

Safety Policy

First United Methodist Church of Alexandria, LA

Safe Sanctuary Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

(updated October 2025)

“God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children, youth, and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong.” –The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church, 2000, p. 180.

First United Methodist Church of Alexandria, LA (FUMCA) takes seriously the call of Jesus Christ to minister to all people and to seek to meet their needs. We recognize the great problem of abuse in our culture and the inherent risk of ministry. This document was developed in order to ensure that reasonable safety measures are taken to safeguard the physical and emotional welfare of children, youth, and vulnerable adults that participate in the ministries of FUMCA. It is our desire to respond to any situation in a Christ-like manner.

This policy applies to all volunteers and paid staff who participate in FUMCA’s children, youth, and adult programs, including church-sponsored events held in any location in which minors or vulnerable adults are present.

First United Methodist Preschool is exempt from the requirements of this policy and follows its own policies, which are in part determined by Louisiana state licensing requirements.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Definitions
2. Selection and Screening
3. Safe Spaces Procedures
4. Policy Exempting Persons from Eligibility to Serve
5. Reporting of Incidents Requirements
6. Appendix: Policy for Electronic Communication with Minors

1. DEFINITIONS

Definition of Age:

1. Adult refers to a person 18 years or older

2. Child refers to any person under the age of 18
 - a. Children refers to individuals between the ages of 0 and 12
 - b. Youth refers to individuals in seventh grade or older
3. Vulnerable Adult refers to any adult aged 18 or over who, by reason of mental or other disability, age, illness, or other situation is permanently or for the time being unable to take care of him or herself, or to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.

Definitions of Abuse:

1. Child Abuse is the harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, in which the harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.
2. Vulnerable Adult Abuse is the harm or threatened harm to a vulnerable adult's health or welfare by a person responsible for the vulnerable adult's health or welfare or by a person in a position of trust, in which the harm occurs or is threatened through non-accidental physical or mental injury or sexual abuse.
3. Physical Abuse is any deliberate act that inflicts bodily harm to a person or the failure to protect from physical harm where a duty exists to do so.
4. Neglect is failure to provide nutrition, medical, surgical, or any other care necessary for the well being of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
5. Sexual Abuse is any sexual contact or sexually explicit language, gestures, or images by a volunteer or staff person with, or directed to, a participant.
6. Child Sexual Abuse occurs any time a child is used for the sexual stimulation of an adult or older child. A child is powerless either to consent to or resist such sexual acts. This includes fondling, sexual intercourse, forced participation in sexual acts, incest, exploitation for the purpose of child sexual assault materials (videos, photographs, or other artifacts) or prostitution, and/or exposure to adult sexual activity.
7. Emotional abuse is submitting a child, youth or vulnerable adult to verbal assault or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse can include closed confinement (being shut in a small area), making racial remarks, excessive punishment, pervasive use of profanity in a denigrating or humiliating manner, knowingly permitting drug or alcohol abuse, and ignoring or encouraging peer abuse.

Definition of Roles:

1. Participants are children, youth, or vulnerable adults who are registered, enrolled, attending, or otherwise participating in an event or activity sponsored by the church.
2. Staff includes any clergy person or any paid employee of FUMCA.
3. Supervision is the ability for a person to be in charge of a group of children, youth, or vulnerable adults giving direction, setting boundaries, disciplining appropriately, maintaining safety, and being the adult in all situations.
4. Adult Volunteer is a person who has the care/supervision of any participant at an event. This may include paid staff members of a local church. Such a person should be eighteen (18) years of age or older and at least 5 years older than the oldest child in the group with which they are to work. It is strongly recommended that at least one person serving in this role be at least twenty-one (21) years of age or older. This role requires local church Safe Sanctuary training based upon the congregation's policy and procedures.
5. Helper under age 18 is considered a child and, therefore, can serve in no official role of authority over children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

2. SELECTION AND SCREENING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Careful screening is one way to reduce the potential for abuse (sexual, physical, and emotional) of children, youth, and vulnerable adults at FUMCA. Screening includes background checks, informal interviews, and completion of a Safe Sanctuary training. All screening results will remain confidential.

1. FUMCA shall direct each prospective paid staff or volunteer to complete an application and consent to having a background check performed.
2. FUMCA shall review the applications and follow through each stage with each applicant.
 - a. The Senior Pastor will be responsible for screening all paid staff employees and all volunteers working with vulnerable adults.
 - b. The Program Director will be responsible for screening all volunteers working with children, including nursery staff and volunteers.
 - c. The Program Director will be responsible for screening all volunteers working with youth.
 - d. The Director of Worship & Music Ministries will be responsible for screening volunteers working with children and/or youth choirs and any choir in which youth or children participate.

3. Leaders of outside groups are not required to have been screened by FUMCA. However, FUMCA will review the outside group's screening policies regarding working with children to determine their eligibility to use FUMCA's facilities. Additionally, outside groups that seek to use church property must be in line with our United Methodist Social Principles and must be approved by the Senior Pastor.
4. FUMCA reserves the right to turn away any person for volunteer or paid service. Persons alleged and convicted of sexual abuse, past or present, will not be eligible to serve as paid staff or volunteers with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
5. Re-screening will occur every three years. If a volunteer moves away from the area for any length of time, a new background check will be issued on their return.

3. SAFE SPACES PROCEDURES

1. Two Adult Rule: During all church sponsored events, including virtual gatherings, one adult will not be alone with any number of children, youth, or vulnerable adults. These two adults must be non-related and non-cohabitating. For small group activities where one adult supervises a group, all groups are to meet in sight and sound of at least one other group or an adult floater. The ministry leader may also decide to combine groups to ensure the safety of all parties. Small group sizes will be determined by the size of the group but should not exceed reasonable adult/participant ratios.
2. Rule of Three: In addition to no adult being alone with participants, no two participants should be alone together in a private space, including the restroom. There should always be a group of three together, whether that be a group of only children or youth or a group of minors along with at least two adults.
3. Five Year Older Rule: Persons supervising children and/or youth will be at least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth participant. It is expected that all staff or volunteers for church sponsored events be at least 18 years of age or older and have completed a background check, interview with the appropriate staff leader for that ministry area, and participated in training on the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
4. Adult/Children Ratio. The adult/children ratio will be dependent upon the age of the children present. While maintaining the Two Adult Rule:
 - a. the ratio for children ages 0-5 is a minimum of 1 adult for every 4 children.
 - b. the ratio for children grades 1-6 is 1 adult for every 6 children.

5. Adult/Youth Ratio. While maintaining the Two Adult Rule:
 - a. the adult/youth ratio will be at least 1 adult for every 8 youth while on the church campus during waking hours.
 - b. the ratio for off-site or overnight activities will be a minimum of 1 adult for every 5 youth.
6. Open Doors: Doors to meeting spaces without windows must remain open when children, youth, or vulnerable adults are utilizing the space. Doors with windows may remain closed provided that sight lines to all areas of the room are clear.
7. Medical Release/Registration Form: All persons attending children or youth events shall have a completed parental permission form, which includes a medical release. It is expected that a new form will be submitted if a change in medical status occurs. All forms will be maintained by the appropriate ministry team leader and will be available upon request for verification during church event check-in.
8. Check-In Procedure: Children and youth ministry leaders should practice clear and consistent check-in procedures for all events.
9. Check-out/Event Pickup: No child/youth will be released to anyone other than the parent whose signature has been provided without specific written direction by that parent and satisfactory identification of the person who will call for the child/youth.
10. Communication with Children: Communication with children should occur through approved channels, such as an official church email or designated platforms, and must be transparent, ideally in group formats. One-on-one communication is prohibited unless prior approval is granted, and parents must approve consent before contact is initiated. More information on best practices can be found in Appendix A: Policy for Electronic Communication with Minors
11. Transportation: Volunteers may transport children to and from church sponsored events if they are 25 years or older, possess a valid drivers license, and have up to date insurance coverage. No adult should be alone with a minor in a vehicle, unless the adult is the parent or guardian of the minor. Written consent from a parent or guardian is required for transportation of minors to and from church events. Parents should be informed of the transportation arrangements, including the names of the drivers and the vehicles being used.
12. Lodging for overnight youth events with hotel-style or individual rooms: An adult and youth will not share a room/hotel/tent unless the adult is a parent of the youth with whom they are sharing the room/hotel/tent. No adult should share a bed with any youth. Individual youth rooms will be located on the same floor as two adult staff/volunteer chaperones occupying their own room(s).
13. Lodging for overnight youth events with large group sleeping arrangements: There will be separate sleeping areas/rooms for males and females at all church

sponsored events. If youth and adults are sleeping in the same large space, there will be at least two adults of the same gender in the room/cabin.

- a. Parent/Guardian Housing Exemption: An immediate family member or guardian of a young person who is chaperoning an overnight event is permitted to share a room with his/her child no matter the gender as long as no other young people are sharing the room.

14. Six Month Rule: Any volunteer working with children must be a member of FUMCA or attend regularly for at least six months. This shall be confirmed by the Senior Pastor or Program Director.

4. POLICY EXEMPTING PERSONS FROM ELIGIBILITY TO SERVE

Circumstances or conditions that may exempt a person from eligibility to serve with children, youth, or vulnerable adults include the following items:

1. Individuals convicted by local, state, or federal courts of neglecting, abusing, molesting or battering a child or an adult.
2. Individuals convicted of a violent crime.
3. Individuals convicted of a felony: Applicants whose felony conviction is not otherwise mentioned above will be considered on an individual basis pending a background check and subject to final approval by the Senior Pastor.

5. REPORTING OF SUSPECTED INCIDENTS OF SEXUAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE OF MINORS

FUMCA will take all accusations and suspicions of abuse seriously. Under Louisiana Law, members of the clergy are required by law to report it to a local law enforcement agency. Upon a volunteer or staff person receiving a complaint, or suspecting abuse or neglect from within the church setting, the Director of the involved ministry shall immediately be notified.

This staff person will then notify the appropriate law enforcement agency, as well as the Senior Pastor. If the abuse happened on church property by church volunteers or staff, the accused person shall immediately be removed from contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults until the incident reported has been resolved. The removal of the accused person should be handled in the most caring manner for all involved.

6. APPENDIX: POLICY FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH MINORS

Purpose: The purpose of this policy is to ensure the safety and well-being of minors while participating in church activities and communications. This policy is designed in accordance with Safe Sanctuaries principles to establish clear guidelines for electronic communication between adults and minors within the organization.

Policy Statement

All electronic communication between adults and minors must be conducted in a manner that is safe, respectful, and appropriate. This policy applies to all forms of electronic communication, including but not limited to email, text messages, social media, and any other digital platforms.

Guidelines for Communication

1. Approved Communication Channels
 - a. Communication should primarily occur through official church email accounts or designated communication platforms (BAND).
 - b. Personal phone numbers and social media accounts should not be used without parent permission for communication with minors.
2. Transparency
 - a. All electronic communications with minors should be transparent and open, meaning they should be visible to parents or guardians and other appropriate church staff.
 - b. Group messaging (e.g., group texts or group chats) is encouraged to ensure transparency.
3. Appropriate Content
 - a. Communications should remain professional and appropriate at all times. Discussions should focus on church-related activities, events, and topics relevant to the minors' spiritual growth.
 - b. Avoid sharing personal information, engaging in private conversations, or discussing sensitive topics.
4. Parental Consent
 - a. Obtain written consent from a parent or guardian before initiating electronic communication with minors.
 - b. Inform parents about the types of communication that will occur and the platforms used.

Boundaries and Expectations

1. **No One-on-One Communication:** One-on-one electronic communication between adults and minors is prohibited, except in exceptional circumstances where prior approval has been granted by a supervisor and parents have been informed.
2. **Monitoring and Reporting:** All electronic communications should be subject to monitoring. Church leadership will periodically review communications to ensure compliance with this policy. Any inappropriate communication or behavior should be reported immediately to church leadership.

Violation of Policy

1. Any violation of this policy will result in disciplinary action, which may include termination of employment or volunteer status, depending on the severity of the violation.
2. Serious violations may be reported to the proper authorities, as necessary, in accordance with legal obligations.