

Jesup First United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuaries – Proposed Policy

I. PREAMBLE

WE BELIEVE children hold a special place in God's heart. All are created in God's image and while fallen, still maintain some aspect of God's image. Jesus welcomed children and gave them special visibility during His ministry. When some tried to exclude them, He said: "*Let the children come to me for to such belongs the Kingdom of God*" (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

WE BELIEVE children hold a special place in our Methodist tradition. When we baptize children, we assume a holy responsibility "*to so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this child, surrounded by steadfast love, may be established in the faith, and confirmed, and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life*" (TUMH, p. 44). With this responsibility, we promise to help children grow in the knowledge of God's love and as whole persons.

We take our responsibility to nurture children very seriously. We acknowledge the "*sacred trust to maintain an environment that is safe for people to live and grow in God's love. Sexual misconduct in the Church and ministry setting impedes the mission of Jesus Christ. Leaders have the responsibility not only to avoid actions and words that hurt others, but also to protect the vulnerable against actions or words which cause harm*" (Resolution 36, *The Book of Resolutions 2004*).

WE BELIEVE victims of child abuse suffer physical, emotional, and spiritual pain which can become barriers to the abundant life Christ desires to give to all. With this in mind, Jesus warned against impeding the faith of others by saying, "*If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones ... it would be better for you if a great milestone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depths of the sea*" (Matthew 18:6).

WE BELIEVE it is our responsibility to take adequate precautions to prevent, as nearly as possible, the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Therefore, we propose this policy to enhance our Church's ministry, to, by, and with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, by:

- A. Protecting children, youth, and vulnerable adults, participating in the ministries of our Church;
- B. Protecting our staff, both paid and volunteer, from potential false allegations of abuse; and
- C. Protecting the Church's ministry assets for making disciples of Jesus Christ.

This policy presents a comprehensive plan that includes the areas of: Screening, Supervision, Reporting, and Response. These policies are meant to be the standard precautions for protecting children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

II. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

- A. This policy and its provisions shall apply to all adults, volunteers or staff, laity or clergy, who have any direct or indirect contact with the children, youth or vulnerable adults who participate in any activities or events sponsored by Jesup First UMC.
- B. This policy is not meant to protect persons from the harassment, sexual or otherwise, of other adults. A Sexual Harassment Policy is on file in the Church Office and should be followed at all times in all adult relationships within the Church.
- C. This policy will be implemented immediately following its adoption, with full compliance expected by January 1, 2009 for all Church sponsored programs and events, including the Nursery and the School of Discovery.
- D. The Jesup First United Methodist Church will include a Sexual Abuse and Molestation rider as part of its insurance coverage.

III. DEFINITIONS

The following terms are used throughout this document. These definitions are offered for clarification.

- A. An "Adult" is any person 18 years of age or older.
- B. An "Adult Monitor" is an adult who provides additional supervision by moving in and out of ministry areas when two adults (not spouses) are not available.
- C. An "Assisting Minor" is a person under 18 years old who helps with activities, but is not in a supervisory role. An "Assisting Minor" does not satisfy the "two-adult rule."
- D. "Child Abuse" is any harmful act against a person under 18 years old. It usually presents itself in one of the following forms:
 - 1. Verbal Abuse: Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens a child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
 - 2. Physical Abuse: Any act or act of omission that endangers a person's physical and mental health. In the case of children and youth, this includes: any intentional physical injury caused by the individual's supervisor. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. Physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child or youth.
 - 3. Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of others for the satisfaction of sexual desires. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) Incest,
 - b) Rape,
 - c) Prostitution,
 - d) Romantic involvement with any participant,
 - e) Sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual participating in the programs and events of Jesup First UMC,

- f) Sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples include, but are not limited to: *“Displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendos about one’s own or another’s body, touching another’s body, hair, or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another, kissing and sexual intercourse”* (Resolution 36, Book of Resolutions 2004)
- 4. Ritual Abuse – Any act of physical, sexual, or psychological violence or manipulation intentionally inflicted on another in a stylized way, by someone or some group of persons that appeals to a higher authority or power for justification of the abuse:
Note: This includes any act utilizing electronic means that could be construed as verbal, physical, sexual, or ritual abuse.
- E. “Child Abuse” in this policy also includes abusive acts against vulnerable adults.
- F. “Child” or “Children” or “Minor” means any person(s) under the age of 18.
- G. A “Children’s Activity” is any program or event in which children are under the supervision of staff persons or volunteers.
- H. The “Church” is Jesup First United Methodist Church.
- I. “Safe Sanctuaries” is the name of policies of United Methodist Annual Conferences and local Churches which attempts to create a welcoming, safe environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- J. The “Staff Person in Charge” is a Church employee responsible for providing supervision for an event or program (i.e. Director of Children’s Ministries).
- K. A “Volunteer” is a non-employee who assists in providing supervision for an event or program.
- L. A “Vulnerable Adult” is a person 18 years old or older with a diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacity.
- M. “We” are the people of Jesup First United Methodist Church.

IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES

- A. The first step in preventing the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults is: careful screening. While this will consume time, raise questions of trust, and cost money to implement, screening is worth the effort. Everyone – parents, leaders, and participants – can be certain that the most reliable, committed, and experienced persons are supervising programs and events involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults. By participating in the screening process, leaders demonstrate their concern for the protection of children, of adult supervisors, and of the Church’s assets for our ministry of making disciples.
- B. The following are our standards for screening:
All adults – volunteer or staff, laity or clergy – who have direct or indirect contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, participating in the programs and events of Jesup First UMC will be required to submit an application that includes:
 - 1. Standard Contact Information: Name, Address, Phone Number, etc.

2. A signed statement of six months, active relationship with Jesup First UMC. A person must have a six month, active relationship with the Church before being allowed to apply to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Note: Staff persons under appointment by the South Georgia Annual Conference or hired by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee are not expected to comply with this standard. However, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee is asked to give special attention to its hiring practices in regards to ministries involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
 3. A signed voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal conduct,
 4. A list of three non-related personal references, including: names, addresses, and phone numbers. Contact information must be complete for the application to be considered complete.
 5. A waiver of confidentiality allowing Jesup First UMC to conduct a criminal background check.
The Jesup First UMC will contract with Protect My Ministry (www.protectmyministry.com) to conduct the screening process. Volunteers and staff may choose to submit the application online using the church's website (www.jesupfumc.com).
- C. If the criminal background check raises questions concerning a person's suitability to serve, that person will not be allowed to serve. Examples of issues that may prohibit a person from serving with children, youth, and vulnerable adults are:
1. Previous involvement in an activity in which the applicant abused or exploited children, youth, or vulnerable adults. A previous conviction disqualifies any applicant.
 2. Child abuse – physical, emotional, sexual, neglectful, or ritual.
 3. Violent offences, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
 4. A history of DUI or DWI conviction within the last five (5) years, and
 5. A criminal history of drug-related convictions within the last five (5) years.
- D. All current staff members and volunteers will begin submitting to screening procedures beginning January 1, 2009.
- E. After January 1, 2009, no one will be allowed to supervise children, youth, or vulnerable adults without going through the application process and being made fully aware of the Church's Safe Sanctuaries Policy. This includes everyone, staff and volunteer.
- F. Great care will be taken in establishing the protocols for reviewing all applications, conducting screening, checking references, verifying the required training, and maintaining the personal records of all applicants. The Pastor, Staff Person in Charge, and the Lay Leader must approve all applicants and give great care to the confidentiality of the results of the screening process.

V. SUPERVISORY STANDARDS

A second step in preventing the abuse of children, youth, or vulnerable adults is: conscientious and intentional supervision. The following procedures are designed to reduce the possibility of abuse to children, youth, and vulnerable adults and to protect our staff and volunteers from unwarranted accusations.

- A. All staff working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults should attend a Safe Sanctuaries training event hosted by the South Georgia Annual Conference.
- B. All volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults should receive a Safe Sanctuaries orientation covering all aspects of the Church's policy: screening, supervising, reporting, and responding. This orientation can be given by the staff of Jesup First UMC.
- C. All activities involving children, youth, and vulnerable adults must follow the two-adult rule. Regardless of the size of the group, two, non-spouse adults must be present at all times. When two adults are not available or when the adults are related, there should be an adult monitor who moves in and out of the ministry area. An Assisting Minor cannot supervise children, youth, or vulnerable adults and therefore, does not satisfy the two-adult rule.
- D. All activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults must follow the five-year rule. The supervisor must be five years older than the oldest person within the ministry group.
- E. Each room or space used in programs and events with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall have a window in the door or the door shall be left open. All indoor activities should occur in open view. Careful attention should be give to adapting these standards for all outdoor activities in order to ensure proper supervision.
- F. Parental Consent and Information Forms will be used for all off campus trips. These forms must include pertinent health information.

Additional Considerations:

- In order to comply with this policy, it may be necessary to combine groups, recruit additional volunteers, or even cancel an event.
- All one-on-one mentoring, consulting, or counseling with children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall be conducted in sight of another leader.
- For overnight events, it is recommended that there be at least two (2) adults in every room. When staying in hotels, leaders shall sleep in separate rooms from children, youth, or vulnerable adults; or if necessary for participants to share a room with a leader, the leader shall sleep in a separate bed from the participants. No one leader shall be alone in a room with any one participant. When lodging accommodations are restrictive, one leader is adequate as long as any one leader shall not be alone in a room with any one child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

VI. REPORTING

- A. In the event that an incident of child abuse occurs or an allegation is made, it is critical to deal with it promptly and in a clearly outlined manner. All allegations will be treated seriously. The staff person or volunteer who observes the incident or to whom it is reported shall report the incident immediately to the Pastor or the Staff Person in Charge. The Pastor and/or Staff Person in Charge shall provide immediate care to ensure the safety and well-being of the victim. Further, the Pastor and/or Staff Person in Charge will obtain all necessary information.
- B. The Pastor, Staff Person in Charge, and the Lay Leader will consult to determine the appropriate next steps of response. The Pastor will contact the District Superintendent and the Conference Counselor for advice, assistance, and direction.
- C. In consultation with the District Superintendent and the Conference Counselor, the Pastor, Staff Person in Charge, and the Lay Leader will implement a response plan. If the allegation falls within the list of child abuse offenses found in Georgia Code 19-7-5, which requires mandatory reporting, the Pastor shall make a report to the law enforcement authorities. The Pastor and Staff Person in Charge will cooperate fully with any ensuing investigation. The Pastor shall contact the parents of the child to inform them of the allegation and to offer the appropriate care.
- D. For the safety and well-being of the children, the person suspected of abuse shall be removed with dignity from further contact with them until an appropriate investigation has taken place. If the person suspected of abuse is a Staff person, a report shall be made to the Staff Parish Relations Committee who will place that person on leave of absence during the investigation, will ensure the safety of the children, and will ensure a substitute leader until the allegation is settled.
- E. If the allegation involves activities or persons outside a supervisory relationship to the Church, the Staff Person in Charge or the volunteer will consult with the Pastor. If the allegation falls within the list of child abuse offenses found in Georgia Code 19-7-5, which requires mandatory reporting, the Pastor will contact the law enforcement authorities or the Department of Family and Children's Services.
- F. The Staff Person in Charge or volunteer will carefully and contemporaneously document all information received and all actions taken in responding to the allegation.

VII. RESPONSE PLAN

- A. All allegations will be taken seriously and a quick, compassionate, and unified response is expected. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a Church sponsored activity, the entire staff – paid and volunteer – shall cooperate with the agencies and conference officials conducting the official investigation.
- B. The Pastor will continue in consultation with the District Superintendent and the Conference Pastoral Counselor to assess the incident, offer support to

the Staff Person in Charge, and determine the appropriate comprehensive response to the situation. This consultation will continue until the incident is resolved.

- C. The Pastor will serve as the official spokesperson during the incident. He/She is the only person authorized to make official statements to the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Pastor, who will consult with the Conference Communications Director. Those who receive requests for information should politely refer all inquiries to the Pastor.
- D. Pastoral care and support will be available to all persons involved with the incident. The Conference Pastoral Counselor may be called to assist in providing this care.

VIII. ACCOUNTABILITY

It is vital for us to protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in the ministries of our Church, to protect our staff – both lay and clergy – from the potential of false allegations, and to protect all the ministry assets of our Church for fulfilling Christ’s mission of making disciples. Therefore, we expect full implementation of this policy.

- A. The Pastor and Staff of Jesup First UMC will be held accountable for fully implementing this policy for all Church sponsored programs and events beginning January 1, 2009.
- B. After January 1, 2009, staff persons – volunteer or paid – will not be allowed to serve in ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable adults without complying with this policy.
- C. Staff persons – volunteer or paid – will be expected to receive Safe Sanctuaries training on a regular basis.

IX. AMENDMENTS

Following adoption of this policy by the Charge Conference:

- A. Editorial changes that clarify the policy without changing its requirements may be made without the approval of the Charge Conference.
- B. Substantiative changes that alter the requirements outlined in this policy must be presented to the Charge Conference for approval.

SIGNED:

Rev. Tucker A. Lewis, Pastor

Mr. Foy Thomas, Chair of Trustees

Mr. Dave Harrell, SPRC Chair

Mrs. Lori J. Lewis, Dir. Children’s Ministries

Mr. Fred Donica, Chair of Church Council

Rev. Jimmy Cason, District Superintendent