

SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY
DUBLIN FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
DUBLIN, GEORGIA 31021
(LAST REVISED – 8/8/17)

I. INTRODUCTION: The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child, welcomes *me*." (Matthew 18:5). Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our invitation- they are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus 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 the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse."

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation and ritual abuse (ritual abuse refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites', ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be) occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Many annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma. Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of abuse. God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons *from* sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 1996*. Copyright © 1996 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission, [pp.384-386])

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the prevention of child abuse in our church.

A. Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Child Abuse Prevention Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth. This policy will also serve to protect all adult supervisors who serve as a part of our church staff and/or as volunteers within our church.

B. Statement of Covenant

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, Dublin First United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as DFUMC) pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of our children and youth as well as the workers with children and youth. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers; 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.

C. Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children and youth, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child will be "...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)

II. DEFINITIONS: The following terms are defined for the specific purpose of this document.

A. "Adult" ... The adult definition is used to define an adult as it relates to supervision, screening, reporting and responding within the conference and church policy. "Adult" means a person 18 years of age or older, who engages in supervisory responsibility. The term does not apply to program participants.

B. “Adult Monitor” is an adult who frequently moves in and out of rooms or activity areas adding additional supervision where two adults (not spouses) are not available to care for the children.

C. “Assistant Who is a Minor” are persons under 18 years of age who help with activities (e.g., crafts or recreation) but are not in a supervisory role. An “Assistant Who is a Minor” does not satisfy the two unrelated adults rule.

D. “Certifying Officer” is the individual who receives applications, conducts background checks, assesses results, verifies requirements are met, and certifies a person for supervision of children. For all events, the local church is responsible for appointing and supporting a Certifying Officer. DFUMC shall appoint a staff member (financial secretary [recommended], office manager, etc.) to act as a Certifying Officer.

E. “Child abuse” is a harmful act against any person under 18 years of age. “Child abuse” presents in the following forms or types:

1. Verbal Abuse – Any verbal act that humiliates, degrades or threatens any child or youth.
2. Physical Abuse – Any act of commission or omission which endangers a person’s physical and mental health. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s caretaker. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual’s age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child or youth.
3. Sexual Abuse – Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of minors for satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to:
 - a) incest,
 - b) rape,
 - c) prostitution,
 - d) romantic involvement with any participant,
 - e) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of an individual enrolled as a child or youth in Conference or District sponsored activities,
 - f) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content. Examples of sexualized behavior include, but are not limited to, “displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one’s own or another person’s body, touching another person’s body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse” (Resolution 36, *The Book of Resolutions 2004*).
4. Ritual Abuse – Any act of physical, sexual, psychological violence or manipulation inflicted on a minor, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone or multiple people who appeal(s) to a higher authority or power to justify the abuse.

NOTE: This includes any acts utilizing electronic means which could be construed as verbal, physical, sexual, or ritual abuse.

F. “Child abuse” in this policy also includes abusive acts against vulnerable adults.

G. “Child” or “Children” or “Minor” means any person(s) under the age of 18.

H. “Children’s activities” means any activity or program in which persons under the age of 18 are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

I. “Conference” means the South Georgia Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.

J. “Safe Sanctuaries” is the name commonly given by United Methodist Annual Conferences and local churches to their individual efforts to make conference, district, and local church programs welcoming and safe for children and youth.

K. “Staff person” means any person employed by the DFUMC who is responsible for children’s activities (as defined above).

L. “Staff person in charge of a children’s activity” means the DFUMC employee responsible for the supervision of this activity.

M. “Supervisor” means any staff person or volunteer who leads, directs, counsels, teaches, mentors, chaperones, transports or assists in programs and activities related to children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

- N. "Volunteer" means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting children's activities.
- O. "Vulnerable adult" means any person 18 years of age or older identified by a caregiver, staff person in charge or him/herself as an individual unable to take care of him/herself, or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or exploitation due to diagnosed diminished physical, mental or emotional capacities.
- P. "We" means the DFUMC.
- Q. "Youth" means persons 18 years of age or younger who are strictly participants, holding no supervisory responsibility, in a DFUMC sponsored activity.

III. STANDARDS

A. Minimum Age

The following standards for Authority Figures are designed to separate Authority Figures from the group they are serving by age or enough years to reinforce recognition of the Authority Figure's role. DFUMC adopts the following standards for Authority Figures and Assistants:

1. **AUTHORITY FIGURES**-- the primary leaders of youth and children's activities:
 - (a) To work with youth who are in grades 6th and above, the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 21 years of age.
 - (b) To work with children who are infants-5th grade, the Authority Figure must be a minimum of 18 years of age.
2. **ASSISTANTS**--persons who lend aid to the Authority Figure and act at the direction of the Authority Figure including volunteers. Whether working with youth or children Assistants must be:
 - (a) A minimum of 13 years of age; and
 - (b) In the judgment of a DFUMC staff member, competent to assist in the activity.

B. Two Adult Rule

1. All children's activities must utilize the "two-adult rule" when supervising children. The two-adult rule requires that, regardless of the size of the group, there will always be two adults (not spouses) present. It is expected that there will be at least one male and at least one female adult supervisor when there are male and female participants. This may include the presence of an adult monitor who frequently moves in and out of rooms to supervise the activities. An assistant who is a minor shall not supervise other children regardless of age differentiation and, therefore, would not satisfy the two-adult rule.
2. No adult (age 18 or older) shall supervise an age group unless he/she is **AT LEAST 5 years older** than the children or youth with whom he/she is working.

C. Adult to Child Ratios

1. Nursery/Child Care

An adult is defined as an Authority Figure/Assistant who is also at least 18 years of age. Adults must meet the Authority Figure/Assistant guidelines. (See pages 1 & 2)

For these programs, DFUMC adheres to the following **Georgia State Codes**:

- Infants (non-handicapped & not walking) - 1 Adult to 4 Infants
- 12 – 18 months & unsteady walker – 1 Adult to 4 toddlers
- Toddlers (up to 3 years, walking, non-handicapped) - 1 Adult to 6 toddlers
- 2 years of age - 1 Adult to 7 children
- 3 years of age - 1 Adult to 9 Children
- 4 years of age - 1 Adult to 13 Children
- 5 years of age - 1 Adult to 16 Children
- 6 years of age & above - 1 Adult to 20 Children

Mixed Age Groups:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 6 wks to 30 months - 1 to 5 | 2 to 3 years old - 1 to 8 |
| 2 to 4 years old - 1 to 8 | 2 1/2 to 3 years old – 1 to 9 |
| 2 1/2 to 5 years old - 1 to 11 | 3 to 5 years old - 1 to 13 |

4 to 5 years old - 1 to 16

5 to 12 years old - 1 to 20

2. DFUMC Events – These are our preferred ratios. They are meant to be guidelines that will be followed **whenever possible**.

Grades 1 - 4 - 1 Adult to 8 Children

Grades 5 - 8 - 1 Adult to 10 Youth

Grades 9 - 12 - 1 Adult to 12 Youth

A parent and/or staff person must be present at all events.

3. Participants with Special Needs - In the judgment of DFUMC staff, and in consultation with the parent, the above ratios may be adjusted depending on the nature and degree of a participant's special needs.

D. Rooming and Transporting

With parental consent, children or youth of the same sex may room together without an adult. In situations where adults room with youth or children in a hotel, cabin, tent or other similar situation, there must be two adults that are not related. These adults must be the same sex as the children or youth with whom they are staying. Only one adult must be present in home overnight situations where the hosts/hostesses are the other adults present in the home. As much as possible, two adults will be placed in the homes with children or youth in overnight situations.

Transportation will use the DFUMC vehicles driven by approved drivers (according to DFUMC's insurance guidelines) or professional means as much as possible. This also applies to transporting children or youth where two adults should be present, but the adults do not have to be of the same sex. With parental consent, children or youth may be transported by one adult identified to the parent.

Transportation guidelines apply only to church sponsored events.

E. Six Month Rule

All adult volunteer authority figures involved with children or youth of our church must have been members of the congregation or consistently attended our church for at least six months prior to beginning a volunteer assignment. Persons not meeting this minimum requirement may serve only as an assistant with a Safe Sanctuaries certified/trained adult. The Safe Sanctuaries committee must authorize any exceptions to this rule.

F. Policy Instruction

All volunteers and paid staff are required to attend policy instruction to be trained/certified before working with children and youth. In the case that this is not possible, the staff person/volunteer may only serve as an assistant with another trained/certified adult and under the stipulation that they attend the next training session.

All volunteers and staff are required every **THREE years** to review this policy, to attend a policy instruction session (Safe Sanctuaries Training in the Church) for needed updates and to sign a **Participation Covenant** kept on file at the church. These files will be kept and maintained by the Certifying Officer, along with applications, background checks, and other necessary documentation of trained/certified staff and church volunteers.

G. Written Record of Departure

A written record of any departure from this policy will be kept on file by the Certifying Officer. Authority figures and/or staff are expected to report these departures as quickly as possible to the Certifying Officer and the church staff in charge of the event.

IV. SCREENING PROCEDURES (Criminal Background Check): An essential component of preventing abuse by Authority Figures, Assistants and Staff and protecting Authority Figures, Assistants and Staff who work with our children and youth is careful screening. Although we recognize the integrity of an overwhelming number of the persons with discerned calling to ministries with children, youth and vulnerable persons, we realize that abuse may occur in the church. Therefore, we believe that all

Authority Figures, Volunteers, Assistants and all church staff must be properly screened once EVERY 5 Years. It will be the responsibility of the Certifying Officer and the Senior Pastor to ensure compliance as the Georgia Conference policy dictates.

The following steps are used for screening volunteer and paid applicants:

A. Complete a permission form giving consent for a background check. A completed application form will be required for Authority Figures, Assistants and all employees and will be kept on file.

B. Applicants must be approved by the Safe Sanctuaries Committee.

C. Complete reference checks will be filed for all paid staff, hourly and salaried. **A minimum of two references must be contacted on all applicants.** It is further recommended that the reference of a church official (pastor, Staff-Parish Relations Committee Chairperson (SPRCC), youth director, etc.) from the church of the applicant's membership be obtained.

D. Complete background checks may include, but are not limited to:

Criminal histories

Motor vehicle record

Registered sexual offenders

The Background checks will be initiated and seen only by the Certifying Officer. Only concerns will be reported to the Senior Minister who in turn will decide how the situation will be handled ensuring compliance with the Georgia Conference policies on Safe Sanctuaries procedures.

E. Federal and State Law

DFUMC Safe Sanctuaries policy shall be in compliance with the requirements of any and all Federal laws or State laws affecting or relating to employment, sex offender status, or child abuse. In any case where there is a conflict between such laws and the procedure outlined in this document, said laws shall prevail and the procedure outlined in the document shall be modified to the extent necessary to eliminate such conflict. This policy is subject to all Federal and/or State laws relating to employment, sex offender status, and child abuse.

V. REPORTING ABUSE/ALLEGED ABUSE: All reports of suspected child abuse must be taken seriously. Whenever child abuse is suspected, reports must immediately be made to the Department of Human Services and the Senior Pastor. In the event that the victim feels uncomfortable reporting to the Senior Pastor or if the suspected abuse involves the Senior Pastor, reports may also be made to the Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson (SPRCC) and the Safe Sanctuaries Committee Chairperson (SSCC). The SPRCC and the SSCC may be reached by contacting the church office. If the abuse reported has taken place within the church or the perpetrator is a church member or employee, the Senior Pastor and/or SPRCC shall also report the suspected abuse to the District Superintendent.

VI. INVESTIGATION: Whenever child abuse is suspected, the following information should be obtained and reported to The Department of Family and Children's Services (478-275-6533) and then reported to the Senior Pastor and/or Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson and the Safe Sanctuaries Committee Chairman:

(1) Names, ages, addresses and telephone numbers of both the accused and the abused

(2) The nature of the alleged abuse, with dates where possible

(3) The factual details of the report

(4) The name of the person making the report and the date that the information was received.

The Senior Pastor and/or SPRCC and SSCC shall conduct or direct an investigation into the suspected abuse in conjunction with the Safe Sanctuaries Committee. Interim measures may be taken during the investigation to safeguard the potential victim or victims. At the conclusion of the investigation, appropriate actions shall be taken. Depending upon the findings, this may include termination of employment or service as a volunteer with children and youth of the church.

VII. SAFE SANCTUARIES COMMITTEE: The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will consist of six trained/certified members, along with the Youth Director, the Music Director, the Children's Coordinator, the Children's Center Coordinator, the Senior Pastor, and the Youth Lay Coordinator(s). The six members will be made up of two classes of three that will each serve three-year terms. At least one member will be elected from within the Staff Parrish Relations Committee. Any At-Large Members will be appointed by the Lay Leadership Committee. All Safe Sanctuaries Committee Members will be listed by class annually in the Report of Committee on Lay Leadership. Any votes taken in an alleged abuse must have a **quorum** present with a **ten day notice** for committee members to be present at the meeting. Its responsibilities include:

1. Educating Authority Figures, Assistants and all employees about the policy
2. Answering questions about the policy
3. Ensuring compliance with the policy
4. Granting exceptions to the policy, in appropriate circumstances
5. Assisting, as needed, with investigations
6. Reviewing and renewing policy annually or as needed
7. Evaluating board function
8. Other duties as needed

SAFE SANCTUARIES COMMITTEE MEMBER REQUIREMENTS

1. All committee members will be required to be trained/certified by a conference official or a competent trained/certified adult volunteer or staff member from within the United Methodist Church.
2. All committee members must understand the importance of proper implementation of this policy for the protection of our children and youth as well as the protection of those who work with our children and youth.
3. If SSC members are called upon to interview volunteers or decide on abuse cases, the interviewer should not ask for information about marital status or handicapping conditions as stated in Federal/State discrimination guidelines. The interviewer should also be sensitive to age and sex discrimination guidelines; however adequate information may be requested to ensure compliance with this policy's minimum standards.
4. SSC members should be aware of **red flags**. These are indicators of issues that must be explored further in order for one to be assured that all information is collected concerning a prospective or accused employee/volunteer. Red flags might include but are not limited to:
 - * Has had many addresses over a short period of time...NOTE: This could indicate that a person is trying to be anonymous, but it could also indicate that they were a college student who moved frequently to keep rent low.
 - * Wants to work with only one age group...NOTE: If someone would like to work with only one specific age group, it could indicate that the person has targeted that age group for molestation, or it could mean that is the age group for which they are trained or that experience has shown that they are not as gifted with other ages.
 - * Seems overly committed to one age group. For example, someone who simultaneously leads a scout troop, coaches Little League, serves as a Big Brother and now wants to teach Sunday School may be neglecting their own age appropriate peer relationships in order to cultivate potential victims.
 - * Does not want/need/like close supervision... The interview may indicate that the person does not like to be closely supervised which might raise questions about motivation for applying for this work.
5. SSC members who serve as interviewers need to be able to explore issues as they arise during the interview and to depart from the set of prepared questions to do so.
6. SSC members must be able to handle all issues of Safe Sanctuaries with the utmost level of privacy. No case or investigation is to be discussed outside of the private meetings that SSC members attend. Confidentiality is extremely important.

NOTE: The following resources are found at the following sites:

<http://www.sgaumc.org/resourceshandouts> and <http://www.gbod.org/lead-your-church/safe-sanctuaries>

- (1) Premises/Participation Agreement Form
- (2) When a Sex Offender Seeks to Join the Local Church
- (3) Volunteer Application
- (4) Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check
- (5) Background Checks Recommendations
- (6) Training Videos and Power Points

