

MINISTRY SAFE PROTECTION POLICY

For All Ministries Involving Children, Students, and Vulnerable Adults

Effective June 1, 2015

PURPOSE OF THE MINISTRY SAFE PROTECTION POLICY

The MinistrySafe Protection Policy of First United Methodist Church (FUMC) provides a covenant framework for sharing in ministry together. Our goal is to create a safe environment for children, students, and vulnerable adults as well as for adult staff and volunteers serving in these ministries.

We believe that each and every person is a beloved child of God, claimed by God's grace. Further, we embrace our purpose as a church: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. We seek to live into that purpose by fostering opportunities for growth in God's grace for people of all ages through various ministries and by sharing God's grace both within and beyond our faith community. We are committed to engaging in this holy work in an atmosphere that is safe and nurturing for all.

The purpose of this policy is for the protection of everyone involved in ministries provided by FUMC and/or offered on our campus. This policy and the procedures listed within are in place to help prevent the occurrence and/or the appearance of abuse as well as to protect staff and volunteers from false accusations and suspicions.

Prior to volunteering or working in ministries that serve children, students, and vulnerable adults, each person must meet the requirements of our eligibility and screening protocols, complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse and awareness training, attend training specific to our policy requirements, and enter into a covenant agreement with FUMC to uphold and adhere to these policies at all times.

DEFINITIONS

Child – a person 12 years of age or younger

Student—a person between the ages of 13 and 17

Adult – a person 18 years of age or older

Vulnerable Adult – an adult who has one or more mental, physical, or emotional impairments that renders the person incapable of self-care and/or independent living without assistance.

Church – First United Methodist Church of Georgetown

Ministry Function – any ministry, party, class, child care, activity, trip or gathering specifically designed or planned for children/students and sponsored or supported by the Church. This includes ministry functions both on and off the property of the Church. Central Texas Conference (CTC) and Scouting events are not included in this definition and are covered by their respective policies. This definition does not include events and activities where children/students are chaperoned by their own parents or guardians or their designees.

FUMC Safety and Protection Team – Team led by the Church Business Administrator with responsibility for monitoring and assessing the Church’s compliance with the MinistrySafe Protection policy and for addressing any reports of policy violation, incident, or allegation

Eligible Volunteer – an adult person who has met all of the eligibility requirements (see page 5)

Eligible Staff – an employee of the Church who has met all of the eligibility requirements (see page 5)

Eligible Helper – a person under the age of 18 or an adult who is not a member or regularly attendee of FUMC and who has met all of the eligibility requirements (see section below).

Eligible Driver – an Eligible Volunteer or Eligible Staff person over the age of 25 who has met all of the driver requirements (see section below).

Policy – this document, First United Methodist Church MinistrySafe Protection Policy

Records Custodian – the Church Business Administrator who keeps records of all screening, references, background checks, any related documents, and any information considered by the Safety Team, as well as documents regarding training of Volunteers, Staff, and Helpers (collectively, “Records”)

Abuse – Physical, emotional, mental, sexual, or other kinds of abuse directed at, or observed, or occurring with or to, a child, student, or vulnerable adult, including the definition of “abuse” set forth in Section 261.001 of the Texas Family Code.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR VOLUNTEERS, STAFF, DRIVERS, AND HELPERS

To be “Eligible,” each person designated by Church staff to work directly with and supervise children, students, or vulnerable adults at any Ministry Function must meet the following requirements:

1. Church Membership/Attendance: Volunteers must be a member of the Church for 6 consecutive months prior to eligibility OR a regular attendee at worship services or ministries for the 6 months prior to eligibility. This requirement may be waived, under special circumstances, with dual approval by the leader of the Ministry Function and the Church Business Administrator or the Executive Pastor provided all other requirements are met.

2. Screening: Volunteers, Staff, Drivers, and Helpers (ages 18+) must submit to a screening, including:

- a. A criminal history check conducted by MinistrySafe on behalf of the Church. FUMC reserves the right to disqualify a person from “Eligible” status based on the results of this screening. All reports will be kept confidential.
- b. Provide three references from persons who are not related by blood, adoption, or marriage and who have known the Volunteer or Staff person for at least three years.

3. Awareness Training: All Volunteers, Staff, Drivers, and Helpers must complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse awareness training (online).

4. Covenant: All Volunteers, Staff, Drivers, and Helpers must agree to and sign the MinistrySafe Protection Covenant. This Covenant includes a declaration that the participant has read, understood, and agreed to abide by the mandates of the MinistrySafe Protection Policy. Additionally, the FUMC Safety and Protection Team will provide policy refresher training at least annually and upon request.

5. Driver Requirements: Drivers must be 25 years of age and provide proof of valid Driver’s License and insurance (copies will be kept on file with the Church Business Administrator). Drivers must also agree to a driver screening conducted by the Church. Any driver with a Type A* violation will be disqualified. Any driver with more than two Type B** violations in the past three years will be disqualified.

Drivers of the Church bus must have a valid commercial driver’s license and be included in the list of drivers with the Church’s vehicle insurance. Use of a cell phone by the driver while driving is prohibited.

*Type A violations include: driving while intoxicated; driving under the influence of drugs; hit and run; failure to report an accident; negligent homicide arising out of the use of a motor vehicle; operating a motor vehicle during a period of suspension or revocation; using a motor vehicle for the commission of a felony; operating a motor vehicle without owner’s authority (grand theft); permitting an unlicensed person to drive; reckless driving; speed contest

**Type B violations include all moving violations not listed as Type A; accidents

6. Renewal of Eligibility: Every two years, each Eligible Volunteer, Staff, Driver, and Helper must:

- a. Consent to and give permission for a criminal records check
- b. Complete MinistrySafe sexual abuse awareness training
- c. Sign and submit the MinistrySafe Protection Covenant

MINISTRY SAFE PROTECTION POLICY

1. Two adult rule: At least two unrelated Eligible Volunteers and/or Eligible Staff shall lead or supervise every Ministry Function. At least one shall be at least five years older than the oldest child/student participant.

In circumstances when it is not possible to have two adults present, an Eligible Helper may be assigned to partner with the Eligible Volunteer and/or Eligible Staff. If an Eligible Helper is not available, an Eligible Volunteer or Eligible Staff person will make periodic visits to the room or ministry function setting.

Any person who is not “Eligible” – has not or does not meet the eligibility requirements on pages 2-3 -- may not work directly with and supervise children/students at any function.

2. Open Door Policy: Every room where children/students gather should maintain an open door policy or be equipped with a see-through window or a half-door that remains open at all times.

3. Maximum Ratios: The following ratios will be required at all times.

Age Groups	# Eligible Staff/Volunteers	# Participants
Nursery (up to 3yrs)	2	10
Children (PreK - 6th Gr)	2	15
Students (7th Gr - 12th Gr)	2	15

Note: In ministry functions where more supervision should be considered, Eligible Volunteers/Staff will strive to make each situation safe depending on the circumstances.

4. Zero Tolerance: FUMC maintains a zero tolerance approach for the following:
- a. Abuse – any person engaging in behaviors that abuse another person as defined on pg. 5 will be reported according to procedures outline on pgs 10-12.
 - b. Intoxicants – the use, possession, or being under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drugs is strictly prohibited on the FUMC campus and at any off-site Church-sponsored events involving children and/or students.
 - c. Sexually Oriented Materials – possession of any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, images, videos, films, etc.) is strictly prohibited on the FUMC campus and at any off-site Church-sponsored events.
 - d. Tobacco Use – FUMC is a tobacco-free facility and requires all persons to abstain from the use or possession of tobacco products within our facilities, during Church events, or in the presence of children and students.

5. Overnight Events or Trips: Any co-ed overnight event or trip shall require both male and female Eligible Volunteers or Eligible Staff.

6. Transportation: For any Ministry Function involving Church-sponsored or Church organized transportation, the transportation will comply with this Policy if driven by Eligible Drivers and:

- i. Each individual vehicle is in compliance with the Two Adult Rule (see pg. 7); OR
- ii. Each individual vehicle has at least one Eligible Driver and the group travels in caravans of at least two (2) vehicles.

First UMC urges that all vehicles transporting participants to/from a Ministry Function should travel in a caravan whenever possible. It is the responsibility of the Eligible Drivers to strive to maintain a caravan at all times.

7. Counseling: When counseling with children, students, or vulnerable adults on our campus or at a Church-sponsored off-site Ministry Function, the door to the room where counseling takes place should remain open for the entire session.

8. Check-in/Check-out: At any Ministry Function where parents or guardians leave their children in the care of Eligible Volunteers or Eligible Staff, a check-in/check-out procedure must be utilized for children in 6th grade and younger.

REPORTING POLICY VIOLATIONS AND/OR SUSPICIONS OF ABUSE

Every Eligible Volunteer, Eligible Staff, Eligible Driver, and Eligible Helper shares in the responsibility of upholding the FUMC Ministry Safe Protection Policy for the safety and well-being of children, students, and vulnerable adults. We covenant together to hold one another accountable to the policy, to avoid inappropriate behaviors, and to immediately respond to any suspected incident of sexual abuse, physical abuse or neglect of a child. If an issue arises, the following steps should be taken:

1. Reporting a Policy Violation: If a person is observed violating a provision in this policy, speak directly with the person to discuss and correct the violation. If this is not possible, contact the designated leader of the Ministry Function and report what was observed. Once corrected, inform the designated leader of the Ministry Function as to what was observed and how it was resolved.

For example, if an Eligible Volunteer/Staff/Helper takes a child into an unoccupied room for time-out, step inside and quietly remind the Eligible Volunteer/Staff/Helper about the two-adult rule and escort them back to their designated group.

2. Reporting Inappropriate Behavior: Inappropriate behavior covers a broad range of behaviors and can be subjective to identify. If an Eligible Volunteer/Staff/Driver/Helper behaves in a manner that makes the observer uncomfortable, err on the side of caution and speak to that person about what was observed and then share this information with the designated leader of the Ministry Function.

Some examples of inappropriate behavior include inappropriate physical contact, touching, and/or displays of affection, sexually-oriented conversations, and verbal interactions that are harsh, threatening, intimidating, shaming, derogatory, demeaning, or humiliating.

3. Reporting Suspected Abuse: Texas law requires that any person having cause to believe a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect must make a report to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

a) If the suspected abuse or neglect has occurred prior to the child, student or vulnerable adult arriving at a Ministry Function:

- i) Call 911, if needed, and/or call the Texas Department of Family and Protective Service (800.252.5400) to report the abuse
- ii) Contact the designated leader of the Ministry Function
- iii) Cooperate fully with officials conducting an investigation.
- iv) The designated leader of the Ministry Function will contact the Executive Pastor
- v) The designated leader of the Ministry Function will file an Incident Report with the Church Business Administrator.

b) If the suspected abuse or neglect has occurred at a Ministry Function:

- i) Address any needs of the child, student, or vulnerable adult, medical or otherwise
- ii) Contact the designated leader of the Ministry Function
- iii) Cooperate fully with officials conducting an investigation.
- iv) The designated leader of the Ministry Function will contact the Executive Pastor
- v) The designated leader of the Ministry Function will file an Incident Report with the Church Business Administrator.
- vi) The designated leader of the Ministry Function will contact the parent/s and/or legal guardian/s.

The person suspected of abuse shall be removed, with dignity, from further contact with the child, student, or vulnerable adult until an investigation is finalized. Supportive care will be provided for all parties involved.

All incidents of policy violation, inappropriate behaviors, and suspected abuse will be documented in an Incident Report by the designated leader of the Ministry Function and reviewed by the FUMC Safety and Protection Team. These matters are confidential. All written reports and documents will be kept by the Church Business Administrator in a secure file.

FUMC SAFETY AND PROTECTION TEAM

The FUMC Safety and Protection Team has been commissioned by the FUMC Administrative Council with responsibility for administration, oversight, and assessment of the FUMC MinistrySafe Protection Policy. This team will meet at least quarterly and as needed in the event of any incident or allegation. The team is comprised of the following members:

- a) the Executive Pastor
- b) the Church Business Administrator
- c) the Director of Children’s Ministries
- d) the Director of Student Discipleship
- e) the Director of Congregational Care
- f) a member of Staff Parish Relations (SPR)
- g) a member of Trustees

RECORDS

The Church Business Administrator serves as the Records Custodian and keeps records of all screening, references, background checks, any related documents, and any information considered by the FUMC Safety and Protection Team, as well as documents regarding training of Volunteers, Staff, and Helpers (collectively, “Records”).

Records shall be kept confidential and in a locked cabinet, but will be provided upon request to any appointed clergy of the Church, the FUMC Safety and Protection Team, law enforcement, Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Child Protective Services (CPS), or the Central Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church (CTCUMC). Records may also be disclosed in response to a court order or valid subpoena.

Records are the property of the Church.

The Records Custodian shall keep an updated list of all Eligible Volunteers, Staff, Drivers, and Helpers. This list shall be available to all Church staff, members, volunteers, parents, and any person who has an interest in the welfare of children, students, and vulnerable adults participating in our ministries.

THE LEARNING TREE PRESCHOOL

The Learning Tree Preschool is a ministry of the Church and is also a licensed child care facility that is regulated by the Texas Department of Child Care Licensing. The Learning Tree shall strive to maintain the same standards as all other Church ministries as outlined in the Policy. However, when the Policy is in conflict with the Texas Department of Child Care Licensing, the Minimum Standard Rules for Licensed Child Care Centers will supersede this Policy for the pre-school operation.

CHURCH MINISTRIES WITH VULNERABLE ADULTS

Church ministries serving vulnerable adults, such as PALS Place and Camp Sunshine, shall maintain the same standards as all other Church ministries as outlined in the Policy.

OUTSIDE GROUPS AND VISITING UNITED METHODIST CLERGY USING FUMC FACILITIES

The use of FUMC's campus and facilities is governed by the Church's Board of Trustees. In any case, where a visiting group will be conducting or sponsoring an event for children, students, and/or vulnerable adults as defined herein, the Policy will be in effect as follows:

- a. Visiting groups that follow a formal MinistrySafe and/or Protection Policy and training of their own may use our Church facilities if the visiting group follows the FUMC Policy while using our facilities. Every adult must be familiar with the FUMC Policy and sign the related Covenant prior to the event. The visiting group's event leader/contact person is responsible for providing original signed covenants for each adult to our Church Business Administrator no less than three working days prior to the event.
- b. United Methodist clergy, when invited to participate in any Ministry Function, will be granted "Eligible" status. Visiting clergy will be required to be familiar with the Policy and submit the signed Covenant prior to the function. The person issuing the invitation to the visiting clergy is responsible for providing him/her with a copy of this policy and the covenant far enough in advance that the clergy person can return the signed covenant at least 3 working days prior to the function.