



Safe Sanctuaries Policy

I. Introduction

As a Christian community of faith, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as those who serve in ministry with and to them. As such:

- We will follow reasonable safety measures in the screening and selection of leadership, both paid and volunteer.
- We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, events, and ministries.
- We will educate everyone who works with children, youth, and vulnerable adults—to include both paid staff and unpaid volunteers—regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting an observed or suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, and we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

Nothing in this policy or procedure is designed to hinder or prevent the investigation of suspected, reported or confirmed violations of any North Carolina criminal laws.

II. Theological Rationale

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 at each person's baptism by our congregational response, pledging: "With God's help we will so order our lives after the example of Christ, that this person, 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).

III. Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, we will use the following terms:

- Child or youth: Any person under the age of 18
- Adult: Any person 18 years old or older

- **Vulnerable adult:** Any person 18 years or older who is in need of special care, support, or protection due to diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities or at risk of abuse due to the power dynamics of the situation (*e.g.*, mission work or visitation ministries)
- **Leader:** Any adult—paid or volunteer—who has supervision or management responsibilities for the event, program, or ministry

IV. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by First United Methodist Church of Sylva, Inc., regardless of location.

V. Policy

a. Liability Insurance

The church shall have adequate liability insurance for all ministries, including sexual abuse or misconduct coverage.

b. Screening and Selection

All persons serving in leadership with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be:

- An active member or constituent of the local ministry for at least six months.
- At least 18 years of age. Nursery workers may be hired at 16 and are only allowed to work in the nursery with another staff member or volunteer of at least 18 years of age.
- At least five years older than the oldest person they are supervising/leading (Exception: This does not apply to adults in ministry with vulnerable adults.)

As part of the selection process, applicants must:

- Submit an application and personal references
- Participate in an interview process as approved by the Management Team and facilitated by the staff.
- Consent to a National Criminal Background Check

Any conviction involving abuse of or harm toward children, youth, or vulnerable adults will disqualify the applicant from participating in ministries with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. All other convictions will be reviewed by the Senior Pastor in consultation with the leader of the particular ministry area in order to ensure the safety and confidentiality of all involved.

All documentation collected as part of the application and screening process shall be maintained in a permanent secure file accessible only to the Senior Pastor and Finance Coordinator (human resources related files are kept in this location).

c. Youth helpers

Youth helpers are considered children or youth under the age of 18 who assist with ministries (*e.g.*, Vacation Bible School).

Youth helpers shall follow all of the same guidelines as adult leaders.

Youth helpers shall never be alone with children without an adult present.

d. Training

All leaders shall be trained annually in the practices of Safe Sanctuaries, and a record of attendees shall be kept on file for a minimum of seven years.

Local church staff or lay leadership may facilitate Safe Sanctuaries at the local church level. However, at least once every four years, the church is expected to utilize conference leadership to be updated on new and emerging trends in Safe Sanctuaries.

The church community shall be informed of the Safe Sanctuaries policy and how the church is working to prevent abuse. The church community shall also be notified in advance of Safe Sanctuaries training opportunities.

Training may be offered to the following:

- Any leader of a church-sponsored ministry with children, youth, or vulnerable adults
- Any leader of outside groups that utilize the church facilities for activities with children, youth, or vulnerable adults
- Any person in the community who would like to learn more about Safe Sanctuaries and its ministry of abuse prevention

The training shall include information, explanation, and discussion of the following:

- Local church policy and operational procedures
- Appropriate boundary guidelines
- Appropriate playground/recreational supervision
- Behaviors or other indicators which may signal concerns or abuse
- Requirements of North Carolina law for reporting incidents of abuse
- Procedures for reporting observed or suspected incidents or abuse

The process of Safe Sanctuaries training:

- First-time volunteers or first-time Safe Sanctuaries trainees must complete the online training from the WNCUMC and submit the certification of completion to the ministry leader to which they wish to volunteer. You may access the online training tool through this link: <https://www.wnccumc.org/onlinelearning>. This may be completed at any point throughout the year.
- Bi-annual training opportunities will be held in April and October; attendance is mandatory to continue in a volunteer position.

e. Activity Procedures

All activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults shall adhere to the following

minimum requirements:

- There shall be two unrelated adults present at all times.
Nursery workers may be hired at 16 and are only allowed to work in the nursery with another staff member of at least 18 years of age.
 - “Unrelated adults” is interpreted as adults who are not related to one another. (The adults may be related to participants, but not to one another.)
 - When two unrelated adults are not able to be present, two related adults shall be present, so long as they are not in a marital relationship. (Married adults may lead together, but there must be at least one more adult present.)
 - If it is not possible to have two adults present at all times, the activity must take place in an open space—indoors or outdoors—where other adults are able to witness the activity and interactions of all involved.
 - It is NOT acceptable to have only one adult present with children, youth, or vulnerable adults in a private space, or any space where other adults are not able to witness the activities and interactions of all involved.
- There shall be at least one adult present at all activities who is trained in first aid and CPR. First aid kits shall be readily available in the CLC & Asbury room kitchens, the church office, the Early Learning Center classrooms (nursery is located here) and in each classroom that serves children and/or youth.
- At no time shall windows be obscured or doors locked to areas where children, youth or vulnerable adults are meeting. (Exception: Active shooter drills or incidents.)
- All leaders assisting with diaper changing, toileting, and clothes changes of young children or of children, youth, or adults with special needs shall follow [guidelines as set forth in training].
- All leaders supervising or assisting with recreational or playground activities shall follow [guidelines as set forth in training].

f. Individual counseling

Sometimes one-on-one interactions are necessary, specifically in reference to counseling. These interactions must be conducted in an appropriate manner.

The clergyperson, staff person, or lay leader shall conduct the meeting in a visible space, meaning that the office door is cracked open or a window is visible and someone can reasonably see all persons in the room, or the meeting shall take place in a public place.

Suspected abuse or neglect uncovered in counseling shall be reported in accordance with North Carolina law.

g. Internet and Social Media

Images and names of children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall not be utilized on any

website or application without explicit consent.

A social media policy and covenant shall be adopted and adhered to by all participants and leaders. Sylva First United Methodist Church Electronic Communications Policy may be found at the end of this policy.

h. Transportation

Any person driving a church-owned vehicle or driving a personal vehicle on behalf of the church must consent to a motor vehicle record check and provide proof of current insurance coverage.

When using charter buses or other contracted drivers, the carrier must provide certification that the driver has completed a recent background check.

All vehicle use requirements set forth by the Property Team and approved by the Management Team shall be followed.

i. Off-Site and Overnight Events

All requirements from section 3C: Activity Procedures shall be adhered to.

Adults and children or youth who are unrelated shall not share beds.

Leaders must obtain medical information and liability release forms for all participants and keep those records on hand throughout the off-site activity or overnight event.

Leaders shall provide parents or guardians with specific information regarding the schedule, sleeping arrangements, leader-to-participant ratios, and emergency contact information.

j. Missionaries

When engaging in mission work—whether domestically or globally—missionaries are intrinsically put in a place of power over the persons they serve. Due to these power dynamics, all persons participating in mission work shall follow the screening, selection, training, activity, counseling, transportation, and off-site/overnight event regulations as set forth above.

k. Daycare/Preschool Requirements

In addition to the requirements set forth in this policy, the church's daycare program shall also adhere to relevant requirements established by the state of North Carolina. Where the two requirements are in conflict, the more conservative approach shall be taken.

VI. Reporting and Response

a. Documentation and Reporting

All incidents—including accidents and suspected abuse—shall be documented in writing on the Incident Report Form and kept on file. The form is available from the church office.

In the event of an accident or injury, one copy of the Incident Report Form shall be given to the parent or guardian of the affected child, youth, or vulnerable adult.

In the event that an allegation of abuse or misconduct is made against a volunteer or lay leader, a report shall be made to the ministry area leader who shall report it to the Senior

Pastor.

In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against a clergy member or staff person, a report shall be made to the chairperson of the Human Relations Committee.

b. Mandatory State Reporting

All reporting of alleged or actual incidents of child or vulnerable adult abuse must strictly follow North Carolina law. Although there is no obligation for private citizens to report evidence of most crimes, North Carolina citizens have a legal duty to report in the following situations:

- Suspected child abuse or neglect by a parent, guardian, or caretaker *NC G.S. 7B-301(a)*
- Suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult by their caretaker *NC G.S. 108A-2*

A leader who has reasonable cause to suspect that abuse has occurred should secure the safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult (if possible) and then immediately report the incident to appropriate law enforcement.

It is never the responsibility of a leader to investigate allegations of abuse.

c. Response

All allegations shall be taken seriously.

A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child or adult abuse will be initiated following the direction of the appointed clergy in the local church and in consultation with the District Superintendent of the district in which the church is located.

In the case that the alleged incident involves the appointed clergy, the response will be directed by the District Superintendent of the district in which the church is located.

A response will include appropriate pastoral care and support for all involved in the allegation, including the alleged perpetrator(s), alleged victim(s) and their families.

d. Interaction with the Media

In the event that an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Senior Pastor and District Superintendent.

If approached by the media, all others should not comment and instead endeavor to help the media find the authorized spokesperson(s).

VII. Policy Review

A team composed of representatives of age-level ministries, the Human Relations Committee, Property Committee, and Finance Committee as well as others whom they invite to participate in the team's work, shall be responsible for reviewing this policy on an annual basis for relevance and adherence to requirements established by the Western North Carolina Conference. The Management Team of Sylva First United Methodist Church, Inc. is the board responsible for the approval of this policy.

Safe Sanctuaries- Electronic Communications Policy

The internet and portable devices allow people to stay in contact with each other more easily than at any other time in the history of civilization. Some incredible ministry can take place using modern technology, but as with all forms of ministry there are some inherent risks involved with the use of electronic communications. However, following basic Safe Sanctuaries procedures can help to minimize those risks. There is no such thing as privacy on the Internet. Consider anything and everything on the internet as public information. Here are some recommendations:

Receive Parental/Guardian Permission. In addition to general permission to participate in a Sylva First United Methodist ministry, it is advisable to receive advance parental permission for children and youth, and personal permission for vulnerable adults in writing for:

1. Posting photos or videos of participants on any websites or social media platforms or sending them via e-mail, cell phone, or direct messaging platform for any use;
2. E-mailing, Instant Messaging, calling, texting, or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer or cell phone; and
3. The sharing of any full name or contact information.

Never Post Easily Identifiable Information Online.

1. If you communicate by email, do not use "broadcast" emails. Use the "BCC" (blind carbon copy) so that each recipient sees only his or her address when a message is received.
2. Be cautious when transmitting easily identifiable information like event dates, times, locations, or participants.
3. Limit what is communicated in electronic prayer requests. Obtain permission prior to placing anyone on an electronic prayer list especially with sensitive matters.

Limit individual communications with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

1. Conduct any communications in a professional manner. (Even though you may be a sounding board for a person having a bad day, the reverse is not true.)
2. Save all confidential cyber-communications you have with children, youth, and vulnerable adults (i.e., instant messages (IM's) chat room conversations, emails, etc.) to create an electronic paper trail.
3. If you are uneasy about any topic addressed in an email or other message from a child, teen, or vulnerable adult, notify the relevant parent(s)/guardian(s) (if appropriate). Honor privacy, but not secrecy.
4. If abuse is divulged electronically, follow standard reporting procedures.

Safety Measures for Sharing Photos Electronically

1. ALWAYS obtain permission to use photos or videos.
2. When posting photos, refrain from using names and never use last names or identifiable information.
3. Check photos for vulnerable/compromising situations and make sure they uphold your mission.
4. Block "save photo as" options on websites
5. Limit access to photos by employing the use of a password.

Safety Measures for Using Social Networking Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, SnapChat, Instagram, etc.

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1. Set privacy settings to limit who can see your profile, otherwise people may still be able to view your full profile.
2. Restrict who can be your friend. It is prudent to use judgment in accepting requests from youth. Do not send requests, you may accept requests from youth.
3. Use higher level security features even if you have a restricted profile (such as requiring your approval of all comments posted to your site.)
4. Do not post anything to your social networking site that you would not want attached to your resume or printed in the church bulletin or newsletter (the same goes for blogs).
5. Remove or do not post inappropriate comments, photos, etc.
6. Encourage youth to follow these same guidelines.

Policy based on sample policy found at UMC Discipleship Ministries:

http://gbod-assets.s3.amazonaws.com/legacy/kintera-files/safe-sanctuaries/SafeSanctuaries_SAMPLESocialMediaGuidelines3.pdf