FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
Wadesboro, North Carolina
SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY
Approved November 5, 2023

INTRODUCTION

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and vulnerable adults as well as those who serve in ministry with and to them. As such:

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the screening and selection of leadership, both paid and volunteer.
- We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, events and ministries.
- We will educate all our leadership—both paid and volunteer—with children, youth and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure to reporting an observed or suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported or confirmed violations of any North Carolina criminal laws.

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by First United Methodist Church, Wadesboro, NC, regardless of location, as well as any activities utilizing its facilities. Outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt and adhere to equivalent policies. Where the two policies are in conflict, the more conservative approach shall be taken.

THEOLOGICAL RATIONALE

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 fasted 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 at each person's baptism by our congregational response, pledging: "With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this person, 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).

"Safe Sanctuaries is a calling, and it is a mandate to ensure that there are places of safety and protection for God's people…. Building safe sanctuaries is about building a culture of safety, a culture where people are cared for, a culture where people can thrive and be free to experience the embrace of a loving God…These policies and procedures are not about a lack of trust in clergy, laity, staff, or volunteers, but about a culture of protection for our children, youth,

vulnerable adults, employees, volunteers, and the whole church body. This is the reason we do this work, so that the whole church might thrive." Safer Sanctuaries, 159.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy, we will use the following terms:

- ***Abuse*** means harm or threatened harm to the health and welfare of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by any person responsible for the health and welfare of that child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- ***Adult*** means any person at least eighteen years of age.
- ***Appropriate*** means conduct that one understands would be acceptable and permissible by a child's parent or guardian.
- ***Child*** refers to a person under eighteen years of age.
- ***Leader*** means anyone personally responsible for supervising and overseeing a specific church-related function, event, or activity.
- ***Parent or guardian*** means any parent, stepparent, foster parent, grandparent, or appointed guardian with general responsibility for the health, education, or welfare of a child or vulnerable adult.
- ***Staff*** means any employee of the ministry. This can include both paid and unpaid staff members, but is particularly used in reference to paid employees.
- ***Volunteer*** means a person who participates as a leader or assists a leader in activities relating to any event or ministry without compensation.
- ***Vulnerable adults*** are people eighteen years or older who are unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect, or exploitation.
- ***Youth*** refers to a person between the ages of thirteen and seventeen.

PROTOCOLS

- **Background Checks:** Background checks must be completed every two years for church staff and volunteers who work with children and youth. Adults working with children or youth must be an active church member/constituent for at least six months prior to beginning volunteer activities.
- **Training and Policy visibility:** Annual Safe Sanctuaries training shall be held each year for all volunteers and paid staff. Volunteers and leaders will sign the Volunteer Covenant Agreement each year. The Safe Sanctuaries policy shall be available in printed form around the church building and available online on the church's website firstumcwadesboro.org.
- **Room visibility:** Every room that is used for activities and teaching of children and youth should have a window in the door or a half door, that gives visibility to all areas of that room. The window must be left uncovered. If there is no window, the door must be left open at all times when children and youth are present.
- **Two adult rule:** The standard for activities with children or youth is at least two unrelated adults supervising. When this is not possible, two related adults may lead, with the exception of adults married to one another who need an additional adult present. If it is not possible to have two adults present at all times, the activity must take

place in an open space (indoors or outdoors) where other adults are able to witness the activity and interactions of all involved. A roving monitor may be used during times when activities are taking place in multiple rooms and more than one adult is not possible in each room, but the door must be left open to these rooms.

- **Internet and social media:** The vast majority of digital messages should be informational only (i.e. pertinent information for events). Digital messages to youth or children should be simple, straightforward, and limited (i.e. "Good luck on your test," "Are you feeling better?"); Responses beyond a simple response like "thanks," should be followed up with an invitation to continue the conversation in person and in clear view of others. Any online profile used to communicate with youth should be open and accessible by other adults and should never initiate "friend" or "follow" requests. Any volunteer or staff engaging with others based on their employment or association with our ministry needs to understand they represent the ministry and should follow church guidelines for online behavior.
- **Individual Counseling**: Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner. The clergyperson, staff person, or lay leader shall conduct the meeting in a visible space, meaning that the office door is cracked open or a window is visible and someone can reasonably see all persons in the room, or the meeting shall take place in a public space. Suspected abuse or neglect uncovered in counseling shall be reported in accordance with North Carolina law.
- **Registered Sex Offenders**: All people are invited to experience God's redeeming love through worship. To honor our duty to care for the young and vulnerable, it is necessary to place covenant boundaries around participation of any person convicted of abuse or who is a registered sex offender. That individual must identify themselves to the pastor or Chairperson of the Leadership Council. In order to participate in the Church, the individual must sign the Registered Sex Offender covenant, be accompanied by a same-gender unrelated adult while on church grounds, and not go near any area of the church intended for the use, care of, or supervision of minors (N.C. Gen Stat. § 14-208.18(a) (2) (2008)) nor any activity where children or youth are the primary audience (N.C. Gen Stat. § 14-208.18(a) (1) (2008)). Transgressions on these boundaries are reported to the sheriff's office in compliance with NC law.

SCREENING

All persons, both employed and volunteer, working with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be:

- An active member of the local ministry for at least six months
- At least 18 years of age
- At least five years older than the oldest person they are supervising/leading (Exception: This does not apply to adults in ministry with vulnerable adults.)

New volunteers must:

- Submit an application and personal references
- Participate in an interview process as determined by the Church Leadership Team.

• Consent to a National Criminal Background Check as well as previous employment and reference checks.
All information received from the Background Check will be received and reviewed by the Pastor and Chairperson of the Leadership Council.
All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be filed by the Pastor and maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to persons identified by the Church Leadership Team.
Background Checks for Volunteers are good for a period of two years. After two years, each Volunteer must have a fresh background check.

REPORTING
Reporting is required from any staff or volunteer:

1) when that person personally witnesses an incident of abuse or exploitation
2) when an allegation of an incident of abuse or exploitation is made to the staff member or volunteer by a third party
3) when a child or adult discloses an experience of abuse or exploitation

Although there is no obligation for private citizens to report evidence of a most crimes, North Carolina citizens have a legal duty to report in the following situations:

- Suspected child abuse or neglect by a parent, guardian or caretaker (*NC G.S. 7B-301(a))*
- Suspected abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult by their caretaker (*NC G.S. 108A-2)*

Staff members and volunteers should report first to a person in charge of the ministry in which they are involved. That person should inform the pastor and contact appropriate local authorities (i.e. Police, Child Protective Services). First and foremost: a victim's safety is of primary concern! Attention and care should be given to documenting action steps, preserving any evidence, and coordinating communication in a way that is honest, transparent, and preserves as much privacy and dignity as possible. It is never the responsibility of a leader to investigate allegations of abuse.

The person responsible for reporting abuse to authorities should also complete an incident report form. The forms shall be kept on file in a locked cabinet in the church office.

RESPONSE PLAN
All allegations shall be taken seriously.
A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child or adult abuse will be initiated following the direction of the appointed clergy in the local church and in consultation with the District Superintendent of the district in which the church is located.
In the case that the alleged incident involves the appointed clergy, the response will be directed by the District Superintendent of the district in which the church is located.
A response will include appropriate pastoral care and support for all involved in the allegation, including the alleged perpetrator(s), alleged victim(s) and their families.

Immediate response steps

1. Ensure the safety of the victim.
    a. Provide medical care as needed.
    b. Notify parents if victim is a minor.
2. Removed the accused abuser from further involvement.
    a. Do not confront the accused abuser with anger or hostility. Treat them with dignity, but immediately remove that person from that ministry and any others that involve youth or children. Inform the accused of their removal and lay out the process that the congregation has in place.
3. Notify the proper law enforcement and/or family services agency.
    a. The report should be made by the person who directly witnessed the abuse, the person who suspects abuse might be occurring, or person who first heard about the abuse from the victim.
    b. It is useful for this report to be made in the presence of a senior pastor, youth coordinator, or another church leader for moral support and to corroborate that a report was properly made.
4. Notify denominational leadership, the church's insurance company, and the church's attorney.
5. Create a written record of the steps taken by the church.
6. Designate a spokesperson to make any necessary statements to the public.
    a. May be the pastor, another staff member, the church's attorney, or a lay member (such as the Chairperson of Leadership Council). Whoever is chosen should be capable of speaking calmly and thoughtfully and must be prepared to answer questions honestly without adding extra or unnecessary information. The church should coordinate with the District Office whenever possible.
    b. Key goals of the spokesperson are to 1) protect the privacy of the victim 2) express that the congregation is responding appropriately 3) provide any transparency possible about the ongoing process | It is best practice to have an prepared statement or written notes that have been checked by the church's attorney. The spokesperson may answer questions by saying "We don't know at this time." Honesty and transparency is important and must be held in balance with privacy and avoiding speculation.
7. Prepare a brief and honest statement for the congregation.
    a. Honesty, communication, and accountability are core elements of building safer sanctuaries.
    b. Engage in honest conversation about what has happened without gossip or speculation. The best way to share honest and forthright information is generally with a letter that briefly explains the incident and initial action taken by the church. It should avoid identifying the victim or accused abuser, but should include information about actions taken so that the congregation knows the situation is being taken seriously, the victim is safe and supported, and the accused abuser has been removed from vulnerable situation.
8. Cooperate fully with investigations from law enforcement or the department of family services.

Registered Sex Offender Church Participation Covenant Statement

The congregation of First United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children and youth. In furtherance of our Safe Sanctuary policy and in compliance with N. C. Gen. Stat. §§ 14-208.17, 14-208.18, all registered sex offenders who wish to be part of our worshipping community must abide by the following procedures:

1. As a registered sex offender, I will have and abide by conditions placed on my participation in the church community.

2. While on church property, I will be accompanied by an unrelated, same-gender adult covenant partner. Providing a covenant partner will be the responsibility of the church.

3. I will not be permitted to work/volunteer with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-208.17 (2008)

4. I will not be in attendance at any event where children or youth are the primary audience. This includes, but is not limited to, United Methodist Youth Fellowship activities, Vacation Bible School and scouting activities. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-208.18 (a) (3) (2008) If I attend such an event, I will be told to leave and a report will be made to the sheriff's office.

5. I will not be within 300 feet of any location intended primarily for the use, care or supervision of minors. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-208.18(a) (2) (2008).

6. I will not be in any area of the property designated for the use, care or supervision of children or youth. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-208.18 (a) (1) (2008). These areas include, but are not limited to, the nursery, preschool classrooms, children's Sunday school classrooms and playground.

Dated: _____
Pastor: _____
Church Council Chairperson: _____
Signature: _____
Printed_____

Uwharrie District
Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church

ACCIDENT REPORT FORM

(Please Print All Information)

Date of Accident: _____Time of Accident: _____

Name of Person Injured: _____

This Person Is A (Circle One) Child or Youth Adult

Address of Injured Person: _____
_____

Location of Accident: _____

Name of Parent(s) or Guardian(s):_____

Name of Person(s) Who Witnessed the Accident:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Describe the Accident:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Name of Person Making This Report: _____

_____ _____
Signature of Person Making This Report Date

Uwharrie District
Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church

Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church
Report of Suspected Incident of Child or Youth Abuse
Part I

- Name of Worker (Paid or Volunteer) Observing or Receiving Disclosure of Abuse of Child or Youth:_____

  Names of Additional Witnesses if Applicable: _____
  _____

- Victim's Name:_____
  - Victim's Age/Date of Birth_____

- Date and Place of Initial Conversation With/Report from Victim:_____
  _____

- Date and Place Of Observed Incident of Suspected Abuse:_____
  _____

- Victim's Statement or Description of Observed Incident (Give a Detailed Summary Here, Using Additional Pages if Needed):_____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Name of Person Accused of Abuse:_____

- Relationship of Accused to Victim (Paid Staff, Volunteer, Family Member, Etc.):_____
  _____

- Reported to (Name of District Staff Member, Volunteer Staff, Adult Counselor, Pastor):_____
  _____
  - Date and Time Report Made:_____
  - Summary:_____
    _____
    _____
    _____

    (Continue to Signature Portion on Reverse Side.)

Report of Suspected Incident of Child or Youth Abuse
Part II
(This Portion to Be Completed By District Staff Member)

- Call to Victim's Parents or Guardian Made By:_____
- Spoke With:_____
- Summary:_____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Call to Local Law Enforcement Agency Made By:_____
  - Date and Time of Call:_____
  - Spoke With:_____
  - Summary:_____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
- Other Contacts:_____
  - Date and Time of Call_____
  - Spoke With:_____
  - Summary:_____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

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_____ _____
Signature of Person Making This Report ***Date***

_____ _____
Signature of District Staff Member Receiving Report and Completing Part II ***Date***

This Form Will Be Kept On File In a Locked Cabinet At the District Office, Accessible Only By District Staff With A Need To Know, Until The Matter Is Fully Addressed Or All Applicable Statutes Of Limitations Have Expired.

VOLUNTEER COVENANT AGREEMENT

The congregation of First United Methodist Church of Wadesboro, N.C., 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 statement reflects 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.

1. No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (including sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) shall be permitted to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in any church sponsored activity.
2. All adult volunteers involved with children or youth of our church must have been *active* members or constituents with the congregation for at least six months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall, wherever possible, observe the two-adult rule so that no adult is alone with children or youth.
4. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall immediately report to the their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please read the following statements and initial:

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, I have read, understand, and agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth. ___
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to observe the two-adult rule at all times. ___
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to my volunteer assignment. ___
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to submit to a criminal background check, including, but not limited to, NC Statewide Criminal Records Check and Nationwide Sex Offenders Check. ____
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, I agree to promptly report any changes of this information to the Church Pastor or the Chairperson of the Leadership Team. ___

Name: _____ (Please Print)
Address:_____
City:_____ Zip: _____
Cell: _____ Phone: _____
Email:_____
Birthday: _____
Social Security# (required for background check) _____

I have read this volunteer covenant statement, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.
Sign & Print full name_____
Date_____