if it occurred in the course of church ministry, the Lead Pastor will be notified.
   4. *District Superintendent.* If the allegation is against a local church staff person or volunteer, or if it occurred in the course of church ministry, the District Superintendent will be notified.
   5. *Investigating Agencies.* The staff and volunteers involved shall be at the service of all official investigating agencies.
   6. *Confidentiality.* Allegations are to be discussed on a need-to-know basis. Once the allegations have been reported, the matter should only be discussed with law enforcement or designated officials.
4. Document what you see, hear, and do.
   1. A written record of the steps and actions taken will be kept. A First Church Child Abuse Report Form is available in the church office and from the staff person. The person making the report should record all information reported to them. A copy of the form will be available to the parent(s) or guardian(s) upon request.
5. Call ChildLine at 800-932-0313 immediately to report child abuse.
   1. Submit a CY47 form (available in the church office and from the staff person) to Lycoming County Children and Youth within 48 hours.
   2. Whenever a ChildLine report is made regarding an incident that occurred on church property or in the context of ministry, the Lead Pastor should be notified.
6. To report abuse of vulnerable adults, call the Adult Protective Services Hotline: 1-800-490-8505.
7. Media Involvement
   1. All requests from the media should be directed to the Lead Pastor.
   2. Do not say “no comment” and do not make a statement “off the record.”
   3. Express a desire to be helpful and kindly tell the reporter that the Lead Pastor is the best person to respond to questions.
8. What do I do if I am aware of abuse that is happening outside the context of ministry?   
   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 or the volunteer to whom the report was made to contact Childline. An example would be a youth telling a Youth Pastor about abuse by a relative. The Youth Pastor will immediately call Childline and submit a CY47 Form to Lycoming County Children and Youth within 48 hours.

DEFINITIONS

* “Adult” - a person 18 years of age or older.
* “Child” - any person under the age of 13, from birth through 5th grade.
* “Child abuse” as defined under Pennsylvania Child Protective Services Law means any of the following:
  + 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.
  + 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.
  + 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.
  + 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.
* “Children’s activities” - 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.
* “Covenant Group” – A covenant group is for the protection and integration of known sexual offenders through accompaniment of the individual by at least one group member at any church event, property or ministry.
* “Mandated reporter” – Mandated reporters are people who are required by law to report suspected child abuse. In PA, the legal definition of a mandated reporter includes “An individual 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.” Clergy are also mandated reporters.
* “Non-related adults” – people over the age of 18 who do not reside in the same household and are not married.
* “Staff person” - any person employed by First United Methodist Church.
* “Roamer” - 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” - someone who has committed acts that meet the definition of child abuse.
* “Staff person in charge of a children’s activity” - the adult church staff person responsible for the

conduct of this activity, program, or ministry.

* “Volunteer” - 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” – any person age 18 or older who may be particularly susceptible to abuse due to physical or mental infirmity, emotional or intellectual disability, or emotional dysfunction.
* “We” or “the church” - the First United Methodist Church, 604 Market St, Williamsport, PA 17701.
* “Youth” – any person under the age of 18 and is in 6th-12th grade.

PROTECTION AND INTEGRATION OF KNOWN SEXUAL OFFENDERS

1. **What do we mean by “known sexual offender?”** 
   1. A “known sexual offender” is a person who has been convicted or formally charged with sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children.
   2. Some, but not all, “known sexual offenders” are on Megan’s List.
   3. If a person who has been convicted or formally charged is subsequently found to be innocent, they will no longer be considered a “known sexual offender” and a covenant will no longer be needed.
2. **What steps are taken when First Church is aware of a known sexual offender who is on church property or participating in church ministry off-site?**
   1. A known sexual offender must be graciously and firmly asked to leave church property or church ministry immediately so that adequate protections of the offender and those who are vulnerable can be put in place. They will be invited to set up a meeting with a Pastor to set up this protection.
   2. When the Pastor and the offender meet, the following will be discussed
      1. A written covenant needs to be in place before the offender can be on church property or involved in church ministry.
      2. The written covenant must be functioning within 30 days of initial contact.
      3. The Offender must share with the Pastor the facts of the offense, sentence, conditions of probation, name of the probation/parole officer, and contact information for the officer.
      4. The Pastor will contact the probation/parole officer to verify the information received from the individual and will confirm any parole restrictions that might relate to presence on church property or attendance at church ministries. The probation officer is to be interviewed as a reference as to the qualities of the individual.
   3. In all interactions, grace and care must be extended to the offender as well as any family members.
3. **What commitments are needed by an Offender?**
   1. Uphold the mission of First Church by providing a safe sanctuary for all people and by following the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
   2. Provide needed information as requested.
   3. Accept the support of a Covenant Group.
   4. Seek volunteer work, only if allowed by parole restrictions. All volunteer work must be limited to adult activities.
   5. Refrain from any volunteer opportunity that provides isolated or one-on-one contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
   6. Avoid areas where children or youth programs occur. These areas should not be entered, even with a covenant group member.
   7. If this covenant is not kept, the individual will not be permitted in or on church property and will not be permitted to participate in church ministries off-site. Spiritual guidance can still be extended to the individual by the Pastor(s).
4. **How does a Covenant Group work?**
   1. When an offender is on church property or at a church ministry, a member of the Covenant Group will always be present with the individual.
   2. It is the responsibility of the offender to make arrangements for a covenant group member to be present when they plan to be on church property or participating in a ministry off-site.
   3. *Bathrooms.* Offenders are encouraged to use single-stall restroom. If a single-stall restroom is not available, Covenant Group members will accompany the offender into a multi-stall restroom.
   4. *Confidential.* Covenant Groups are confidential groups and seek to provide “quiet support.”
   5. *Annual.* Covenants are to be reviewed and signed each year.
5. **Who can be a part of a “Covenant Group?”**
   1. Covenant group members must be members or regular attendees of First United Methodist Church.
   2. Covenant Group members must submit all clearances.
   3. Covenant Group members may not be related to the offender by blood or marriage and may not live in the same household.
   4. In order to honor confidentiality, it is the responsibility of the offender to recruit willing covenant group participants and furnish a list of the members to the Pastor.
   5. The Pastor will assist the offender in developing a covenant group, as able.

Do you covenant to agree with all conditions as outlined above? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Do you understand that failing to uphold all the conditions above will mean that you will not be permitted to be on church property or participate in church ministries off-site? \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Your signature below indicates your understanding of this covenant.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Pastor’s Signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Covenant Group Members:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**First United Methodist Church**

**Safe Sanctuaries Participation Covenant**

The following policy statements reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a place in which all people can be safe and experience transformation in Christ. (Refer to the complete policy for more details.)

1. **Six Month Rule.** All adult volunteers involved with children, youth, or vulnerable adults must have had an active relationship with the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
2. **Clearances.** All adult volunteers and staff must submit mandatory clearances.
3. **Training.** Adult volunteers and staff will complete Ministry Safe online training and a yearly policy refresher training.
4. **Two Adult Rule.** Minimum supervisory standards for children and youth will include two adults.
5. **Reporting Abuse.** Adult volunteers will immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.
6. **Sexual Offenders.** No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse), or has been formally charged with sexually deviant crimes or crimes against children will be allowed to work with children in any church-sponsored activity.

**Please answer each of the following questions:**

1. I will observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, and I will notify my supervisor if I am unable to do so.

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

1. I have had an active relationship with First Church for at least 6 months.

Yes\_\_\_ No\_\_\_

1. I will observe the “two adult rule” at all times.

Yes \_\_\_ No\_\_\_

1. I will participate in training events

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

1. I will promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to my supervisor and the appropriate authorities, if appropriate.

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

1. Have you 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: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_