

SAFE SANCTUARIES

Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth



First United Methodist Church, Yankton, South Dakota



First United Methodist Church of Yankton



Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures

Adopted: 4/29/14

Latest Revision: 4/13/23

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I. Introduction

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in 2008 (amended in 2012), adopted resolution 2044 aimed at reducing the risk of sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships. The resolution states, “The abuse of power occurs when we use power to gratify our own needs rather than to carry out God’s sacred trust. It happens when we refuse to own the responsibility of guardianship that comes with the privilege of power...until we understand that power is the responsibility to give, instead of the opportunity to take, we will continue to abuse it.”

There is little doubt that sexual misconduct and abuse in church and society is significant and troubling for our communities and congregations worldwide. Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for everyone. Sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. This unwanted behavior damages the moral environment where people worship, minister, work, and learn.

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting all vulnerable persons from abuse and also calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safely. In accordance with *The Book of Discipline* all human beings, both male and female, young and old, have equal worth in the eyes of God and thus have been made equal in Christ. As the promise of Galatians 3:26-29 states, “all are one in Christ Jesus”; therefore, we as United Methodists support equity among all persons without regard to ethnicity, sexuality, situation or gender.

II. Statement of Purpose and Covenant

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and adults, First United Methodist Church of Yankton is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal. We wish our church to be viewed as we are instructed to be by *1 Corinthians 4:1-2*, “Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.”

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and followers of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, the First United Methodist Church of Yankton vows to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of our children, youth and all those we minister towards. We will also assure the safety and spiritual growth of all church workers. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers. Any materials gathered during the selection process and screening will be confidential and only authorized persons will have access to this information for the sole use of safeguarding our church and congregation. We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events. We will educate all of our workers with children and youth regarding the use of all-appropriate policies and procedures. We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected

incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law. We commit ourselves to education, ongoing assessment of church ministry environment and continuous evaluation of policy and procedures.

III. Responsible Parties

1. Members of First United Methodist Church, Yankton, South Dakota
2. Clergy
3. All employees
4. All volunteers

IV. Safe Sanctuary Policy

1. We hereby initiate into policy that all Yankton First United Methodist Church employees (including clergy) and all volunteers who work with youth, children, and/or vulnerable adults in any capacity, will undergo the screening procedure set forth in this document. The intention of this screening procedure is to make an effort to insure that those whom we entrust with the supervision, care, and mentoring of others would not compromise these relationships with unethical and/or unlawful behavior as defined within Appendix A of this policy.

2. The screening procedure may include the completion of an application, a personal conversation, authorization for criminal background checks, review of the criminal sex offenders database and a signed Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Covenant Agreement. A copy of some form of official photo identification (stated ID card/driver's license) will be included in the file of each employee/volunteer. This material and its content will be kept confidential and only authorized personnel will have access to this information for the sole purpose of safeguarding our church and congregation.

3. Volunteers and employees shall complete an educational/training session that may include state law and federal law regarding abuse and how to carry out our policy and procedures to prevent misconduct and abuse. Volunteers and employees will be familiarized with misconduct and abuse reporting obligations and procedures. In addition, volunteers and employees may be required to participate in annual review and training events. The form of the above mentioned educational and training events may vary based on needs and feasibility.

4. Volunteer leaders need to be members to First United Methodist Church for at least 6 months prior to working with minors. If any person wishes to volunteer at First United Methodist Church in a non volunteer leader role that individual would be paired with an employee of First United Methodist church or a volunteer leader.

5. All volunteers, employees and clergy working with children and youth shall not be allowed to spend one on one time alone with a minor in an area of the church without

surveillance (including camera.) This also applies to children and youth events outside of the church.

6. When working with minors, the door to the area where the activity is taking place is to remain open. If this is not feasible or the nature of the activity dictates the door be closed, the closed door should contain an uncovered window so the activity can be observed from outside the room or area.

7. In the event that any group of children or youth are to participate in an overnight activity planned by the church, when feasible, at least one male and one female adult will be present to supervise. An exception to this would be if the group of children or youth who will be participating in the overnight activity will be all of the same gender. In that case, two adults of the same gender as the children or youth are permitted to supervise the group.

8. In the event that a leader will be transporting children or youth in any vehicle (their personal vehicle or one owned by the church), the driver will obtain a copy of and agree to adhere to the church's policies for drivers as outlined in Appendix B of this document.

9. Any clergy, employee or volunteer of the church that maintains electronic communication such as (but not limited to) websites, message board, social media sites, etc. should make reasonable efforts to ensure that the content of these communications are in line with the policies set forth in this document.

V. Reporting and Response Strategy

To help preserve the mission of our church, clergy and the Staff Pastor Parish Relations Team will help facilitate a productive process in dealing with situations involving abuse and/or misconduct.

Remember, every situation is unique. Not every single step of the below process will be applicable in every situation nor is it an exhaustive list of all the responsibilities that may fall on the church in any given situation. Some of the steps may need to be adjusted or modified at the request of outside agencies such as law enforcement and/or social services. When applicable and reasonable, the following steps will be taken whenever an incident of misconduct, harassment or abuse is suspected, witnessed or reported:

- 1.** Contact and inform clergy at which time an incident report will be completed. A copy will be provided for the person reporting the incident.
- 2.** Clergy along with a representative of SPPR will contact the alleged victim(s) and determine what immediate action can be taken to insure their immediate safety and well-being.
- 3.** If the alleged incident is suspected to be of an unlawful nature, Clergy and/or SPPR will contact law enforcement authorities, and may also contact the annual conference authorities, the church's insurance agent, and the church's attorney.

4. Clergy and SPPR will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement officials and/or child protective services.
5. Clergy and SPPR will keep a detailed written account of each of the steps they take and ensure this written account is kept on file.
6. No statements will be made by church personnel to the media, and all inquiries from the media shall be referred to the church legal counsel.
7. If deemed appropriate and necessary, the appropriate church leaders and/or committees will be informed of the incident by Clergy and SPPR in a concise and honest manner to allow discussion and input from members. Clergy and SPPR will encourage the members to maintain a Christian attitude that assures justice for all and healing for those who are suffering.
8. Clergy will determine ministerial care for those involved in the alleged incident and their families.
9. Clergy and SPPR will evaluate policy and procedures regarding misconduct, harassment and abuse and make any necessary changes.
10. On-going education will be maintained to prevent further incidents from occurring.

VI. Policy Awareness

1. The availability of this policy will be published in the church newsletter annually. The policy will be available upon request from the church office.
2. Leadership Team shall annually review and amend (when applicable) this policy.
3. All volunteers, employees and clergy who work with minors, shall participate in an educational session once a year where child abuse and prevention is discussed, as well as review this policy.
4. Every new members will review our Safe Sanctuary Policy and have access to it.

VII. Screening Procedure

The goal of screening those who wants to work with minors in our church as employees or volunteers is to identify those who should not be doing so.

Therefore, before a person begins work at our church, we will:

- Have the applicant fill out application and consent to a background check form
- A personal conversation with applicant
- Check local law enforcement information for the list of registered sex offenders
- Run a criminal background check at the discretion of the church and as deemed appropriate based upon information obtained through the screening process.
- Have the applicant sign a Safe Sanctuary Volunteer Covenant Statement.

Please direct all inquiries regarding this Safe Sanctuary Policy to:

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF YANKTON
207 W. 11th St.
Yankton, SD 57078
Phone: (605) 665-2991; Fax: (605) 665-9603
Email: 1stumcyankton@gmail.com
Website: www.firstumcyankton.org

Appendix A: Definitions

I. Definitions of Policy Terms

1. Volunteer

A volunteer is a person connected with First United Methodist Church who serves a role in a mission or ministry of the church without being paid.

2. Volunteer Leader

A volunteer who is responsible for overseeing the workings of an assigned program or activity and may be coordinating or directing the actions of other volunteers. These individuals have been members of the church for a least six months and are 18 years or older.

3. Employee

A person who is hired and on the payroll of First United Methodist Church, Yankton, SD.

4. Clergy

Commissioned and ordained deacons and elders; associate members and licensed local pastors serving under the full or part-time appointment of a bishop.

II. Definitions of Abuse and Misconduct

In relation to this policy, abuse is categorized in five primary forms: physical, emotional, sexual, ritual, and harassment.

1. Physical Abuse

Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally caused bodily harm to a child, examples may include violent battery with a weapon (knife, belt, strap, and so forth), burning, shaking, kicking, choking, fracturing bones and any of a wide variety of non-accidental injuries to a child's body.

Possible signs of Physical Abuse: hostile and aggressive behavior toward others, fearfulness of parents and or other adults, destructive behavior toward self, others and/or property, inexplicable fractures or bruises inappropriate for child's developmental stage, burns, facial injuries, pattern of repetitious bruises.

2. Emotional Abuse

Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child of worthlessness, badness, and being not only unloved but undeserving of love and care. Children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being locked in a closet, being deprived of any sign of parental affection, being constantly told they are bad or stupid, or being allowed or forced to abuse alcohol or drugs. Emotional abuse is often very difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

Possible signs of Emotional Abuse: exhibits severe depression and/or withdrawal, exhibits severe lack of self-esteem, failure to thrive, threatens or attempts suicide, speech and/or eating disorders, goes to extremes to seek adult approval, extreme passive/aggressive behavior patterns.

3. Sexual Abuse

Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and adult (or other older and more powerful youth) occurs. The child is never truly capable of consenting to or resisting such contact and/or such sexual acts. Often, the child is physically and psychological dependent upon the perpetrator of the abuse. Examples of sexual abuse may include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to child pornography or prostitution.

Possible signs of Sexual Abuse: unusually advanced sexual knowledge and/or behavior for child's age and developmental stage, depression--cries for no apparent reason, promiscuous behavior, runs away from home and refuses to return, difficulty walking or sitting, bruised/bleeding in vaginal or anal areas, exhibits frequent headaches, stomachaches, extreme fatigue, sexually transmitted diseases. In addition to these indicators, children who have been sexually abused at church may exhibit some of the following: unusual nervousness or anxiety about being left in the nursery or Sunday school class, reluctance to participate in church activities that were previously enthusiastically approached, comments such as "I don't want to be alone with _____" in reference to a child care worker or Sunday school teacher, nightmares including a child care worker or teacher as a frightening character, unexplained hostility toward a child care worker or teacher.

4. Ritual Abuse

Abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violations of a child are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare. The abuser may appeal to some higher authority or power to justify the abuse. The abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repeated threats of harm to the child, other persons, and animals. Reports of ritual abuse are often extremely horrifying and may seem too grim to be true.

Possible signs of Ritual Abuse: disruptions of memory or consciousness, unexplained mistrust and mood swings, flashbacks, eating disorders, fear of the dark, especially at sundown or a full moon, agitation or despair that seems to occur in cycles, fear of ministers, priests, or others wearing robes or uniforms, nightmares or sleep disorders, any of the symptoms of sexual abuse.

5. Harassment

Harassment consists of physical or verbal conduct related to a person's race, color, religion, creed, ancestry, national origin, age, disability, or gender.

Possible signs of harassment include those similar to those listed in emotional abuse.

Appendix B: Transportation Safety Procedures

First United Methodist Church of Yankton is committed to providing an all-around safe program for all people who participate in our ministries. In regards to the transportation of passengers on any church sponsored activity, including church chartered or hosted events, the following procedures should be followed:

1. Drivers are expected to know and abide by the official rules of the road. This also includes making sure the safety restraint devices (seatbelts) of all passengers are fastened at all times the vehicle is in motion.
2. Drivers are expected to refrain from transporting any passenger on church sponsored activities if they (the driver) have any medical or physical condition which may hinder their abilities to provide safe passages for their passengers. Any driver who has been convicted of DUI may not drive our youth or children.
3. Drivers must submit a copy of their driver's license to the church office prior to transporting passengers in any church owned vehicle.
4. A report of potential driver's driving record may be requested from the State Department of Transportation by our insurance carrier.
5. Drivers who will be using a personal vehicle to transport passengers on any church sponsored activity, must have for presentation, a copy of their driver's license and proof of insurance on the vehicle which they will be driving. These forms may be photo copied by the person in charge of the event before the transporting of passengers occurs. When driving a personal vehicle, the liability insurance on that vehicle will be the primary insurance in case of an accident. Drivers using personal vehicles must ensure that the vehicle is in safe operating condition.
6. Drivers are responsible for any traffic tickets issued to them while they are driving a church owned vehicle or a personal vehicle during a church sponsored event.
7. All drivers of church owned vehicles must be 21 years of age.
8. Transportation of passengers who leave from the church on a church sponsored activity will be provided by an approved adult (21 years of age or older) driver. Likewise transportation for passengers returning to the church at the conclusion of any activity will be provided by an approved adult (21 years of age or older) driver.
9. No single individual should transport and individual youth or child (unrelated) in one vehicle without prior written consent of the minor's legal guardian.
10. When children or youth are being transported by vehicles the driver shall not text or talk on a cell phone (unless in hands-free mode) until the vehicle is stopped and it is safe to do so.