

**CHILD PROTECTION POLICY AND PROCEDURES  
FOR THE  
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
MARTINSVILLE, VA**

**I. Purpose**

First United Methodist Church (Martinsville, VA) seeks to establish reasonable procedures to reduce the risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse of children as they participate in church ministries, and to protect staff and volunteers from false allegations of misconduct.

*For the purpose of this document, the term “child” also refers to “at-risk” adults.*

**II. Biblical Foundation**

First United Methodist Church seeks to express God’s love for young persons and to provide for their personal wholeness. This faith community seeks to provide an environment which is caring and secure for all persons. The Bible is foundational to our understanding upon which all policies, procedures and ministries must stand.

*And they were bringing children to Him, that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it He was indignant, and said to them, “Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” And He took them in His arms and blessed them, laying His hands upon them.*

Mark 10:13-16

Jesus teaches us explicitly that young persons have the right and the keys to the Kingdom of God. He demonstrated this through blessing and touch. Our goal in response to this Biblical mandate is to maintain a safe, secure and loving place where children may grow.

*“Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in,  
so that my house may be filled.”*

Luke 14:21 (NRSV)

In the Parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus reminds us that God is in the business of inviting all people to the table, where they can be nurtured and transformed to be Christ to others. Today, we continue to recognize that each individual is a child of God and must be allowed to live free of fear, surrounded by love. As Christian adults, we must establish and maintain a nurturing, loving, safe and secure Christian environment, providing support and assistance to our children, youth, and at-risk adults, remembering that our mandate is not only a responsibility, but an opportunity to protect the gift that God has bestowed upon us.

*“A new commandment I give you: Love one another.  
As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*

John 13:34 (NIV)

*Blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear.  
Matthew 13:16*

### **III. Commonwealth of Virginia Statutes**

Under Section 63.1-284.2 of the Code of Virginia (1950), as amended, an abused child is defined as one who is less than eighteen years of age, "whose parents or other person responsible for his care creates or inflicts, threatens to create or inflict, or allows to be created or inflicted upon such a child a physical or mental injury by other than accidental means, or creates a substantial risk of death or disfigurement, or impairment of bodily or mental functions."

An act of child abuse may be committed by any person responsible for the care of another individual who is less than eighteen years of age. It does not matter whether the person caring for the child under the age of 18 (hereinafter referred to as a "Child" or "Children", which term as used in this Policy also includes youth ages 12-18 and vulnerable adults) is a compensated or a volunteer worker. It does not matter whether the person routinely is entrusted with the care of children or whether such individual only occasionally comes in contact with children. It does not matter whether the person was entrusted with the care of a child for an hour or only a moment. It only matters that a child was abused or neglected by the person who, on the occasion in question, was responsible for the child's care

### **IV. Types of Child Abuse**

#### **A. Definition**

Child abuse refers to an act committed by a parent, care giver or person in a position of trust (even though he/she may not care for the child on a daily basis) which is not accidental and which harms or threatens to harm a child's physical or mental health or welfare. The following definitions and explanations in this section are from the Virginia Department of Social Services.

#### **B. Types of Abuse**

##### **1. Physical Abuse:**

A physical injury, threat of injury or creation of a real and significant danger of substantial risk of death, disfigurement or impairment of bodily functions. Such injury or threat of injury, regardless of intent, is inflicted or allowed to be inflicted by non-accidental means. Examples: asphyxiation; bone fracture; brain damage, skull fracture, subdural hematoma; burns, scalding; cuts, bruises, welts, abrasions; internal injuries, poisoning; sprains; dislocations; gunshot, stabbing wounds.

##### **2. Physical Neglect:**

The failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, or supervision for a child if the child's health or safety is endangered. Physical neglect may include multiple occurrences or a one-time critical

or severe event that results in a threat to health or safety, such as a toddler left alone. Other types of neglect include abandonment, inadequate supervision, inadequate clothing, inadequate shelter, inadequate personal hygiene, inadequate food and malnutrition.

### **3. Sexual Abuse:**

Sexual abuse includes any act defined in the code of Virginia which is committed, or allowed to be committed, upon a child by his/her parent or other persons responsible for the child's care. Examples of such abuse are: sexual exploitation, sexual molestation, intercourse/sodomy and other sexual abuse.

### **4. Medical Neglect:**

Refusal or failure by caretaker to obtain and/or follow through with a complete regimen of medical, mental or dental care for a condition, which if untreated, could result in illness or developmental delays.

### **5. Failure to Thrive:**

A syndrome of infancy or early childhood which is characterized by growth failure, signs of severe malnutrition, and variable degrees of developmental retardation. Children are considered to be in this category only when the syndrome is diagnosed by a physician and is caused by non-organic factors.

### **6. Mental Abuse/Neglect:**

A pattern of acts or omissions by the caretaker which result in harm to a child's psychological or emotional health or development.

### **7. Educational Neglect:**

The child's caretaker is directly responsible for the failure of the child to attend school or an approved alternative program of study.

### **8. Bizarre Discipline:**

Any actions in which the caretaker uses eccentric, irrational or grossly inappropriate procedures or devices to modify the child's behavior.

## **V. Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse**

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within First United Methodist Church and all of its programs and ministries, several abuse prevention measures will be utilized. These measures include **screening** of paid and volunteer workers for past child abuse convictions or sexual abuse or sex offender or expungements, provision for **regular training** on child abuse issues to paid and volunteer staff members, use of the **two leader rule**, **standards of appropriate classroom discipline** and **open classrooms**. Screenings will be done every 5 years or upon initial involvement.

### **1. Six Month Rule**

First United Methodist Church will not use anyone as a volunteer leader for children or youth ministries in the church unless such person has had continuous active involvement in the church or community for at least six (6) months.

## **2. Staff Screening**

Before beginning the first year of service, each employed or volunteer leader for children or youth ministries, children or youth teacher, child care worker, or youth worker will be asked to sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse, sexual abuse, sex offender nor had such a conviction expunged. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction, sexual abuse, sex offender or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children or youth. Each paid staff person and volunteer leader shall also undergo a national criminal record check. The church will cover the cost of this check. Within three months of the adoption of this policy, all existing leaders and workers with children and youth will comply with this paragraph in order to continue in their positions. Background checks will be performed every 5 years.

\*Anyone who has been screened by a public or private school system, scouting group or social services will be exempt from screening by FUMC if they provide the date of screening, the organization's name and a contact person at the organization. A Background Check Information form should be signed and placed on file at First Church for their records. Background checks will only be valid for 5 years for the purposes of this policy.

## **3. Staff Training**

Before beginning their first year of service, all paid and volunteer leaders, child care workers, children and youth Sunday School teachers and youth workers will be required to read the church's child protection policy and sign a form indicating that they have read and that they understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to do so will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Leaders will be required to attend a training session on child protection offered by the church, district or conference every 2 years. Other workers with children and youth will also be encouraged to attend such training sessions. A training seminar will be offered annually.

\*Training from public or private school systems, social services, and Scouting groups will be honored as valid training. The worker should fill out the form for *Child Protection/ Child Abuse Prevention Training Information* to be filed at First Church in lieu of attending the training offered at First Church. This training will also be valid for only 2 years.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facility, including its outdoor facilities, would be required to read the policy and sign the acknowledgment form. Church facilities, including outdoor facilities, will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the policy.

## **4. Two Adult Rule**

Leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for all children or youth activities. These two leaders will be unrelated adults (whenever possible) age 18 or older and at least 5 years older than the children and youth they are with. If the group is divided, each subgroup will have two leaders. If there are not two leaders available for each group, then either the group will be combined with another group to make possible the presence of two leaders or the activity will be canceled on that occasion. Community groups of children or youth who meet at the church must have two or more leaders present who have signed this form. If any group stays overnight at the church, or if a church sponsored group leaves the premises, two or more

leaders must be present and must include at least one male and one female not related by marriage, whenever possible, if the group is mixed in gender.

## **5. Adequate Supervision**

Adequate supervision will be provided at all times:

- One adult to three children, zero to twelve months of age.
- One adult to four children, ages twelve to twenty-four months
- One adult to six children, ages twenty-four months to thirty-six months
- One adult to eight children, ages three to eighteen years

The specific needs of individual children may require a change to these guidelines.

## **6. One-on-One Mentoring or Consultation**

Any one-on-one mentoring or consultation between an adult and a child will be conducted in a room or area that is in plain view of others.

## **7. Classroom Discipline**

All leaders and workers with children and youth will use the following discipline measures. If a child is behaving inappropriately, the leader or worker will tell the child specifically what he/she is doing that is not acceptable and state what the expected behavior is, e.g., "We do not throw blocks. We use blocks for building." If this measure is not effective, the child will be guided to another activity. If inappropriate behavior continues, the child may be placed at a table to work alone away from the other students. If the child's disruptive behavior continues after these steps have been taken, the child may be taken to the Pastor or the primary leader for the activity and left under his or her supervision. No physical punishment or verbal abuse, e.g., ridicule, are to be used at any time. If isolating the child within the classroom or removal of the child from the room becomes necessary, the situation will be discussed with the child's parent or guardian as soon as possible.

## **8. Open Classrooms**

Classrooms or child care rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers, e.g., Sunday School Superintendent, at any time. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth are conducted by the pastor or the primary leader during all activities.

## **9. Online photos/ comments of children/at-risk adults.**

No daycare teacher, church staff, or church volunteers (i.e. children's church worker, Sunday School teacher, youth group worker, etc) should post recognizable photos of any child/at-risk adult on their personal online website (i.e. facebook, myspace, twitter); nor should they post any personal comments or opinions about a child in their care on any online website. The church/Early Learning Center may post photos on their website with proper photo release permission from parents/guardians. *We understand that the youth of today utilize this technology extensively as part of their lifestyle. FUMC youth group leaders and members should exercise caution when posting to their personal online websites. A parent may indicate that their youth/child/at risk adult be exempt from having their image put on a website affiliated with FUMC.*

## 10. Child Protection Policy Revisions

The Director or Programs/Children's Ministry will review the Child Protection Policy annually. Any proposed changes should be approved by the Pastor and a legal representative of FUMC. Revisions must be approved annually at Charge Conference. The Director of Children's Ministry shall be responsible for the administration of this policy.

A Child Protection Committee should be formed only if **major** revisions are required. The membership of the Child Protection Committee should include the pastor, children's coordinator, a designated member of the staff-parish committee and two ad hoc members selected by the pastor and/or the staff-parish chair person of the church. The Child Protection Committee should review and approve **major** revisions to this Policy.

## VI. Reporting Child Abuse

Should there be an allegation of child abuse at First United Methodist Church, the following procedures shall be followed:

1. Any allegation of child abuse shall be treated seriously.
2. Pray for the church and all persons affected by the allegation.
3. Immediately begin documenting all procedures which occur in handling the allegation.
4. Immediately notify the supervisor of the group involved of the substance of the allegations. (This may be the Director of Programs/Children's Ministry, Youth Pastor, Early Learning Center director, scout leader, etc.) The person notified shall immediately contact the pastor to determine whether there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred. If there is a reasonable case, a Child Protection Committee should be formed. The function of the Committee at this stage is not to conduct an investigation, but to determine, based upon the allegations and the information then in the possession of the Committee, whether a reason to suspect exists. In making such a determination, the Committee shall avail itself of such counsel as it deems necessary and as is immediately available, including, but not limited to, consultation with an attorney, with a representative of the church's insurance company, with the district superintendent, and anonymously with the Virginia Department of Social Services.
  - a. If the allegations involve the pastor, the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Committee shall be notified immediately and he or she shall immediately notify the district superintendent who shall direct the next steps taken by the church in responding to the allegations. The provisions of this Policy shall continue to apply except as the district superintendent directs that other steps be taken.
5. If the Child Protection Committee determines that there is a reason to suspect that child abuse may have occurred, then the following steps shall be taken:
  - a. Immediately notify the Virginia Department of Social Services of the allegation.
  - b. Immediately notify the parents if it is not known that they have previous knowledge.

c. Immediately notify the church's insurance company.

d. Immediately notify the district superintendent.

6. Do not confront the accused with the allegation. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church and the Child Protection Committee determines that the steps outlined in paragraph VI (5) above are appropriate, that person must be temporarily relieved of their duties until the investigation is concluded.

7. The pastor should extend whatever care and resources are necessary to those impacted by the allegation, but under **no** circumstances should the pastor or any church leader or member investigate the allegation. In providing care to the principals (alleged victim and the accused) and their families, the pastor or church leader, should under **no** circumstances be drawn into a discussion of the truth or falsity of the allegation which could contaminate the investigation. Do not assign blame or take any steps that involve establishing or refuting the allegation.

8. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.

9. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused until advised to the contrary by the Child Protection Committee.

10. There shall be a single spokesperson for the Church who shall be designated by the Child Protection Committee.

## **VII. Policy Review**

The Child Protection Policy and Procedures of First United Methodist Church shall be reviewed annually by the Director of Programs/Children's Ministry. A verification follow-up report will be made each year at Charge Conference to ensure the integrity of the policy and procedures.





After reviewing the foregoing Policy and Procedures, please sign, date, detach and return this portion to indicate that you have read, understood and accept the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of First United Methodist Church.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understand the Child Protection Policy and Procedures of First United Methodist Church. I agree to abide by those policies and procedures.

I have no convictions for child abuse, sexual abuse, sex offender or expungements of such convictions.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature

Date

*This document will remain in effect for 2 years from the date of signing.*

4/20/13