

Safe Sanctuary Policy Handbook

**First United Methodist Church
Clinton, MS**

2019 Revision

Protecting the Flock at Clinton First United Methodist Church

Contents

Safe Sanctuary Committee Members	1
Why Write a Policy Statement to Protect Our Church Family?	2
Covenant Safe Sanctuary Committee's Policy Statement	2
Purpose and Intent	3
Glossary of Terms	4
Mississippi Code Definitions	5
Educating the Congregation	6
Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff	6
Orientation and Training Content and Procedures	8
Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in Programs for Children and Youth	8
Standards for Accepting, Reviewing and Renewing	8
Child Abuse Policy	8
Standards for All Staff While On-Site	8
Standards for Staff While Off-Site	10
Standards for Diapering and Restroom Activity	10
Discipline	11
Reporting Procedures and Mississippi Code	11
Safety Team/Church Security.....	12
AED and CPR Training	12
Conclusion	12

First United Methodist Church Safe Sanctuary Committee

Committee Chair: Anthony Wilson
Associate Pastor: Sharonda Medina
Staff Liaison: Vicki Rundlett
Committee Member: Jeff Blackledge
Committee Member: Jim Boxx
Committee Member: John May
Committee Member: Nancy Allen
Committee Member: Bill Burrow
Committee Member: Dr. Tommye Henderson

Sources:

Rev. Joy Thornburg Melton, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*.
Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2012
Mississippi Code Annotated §§43-21-105, 43-21-353, et seq.

Why Write a Policy Statement on Protecting Our Church Family?

The Mississippi Conference recommended that a Safe Sanctuary policy be submitted by our church. The Safe Sanctuary Committee was created to establish a Safe Sanctuary Policy. *Safe Sanctuaries, Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1999 was used as a guide. In addition, the Committee reviewed the Dunwoody United Methodist Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy. This committee of youth staff, clergy, social workers, attorney, and parent volunteers worked for several months to compile and refine information. It is our task as Christians to provide a safe and loving environment for children and youth to come and grow in their faith, without fear of physical or emotional harm. Safeguarding procedures are in place, not only to protect our children, but also to protect our paid and volunteer workers with children and youth from false allegations. The Safe Sanctuary Committee presents this information to Clinton First United Methodist Church with the pledge to provide *Safe Sanctuary* for all who worship and grow in our ministries.

Covenant Safe Sanctuary Committee's Policy Statement on *Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse* and Protecting the Church Family:

The 2006 Annual Conference approved a resolution that the conference "shall develop safety and risk-reducing policies and procedures for the purpose of providing protection to children, youth, and vulnerable adults that come to us, to staff and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of abuse, and to limit the extent of legal liability." A task group developed the following policy, which was presented and adopted at the 2007 Annual Conference. In addition, we have a responsibility to keep everyone who walks through our doors safe from all dangers and emergency situations. 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 fastened 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 for the safety of children at each child's baptism by our congregational response, pledging: "With God's help we will 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 life eternal," (*Book of Worship*, Baptismal Covenant, Congregational Pledge, 11). "Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; unless the Lord guards the city, the Watchmen stays awake in vain" (Psalm 127:1). "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:11).

Purpose

Building on our theological and spiritual foundation, our purpose for establishing this policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to create a safe environment that will foster the comprehensive health, growth, and development of all within our charge and care.

Intent

As a Christian community of faith, the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that foster the safety and spiritual growth of all. Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported, or confirmed violation of any Mississippi criminal laws.

We hereby declare our intent to do the following:

1. Use reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of staff and volunteers.
2. Provide adequate training for staff and volunteers regarding the implementation of our policies and procedures.
3. Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events that will encourage the development of our adults and children.
4. Design a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse in accordance with the requirements of state and federal laws.
5. Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following incidents of harm, injury, or abuse.
6. Review our policies and procedures regularly to meet changing legal, health, and safety standards.

CONCLUSION

In all of our ministries, Clinton First United Methodist Church is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person is "surrounded by steadfast love ...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal," (Baptismal Covenant II, United Methodist Hymnal, p.44).

Glossary of Terms

Definition of Age Levels:

Children – Birth through 6th graders*

Nursery age – Birth until begin 3 year preschool

Preschool age – 3 and 4 year preschool aged

Elementary age – Kindergartners-6th graders

Youth – 7th through 12th graders

Adult – any person 18 years old or older

* Children are to progress through Sunday school classes consistent with their school grades, regardless of numeric age.

Abuse- Any sexual contact, indecent exposure, or communication for immoral purposes, as well as physical abuses such as physical assault.

Church- Clinton First United Methodist Church

Children's activities - any activity or program in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Conference - the Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church.

Helper- a volunteer of any age who assists the supervisor of an event.

Residential camping - any overnight event is considered residential camping. This includes but is not limited to residential camping settings, conference camps, a conference or district lock-in, youth related overnight events, or mission work outside the boundaries of your residential dwelling.

Staff person - any person employed by the Church who is responsible for youth or children's activities.

Supervisor - the person who has direct and immediate oversight and responsibility for any event.

Volunteer - a non- employee, person who assists in conducting youth, children's, or church activities.

Vulnerable adult - any person over 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

Locations:

Off Site – Church sponsored activities that take place away from the church property (Retreats, trips to other locations)

On Site – All church sponsored activities that take place on First United Methodist Church of Clinton's property, in the buildings or on the grounds

Mississippi Code Annotated § 43-21-105; Definitions:

The following words and phrases, for purposes of this chapter, shall have the meanings ascribed herein unless the context clearly otherwise requires:

- (d) "Child" and "youth" are synonymous, and each means a person who has not reached his eighteenth birthday. A child who has not reached his eighteenth birthday and is on active duty for a branch of the armed services or is married is not considered a "child" or "youth" for the purposes of this chapter.
- (e) "Parent" means the father or mother to whom the child has been born, or the father or mother by whom the child has been legally adopted.
- (f) "Guardian" means a court-appointed guardian of the person of a child.
- (g) "Custodian" means any person having the present care or custody of a child whether such person be a parent or otherwise.
- (h) "Legal custodian" means a court-appointed custodian of the child.
- (l) "Neglected child" means a child:
 - (i) Whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, neglects or refuses, when able so to do, to provide for him proper and necessary care or support, or education as required by law, or medical, surgical, or other care necessary for his well-being; provided, however, a parent who withholds medical treatment from any child who in good faith is under treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglectful under any provision of this chapter; or
 - (ii) Who is otherwise without proper care, custody, supervision or support; or
 - (iii) Who, for any reason, lacks the special care made necessary for him by reason of his mental condition, whether said mental condition be mentally retarded or mentally ill; or
 - (iv) Who, for any reason, lacks the care necessary for his health, morals or wellbeing.
- (m) "Abused child" means a child whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, whether legally obligated to do so or not, has caused or allowed to be caused upon said child sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, mental injury, non-accidental physical injury or other maltreatment. Provided, however, that physical discipline, including spanking, performed on a child by a parent, guardian or custodian in a reasonable manner shall not be deemed abuse under this section.
- (n) "Sexual abuse" means obscene or pornographic photographing, filming or depiction of children for commercial purposes, or the rape, molestation, incest, prostitution or other such forms of sexual exploitation of children under circumstances which indicate that the child's health or welfare is harmed or threatened.
- (o) "A child in need of special care" means a child with any mental or physical illness that cannot be treated with the dispositional alternatives ordinarily available to the youth court.
- (v) "Any person responsible for care or support" means the person who is providing for the child at a given time. This term shall include, but is not limited to, stepparents, foster parents, relatives, non-licensed babysitters or other similar persons responsible for a child and staff of residential care facilities and group homes that are licensed by the Department of Human Services.

Educating the Congregation

Educating the Congregation is key to the success of the Safe Sanctuary Committee's efforts. Dissemination of information will include, but not be limited to:

1. Articles in Publications
 - a. Sunday Bulletin
 - b. Voice
 - c. E-mail
 - d. Staff-Employee Handbook
 - e. CFUMC Web Site
 - f. Brochures
2. Children and youth parent meetings
3. Information given in adult Sunday School classes
4. Pulpit announcements
5. Letters to all potential workers with children and youth
6. Orientation and training sessions for workers with children and youth
7. Personal telephone calls
8. Wednesday night suppers and classes
9. Educational displays/bulletin boards
10. Parent seminars with guest speakers
11. Literature from Mississippi Conference

Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff

1. All persons **employed** by the church who serve in a **supervisory** capacity for children/youth shall:
 - A. Be at least 21 years of age and at least 4 years older than the oldest student or youth they are assigned to supervise. Exceptions for college aged interns will be considered on a case by case basis.
 - B. No one shall be employed by the church and serve in a supervisory capacity unless he/she is at least four years older than the oldest student or youth they are assigned to supervise.
 - C. Provide three character references with full contact information and consent to allowing those responsible for hiring to contact unlisted references which may be provided by listed references.
 - D. Demonstrate an active relationship with their local church for at least 6 months prior to employment
 - E. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program and the church administrator and/or the senior pastor.
 - F. Consent to and pass a national criminal records check and a driver's license record check which shall be kept on file by the church administrator and renewed every 2 years.

2. All **volunteers** serving as a chaperone or in a **supervisory** capacity for children/youth shall:
 - A. Be at least 21 years of age and at least 4 years older than the oldest student or youth they are assigned to supervise.
 - B. Demonstrate an active relationship with their local church for at least 6 months prior to serving as a chaperone or in a supervisory capacity
 - C. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program and the church administrator and/or the senior pastor.
 - D. Consent to and pass a criminal records check and driver's license records check which shall be kept on file by the church administrator and renewed every 2 years.
 - E. The church administrator shall maintain a list of all approved volunteers. Said list shall be posted on the CFUMC website.

3. All **volunteers** serving in a helping capacity for children/youth shall:
 - A. Be interviewed by the director of the ministry/program and the church administrator and/or the senior pastor.
 - B. Consent to and pass a criminal records check and driver's license records check which shall be kept on file by the church administrator and renewed every 2 years.
 - C. A volunteer helper may be a youth of any age so long as they are recruited by and approved by the event supervisor. (Example: Jr. High aged youth helping with Vacation Bible School or Easter Egg Hunt). Youth helpers are exempt from requirements of 3.A. and 3.B. above.

4. In the event that a substitute worker needs to be brought in under last-minute circumstances, that person must:
 - A. Have previously been approved through the procedures in section 2 and be on the list provided for by 2.E.

5. All information obtained from background checks will be received and reviewed by the Church Administrator or their designee, who may, in their discretion, share applicable information with the appropriate supervisory staff person(s) and/or the Safety Team. Additionally if the record of a staff member or candidate for a staff position shows a criminal conviction, the Church SPRC or their designee will consider the employment on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise all such information will be held in confidence, except for any disclosure required by lawful court action.

6. Any prospective volunteer or candidate for a staff position with a conviction for a sex offense or abuse or neglect of a minor is prohibited from work with children or youth. All other convictions will be considered on a case by case basis.

7. **All information from Background and/or Reference Checks will be kept confidential.**

Orientation and Training Content and Procedures

Training:

1. Training must become a component of each event's design. The event supervisor shall be responsible for assuring that adequate insurance and training for the specific event and/or activities either from the conference or the district is in place.
2. The event supervisor must be trained to receive any report of allegations of abuse and follow through according to the conference guidelines and the requirements of state law. Any allegation of abuse at an event must be reported to the event supervisor and the Church Administrator.
3. All workers shall be trained periodically in safety and risk-reducing policies and procedures.
4. Training shall include information, explanation, and discussion of:
 - a. The CFUMC Safe Sanctuaries policy
 - b. Behaviors or other indicators which may signal problems
 - c. Requirements of Mississippi law for reporting incidents of abuse
 - d. Procedures for response to incidents of abuse and for reporting incidents of abuse.
5. All persons serving as directors shall complete certification training for processing allegations and reports of child abuse.

Procedures for Reducing the Risk to the Church Family:

1. Standards for accepting, reviewing and renewing the Safe Sanctuary Policy:
 - a) Policy and Operating Procedures will be reviewed annually.
 - b) Criminal Background Checks will be repeated on individuals periodically, at a minimum every 24 months.
2. Operational Standards to be applied by all paid and volunteer staff while working with children/youth ON SITE:
 - a) **Number of Adults Required:**
 - i) **Nursery Aged: 2 Adults for 1-10, additional Adult for every 5 more**
 - ii) **Preschool Aged: For Sunday school, children's church, and similar activities, 2 Adults for 1-20, additional Adult for every 10 more. For CFUMC Preschool, additional adults are not mandatory in classrooms, but must be on-site and available if needed.**
 - iii) **Kindergarten – 5th Grade: 2 Adults for 1-20, additional Adult for every 10 more.**
 - iv) **6th Grade and up: For Sunday school and similar activities, additional adults are not mandatory in classrooms, but must be on site and available if needed.**
 - b) Rooms where children or youth are gathered should have a window in the door or half-door open when children or youth are present. If there is not window or half door, the door shall remain open.
 - c) When a last-minute substitute is needed, the substitute must be selected from a list of volunteers who have been cleared through Reference and Criminal Background Checks.
 - d) All Nursery workers, paid and volunteer, must be at least 21 years old. Teens under 21 years of age may assist in an activity, but may not be in charge of a room. Two adults must still be present.

- e) Workers should be at least four years older than the children or youth they are supervising.
- f) All workers will be designated, by badges, clothing (shirts, smocks or aprons), or nametags while working with children and youth.
- g) **Private**, one on one contact between children/youth and an adult is strictly prohibited. Should a one on one meeting or discussion be needed, it shall take place in view of other children/youth or adults.
- h) All children in the Nursery and Preschool age group and their parents, guardians, and approved adults shall be registered in the computerized check in system by an approved staff member or volunteer. Following registration the adult dropping the child off must **check their child in using the computer check-in system, place the printed name tag on the child's clothing, and walk the child all the way to the classroom. When picking up their child from class, the parent/guardian must present the original matching claim slip to the teacher. The teacher must verify that the unique numbers match before releasing the child to the adult. In the event that the parent/guardian has lost the matching claim slip, the teacher must call for a staff member or Safety Team member to record the driver's license information of the adult claiming the child.**
- i) Adults supervising elementary and youth programs shall require children and youth to remain with them, unless special written permission is given by the parents to leave that group. Exception: trips to the restroom should be permitted at leader's discretion.
- j) The activity supervisor shall prepare an activity proposal and submit to the senior pastor or church administrator for approval at least two weeks in advance of the activity. Following approval, the activity supervisor shall provide all parents of participants with a detailed activity plan including but not limited to travel itinerary, planned activities, and chaperone and leader contact information. **To request a Safety Team presence at the activity, the activity supervisor must complete an Event Safety Team Request Form at least two weeks before the event (<https://forms.gle/er3SsRpvAs8GndnLA>).**
- k) Corporal punishment is absolutely prohibited.
- l) If there are both male and female participants, then the adult leaders should also include both males and females.
- m) Any and all visitors and or contract laborers must report to the church office and check in prior to accessing the church property. A badge will be provided to all visitors. Any person including contract workers must wear said badge at all times. Any church member must immediately report any person seen on church property not wearing said badge to a church staff member. A church staff member shall advise the individual that they must immediately report to the church office for proper credentials. A staff member, or church member shall remain with the individual until the credentials and badge are obtained.

3. OFF SITE program standards to be applied by paid and volunteer staff of children and youth when leaving church property.
 - a) **Number of Adults Required:**
 - i) **Nursery Aged: 2 Adults present at all times for 1-10, additional Adult for every 5 more**
 - ii) **Preschool Aged: 2 Adults present at all times for 1-20, additional Adult for every 10 more.**
 - iii) **Kindergarten – 1st Grade: 2 Adults present at all times for 1-20, additional Adult for every 10 more.**
 - iv) **2nd Grade – 6th Grade: 2 Adults for 1-20, additional Adult for every 10 more.**
 - v) **Youth- 2 Adults for 1-25, additional Adult for every 15 more. (See sub-rule 9. below for exceptions)**
 - b) The identities of adult chaperones for off site activities must be presented to the senior pastor or church administrator for approval at least two weeks in advance of the off site activity.
 - c) Written permission must be obtained from parent before child/youth leaves with individual(s) or a group on a church sponsored event, with emergency contact information provided. (Example: Confirmation class members meeting off site with mentors, etc.)
 - d) Adequate supervision must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc. CFUMC requires that there be a minimum of 2 adults present at all times for any and all activities for all ages of youth.
 - e) If there are both male and female participants, then the adult leaders should also include both males and females.
 - f) The activity supervisor shall prepare an activity proposal and submit to the senior pastor or church administrator for approval at least two weeks in advance of the activity. Following approval, the activity supervisor shall provide all parents of participants with a detailed activity plan including but not limited to travel itinerary, planned activities, and chaperone and leader contact information. **To request to borrow 2-way radios or have a Safety Team presence at the activity, the activity supervisor must complete an Event Safety Team Request Form at least two weeks before the event (<https://forms.gle/er3SsRpvAs8GndnLA>).**
 - g) If personal vehicles are used to transport youth to off-site location, at least two children/youth should be present at all times. Volunteer drivers must be pre-approved by the church administrator and proof of current driver's license and insurance **information** must be on file.
 - h) When sleeping away from home, no adult may share a bed with a child/youth other than his/her own **child**.
 - i) The two-adult rule applies for overnight sleeping arrangements. Adult chaperones shall not share rooms with youth of the opposite sex.
 - j) Exception to the 2 adult rule: **An adult** leader is permitted to meet with a small group **of youth** without a 2nd adult if said meeting takes place in a public place.
4. Standards to be applied to diapering or restroom activity:
 - a) Procedures for all workers with children in diapers
 - i) Make sure another adult is in the room, when possible, when a diaper is being changed
 - ii) Diapering should occur in a visible area.
 - b) Procedures for all workers with preschool children using restrooms

- i) If a toilet adjoins the room in use, teachers must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
 - ii) If there has been a potty “accident” and a worker needs to assist a child (changing clothes, clean up etc.), two adults must be present, when possible, and a parent may be notified if further cleaning is necessary.
 - c) Procedures for all workers with elementary age children
 - i) Tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom.
 - ii) Take more than one at a time, wait outside the bathroom door, and allow children to be as independent as possible.
 - iii) Inform other adult when you have returned.
5. Discipline - Under no circumstances should paid or volunteer staff administer corporal punishment. The following guidelines for correcting behavior should be used:
- a) Establish and articulate rules and behavior expectations early;
 - b) Immediately intervene and stop any child from any act which could be a threat to the safety of that child or others;
 - c) Use positive words to correct disruptive behavior;
 - d) Inform parents of disruptive or unsafe behavior if unable to correct with the above. When reporting behavior issues to parents, use both positive and negative behavior examples per the “Sandwich Rule”*;
 - e) Notify church staff if disruptive behavior persists.
6. At the conclusion of on- or off-site activities, and before leaving the facility, supervising adults should make sure all children have been claimed by the appropriate, approved person.

**Sandwich Rule* – Public relations tip: When informing the parents about a child’s or youth’s negative behavior, say something positive before saying what the child or youth did wrong. End with a positive statement.

Reporting Procedures

1. When a CFUMC Staff Member Suspects Child Abuse:
 - a) Any CFUMC staff member (paid or volunteer) who suspects child abuse should immediately report suspicions to the Senior Minister.
 - b) The Senior Minister should complete *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form*.
 - c) The Senior Minister will contact the district Superintendent and the Insurance Company.
 - d) The Senior Minister will call the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse. In emergency situations staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to (601)359-4991.
 - e) If staff observes an incident of concern which does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, but does warrant further investigation by the Senior Minister, (i.e. FUMC staff observing parent hitting own child) an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.
 - f) The family shall receive immediate ministerial support from CFUMC by the Senior Minister. Support will also be provided for the alleged abuser and the alleged abuser’s family if needed.
2. When member or visitor suspects child abuse at CFUMC by a staff member – Paid or Volunteer:

- a) The staff member – paid or volunteer who is contacted by a member/visitor reporter should immediately refer the Reporter to the Senior Minister. If the Senior Minister is not available, the reporter should be directed to Church Administrator.
- b) Immediate action and contact with church staff person is recommended. The Senior Minister or Church Administrator should complete the *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form* and if the incident occurred on FUMC property, an *Incident Report Form* should also be completed.
- c) The Senior Minister or Church Administrator will telephone the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse. In case of emergency, staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to the child's county of residence. (See previous list)
- d) If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.
- e) Senior Minister or Church Administrator should indicate on the bottom of the *Incident Report Form* how the situation was resolved.
- f) Any staff member (paid or volunteer) who is implicated on a *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* or an *Incident Report Form* should be removed from direct involvement with children immediately after the report is made until the situation is adequately investigated and resolved. SPRC shall determine whether the accused should be placed on paid administrative leave.
- g) The alleged victim and alleged victim's family shall receive immediate ministry support from FUMC if requested.

Safety Team/Church Security

The Safe Sanctuary Committee oversees the church Safety Team and selects members to fill this team. Safety Team members must receive training on the implementation of the FUMC *Emergency Response Guide*. The Safe Sanctuary Committee and the Safety Team will meet at least annually to review and revise the *Emergency Response Guide*. For security purposes, the full contents of this guide will not be made available to the public. The Safe Sanctuary Committee Chair is responsible for making sure that appropriate orientation and training opportunities are presented for church staff, ushers, class teachers, and the Safety Team.

AED and CPR Training

The church shall maintain at least 3 automatic electronic defibrillators and place them in strategic locations throughout the church property. All staff members must be trained in CPR and use of the AED and maintain certification.

CONCLUSION

We take our policies to reduce risk of danger at our place of worship seriously and we are committed to their enforcement for the safety and security of all our members. All ministry events should strive to comply with these policies. Each ministry event shall be subject to review by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee and the staff person related to that event. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee shall review these policies and procedures at least annually and disseminate updates to the congregation.