



Safe Sanctuaries Policy The Fountains, A United Methodist Church

This policy has been developed for children, youth, and adults for the purpose of reducing the risk of abuse in the church.

Jesus said, “Let the children come to me.” (Mark 10:14) For the church to be faithful in bringing children to Jesus, helping them to develop a personal relationship with Jesus, and teaching them to be disciples, we have to first create a safe place where children, youth, and adults know that an effort has been made to insure personal safety and comfort for all.

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. It is our responsibility to be proactive in our recruiting and training to find people with a gift for caring for children and youth and also to protect those volunteers and paid staff from false accusations. The General Conference resolution affirmed that every local church shall have in place a policy for protecting children.

In June 2008, The Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church passed a resolution mandating that every local church shall have a Safe Sanctuaries policy in place by June 1, 2009. It is critical that we model best practices for the care and protection of children and youth in our meetings and events. In order to do so, we will operate with the following guidelines for their health and safety while participating in programs and meetings of The Fountains, A United Methodist Church (hereafter referred to as simply “The Fountains”).

The goal of these guidelines is threefold: first, to prevent abuse from happening to the children and youth in our care; second, to prevent false allegations of abuse against individuals and the church; third, to enable staff and volunteers to recognize and report suspected abuse.

There is no one thing that we can do to prevent the abuse of the children and youth in our care. A multi-pronged approach that includes annual training, congregational education, and continual practice will provide the best results. This policy is a living document that shall be reviewed and updated annually by the staff.

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1. Group of Three Rule

A child or youth should not be alone with another unrelated adult, child, or youth at any time for any reason. Everything should be done in groups of at least three: at least two adults and a young person, or two young people and an adult. The ideal to strive for is that at least two unrelated adults be with children or youth at all times.

Rationale: Should an adult desire to do harm to a child, it is much more difficult to do so with another witness present. The purpose of a second unrelated adult is to provide a second adult who is not in a position to be intimidated by the first.

A secondary rationale for the Group of Three Rule is to prevent false allegations of abuse. A child or youth seeking revenge for discipline, or perhaps simply seeking attention could accuse an adult or another participant of abuse. With no witness, it is one person's word against another.

Implications: Counseling situations should be managed in a manner that provide privacy of conversation but, if at all possible, visual contact with others. An office with a window into other populated office areas is one option; sitting in an outside area at the edge of a field or building where you may be seen but not heard is another option. At the very least, a door should be left ajar where a yell or struggle could be heard by others. The wise leader will ask another person to stay in visual range to ensure the safety of all involved. The Fountains should take these issues into account when planning new buildings.

Whenever adults are present with children or youth at church sanctioned events plans should be made for two persons to accompany any trips to the restrooms.

At any children or youth events, clearly defined, separate shower times for children, youth, and adults is advisable, with an adult available outside the restroom door to hear any disturbance. A separate shower time is advisable for children unable to shower without parental assistance.

Volunteers and staff need to be alert to their situation at all times so that they're not inadvertently left alone with a child or youth. Child-on-child abuse is also possible, so again, participants should be in groups of at least three at all times.

Youth leaders, teachers and clergy should be careful not to be in a vehicle alone with a youth. Any volunteers transporting youth should arrange their trips so that the first they pick up and the last they drop off are two youth rather than one. At meetings, plans should be made to prevent one youth from being alone with an adult

as parents are picking up or dropping off youth. If it is impossible for a second adult to be present, perhaps another youth and their ride can wait until the last arrives. If this is not possible, the adult should invite the youth to wait with them outside the building where they are at least visible to the public.

2. Background Checks:

Annual background checks should be performed on all staff and volunteers that have contact with children and youth at Fountains' Sponsored Meetings and Events. An unrelated Staff Person should perform the background check on the person who performs the bulk of the checks. The minimum check is of the National Sex Offender Database, available at www.nsopr.gov: Driver's license checks should be made of adults transporting children and youth on behalf of The Fountains; this excludes parents driving their own children and youth to and from meetings or events. Staff and volunteers may be asked not to drive or volunteer with children's and youth events if undesirable results appear on these checks. National Criminal File checks should be performed annually on paid staff who work with children and youth. These checks may be performed at www.screennow.com, through their affiliation with Church Mutual. Background check forms will be made available to all adult volunteers prior to meetings and events.

Rationale: Someone who has been convicted of a sexual offense against children, youth or adults has no place as a volunteer at church events. Further, we desire to not place our children and youth at undue risk by placing them in a vehicle with a driver with recent serious violations on their record. The very act of being asked for a background check may deter a potential abuser from volunteering, or from acting on their desires. Finally, we need to know that the staff that work with our children day in and day out are without a recent criminal background.

Implications: SPRC will designate a staff person who will be assigned to run checks on all volunteers and to maintain those records. SPRC will ensure that checks are performed annually and that problems are reviewed and resolved quickly.

Anyone convicted of child or sexual abuse will be denied the opportunity to work with our children and youth.

DUI's or other serious violations happening within the last decade would be cause to restrict someone from driving children and youth. Likewise, a pattern of multiple continued smaller violations would also be cause for restriction. Lesser issues will be at the discretion of the person performing the checks, in consultation with their superior. The seriousness of these issues could be a consideration in denying a person the opportunity to volunteer.

Privacy of information will need to be at the forefront of those performing the checks. Records will be kept in a secure location, and the person performing the checks will protect the confidentiality of those being checked.

3. Six-month Waiting Period for New Church Members to Volunteer

Persons new to our congregation should wait six months prior to being able to volunteer with children and/or youth. This six month period begins when the person begins regularly attending worship.

Rationale: We do not wish to give strangers immediate access to our children and youth. A six-month waiting period gives the church time to get to know the new members/attendees. It will also deter a potential abuser who wishes to have quicker access to young people.

Implications: Attendance registers can help track the six-month waiting period. If a new visitor expresses an interest in volunteering, explain the policy as part of your system to protect children and youth at church. A possible solution would be to have them paired full-time with a seasoned volunteer during the waiting period.

Gracious hospitality suggests partnering them with another church member who can get to know them and help welcome them during the waiting period.

An exception may be made when a new clergy or staff and their family arrive at the church. At the same time, a strong policy will ask all new staff and volunteers to undergo an annual background check—even clergy, who set the example for us.

A six-month waiting period may seem counter-productive when we struggle to find volunteers. Not yielding to the temptation to immediately use “warm bodies” that show up and want to volunteer will provide an important level for our children and youth.

4. Appropriate Age Difference Between Leaders and Participants

Whenever possible, The Fountains shall follow The Safe Sanctuaries materials recommendation of a minimum five-year age difference between the oldest participant and the youngest leader at all church activities and events.

Rationale: Leaders whose age is within five years of the participants may not exercise appropriate boundaries in their relationships with those in their care. They may not have developed the level of judgment needed to be placed in responsible situations with children and youth. Finally, they may not command the respect of those they are entrusted to supervise.

Implications: The Fountains leadership should work to provide younger volunteers the opportunity to volunteer in situations where this age difference can be maintained.

5. Appropriate Age Range Among Participants

Events should not be planned that include only youth and young adults as participants.

Rationale: While little developmental difference may be observed between a 17 year old and a 19 year old, there is in the United States a vast legal difference. An adult in an intimate relationship with a minor could be charged with child abuse or rape. There is a further discomfort in U.S. culture with high school youth building relationships with legal adults, even college students.

Implications: Recent high school graduates may desire to continue “reliving” their high school youth or camp experiences. The church may be called to help some of these young adults move on to new areas of involvement.

Young adult event participants—some of whom may be out of school and in professional positions—should not be expected to abide by the same rules and curfews as youth participants. It behooves us to honor these young adults by treating them as such. Avoiding events that create these situations will be to everyone’s benefit.

Some meetings and events attended by youth such as Annual Conference will be multi-generational and among unscreened adults. Flexibility and intentionality will be required to enable the youth to participate fully in these events while maintaining safe boundaries for their time at the event.

6. Appropriate Written and Electronic Communication Between Youth and Adults

Written and electronic communications between adults and children and youth should be as open and public as possible. Persons wishing to post information on the internet may do so only with permission of the sponsoring organization.

Rationale: Private conversation between a youth and adult, whether written, texted, e-mailed, phoned, or otherwise sent could signify or be construed as an inappropriate relationship between the adult and the young person. Staff and volunteers may take appropriate photographs and movies of children and youth, but do not have legal authority to post those on-line. Finally, webpages, blogs, social networking sites, etc. about the camp or event that are not maintained by the

sponsoring organization are beyond the Church's control and could confer false information.

Implications: Adults needing to communicate by phone with children or youth about a meeting or similar issue should try to talk to the parents or guardians either at the beginning or end of the phone call; likewise, they should copy electronic communications such as e-mails to the parents. A good strategy is to include several issues in a single message, and copy both youth and adults on the message.

Adults should avoid private communication with individual children and youth where they can't be observed by others (see counseling suggestions in group of three rule).

Church permission forms request permission to use photos of the participants in printed and electronic materials. This does not confer permission to individuals to post pictures on their own websites, myspace pages, etc. Persons that set up pages about camps or events, while usually well meaning, have posted information that is beyond the control of the sponsoring organization. These postings may or may not represent the organization in the best light. Participants, volunteers and staff should covenant to not post information about the camp or event on-line without the express permission of The Fountains.

Volunteers and staff should be aware of what their own "web presence" is. Were an on-line search for their name done by a child or youth, would anything—photo or written word—come up that they would be embarrassed to have a young person see? Are there links from pages they operate that lead to material that is inappropriate for children and youth? Again, we can ask volunteers and staff to covenant to maintain an appropriate web presence.

7. Reporting Suspected or Known Child Abuse or Neglect

We are both morally and legally responsible to report actions that surround suspected or known child abuse. When we suspect that a child or youth in our care has been subjected to abuse or neglect in their home, we should report suspected abuse 24 hours a day at 1-888-SOS-CHILD.

When it is alleged that a child or youth in our care has been subjected to abuse by someone in a church activity, event or related-setting, four contacts should be made immediately. The first is the pastor, youth director, Christian Educator or other designated adult: one of them will contact the local law enforcement authorities; the third is the Superintendent of the district that the incident occurred in; and the fourth is the Conference Communications Director, who will activate the Conference Crisis Communications Team.

Rationale: Our fundamental goal is the protection and well being of the children and youth in our care. Abuse or neglect cannot remain a secret, nor can it be tolerated—if it is, then we are helping to perpetuate it in this and possibly other children or youth. We are not to be concerned about “our getting someone else in trouble”. We are not responsible for the actions of others outside of our realm of supervision. We are however responsible both morally and legally to promptly report actions that surround suspected child abuse.

Implications: Staff and volunteers will need to be trained and resourced in recognizing and reporting signs of suspected child abuse and neglect. Once reported, trained professionals from state agencies or law enforcement will conduct interviews to determine if abuse actually has or has not occurred, and will determine further steps to be taken.

A person making a good-faith report cannot be sued for doing so, and their identity will be kept confidential by those receiving the report. Likewise, we will need a system of recordkeeping and covenants to maintain confidentiality of all parties involved.

If abuse has occurred while a child or youth is in our care, providing the Superintendent and Director of Communications with notification—along with local law enforcement authorities--will ensure appropriate communications among church officials and between church officials and media representatives.

***Suggested Procedures for Implementation follow in the ADDENDUM.

After you have read and understand The Fountains’ Safe Sanctuary Policy please sign, below, and return the bottom portion to the church office.

Cut Here ✂

Sign-Off on Fountains Safe Sanctuary Policy

I have read, understand and will follow the Fountains Safe Sanctuary Policy to the best of my ability. Signed _____ Date _____

Addendum:

Procedures

1. Screening and recruiting

- A. All workers must be interviewed by the Director of Christian Education, Youth Director, or person responsible for the specific ministry. Exempt are occasional volunteers.
 - a. A parent/guardian will be allowed to enter classrooms to give his/her child any necessary assistance.
- B. All adult* volunteer or staff persons who have regular and direct contact with children and vulnerable adults** shall be required to fill out a Background Investigation Consent form which includes:
 - a. Standard contact information
 - b. Voluntary disclosure of past criminal history and allegations of criminal history
 - c. Waiver of confidentiality allowing the church to secure the background checks necessary for the position being sought
 - a) The background check may consist of three reports: the U.S. Criminal Indicator report, the Sexual Offender Registry, and Social Security trace and address locator.
 - b) A current fingerprint clearance card from the state of Arizona will substitute for the background check.
 - c) A Department of Motor Vehicles report may be required for those having driving responsibilities.
 - d) Fingerprinting check can be requested at any time.
- C. During the first year of this policy's implementation staff persons and volunteers will submit to the screening procedures prescribed by this policy. Following the first year, all new applicants and persons who have had a break in service of three or more years, and those with five or more years since their last background check, shall submit to the screening procedures. All forms and reference reports shall be kept as a part of an applicant's personnel file. Information on the release forms and the reports will be protected and stored in a secure location to insure confidentiality.

- D. The staff person in charge of the children's activities and/or their designee is responsible for following up on each application.
- E. References may be followed up in writing or by phone for perspective staff. Detailed notes of conversations will be included in the personnel file.
 - a. Information from references will not be shared with the applicant.
 - b. Oral notification of acceptance is sufficient and no reason will be given to an applicant who is refused approval for work.
- F. Persons shall demonstrate an active relationship with the local church for at least six months before being allowed to be in a supervisory role in children's activities or have references deemed adequate by staff personnel to replace the six month waiting period.

2. Supervision

- A. Minimum training for staff persons and volunteers will include an annual orientation with information regarding this policy, procedures for supervision, as well as information on how to identify and report child abuse. Persons will sign a statement that they understand and will follow the procedures outlined in the policy.
- B. Minimum supervisory standards will include the "two-adult rule." The two-adult rule requires that no matter the size of the group, there will always be two unrelated adults present. An adult "roamer," who moves in and out of rooms, will be used when two unrelated adults cannot be present.
- C. No person shall supervise a group unless he/she is at least 5 years older than the children/youth with which he/she is working.
- D. Each room or space where children are being cared for shall have a window in the door or an outside window with open blinds and the door shall be left unlocked. Activities should occur in open view. Should the activity be an outdoor program or occur in a setting which makes it difficult to comply with this policy, the staff person in charge of the activity shall take appropriate measures to make sure that the setting suits the activity and the children/youth are properly supervised.
- E. Registration materials for activities in which children/youth are taken away from the standard meeting location shall require written permission forms which include pertinent health information in order to participate.

- F. Only person 21 and older with a safe driving record may transport youth and children for church activities.
- G. When taking children and youth home after an event, remember rule of three – i.e. For your own protection – if you transport a child alone record the time and mileage at the start and end of the trip.
- H. For any trip away from the church, Middle school and high school youth who can understand a covenant shall sign a participation/behavior expectation covenant that is explained to the participants at the outset of the program.
- I. Physical contact shall be age-appropriate and done in the presence of other adults in an open area.
- J. An exception to the above is Special Event Nursery coverage. This may be staffed by two persons, ages 14 or older, who are known in the church and one adult rover. Nursery caregivers who are under the age of 18 need to have completed a child care/babysitting training as specified by the Education Committee. Curtains on the glass window must remain pulled open so the nursery and children may be viewed.
- K. Restroom procedures –
 - a. Shepherd should make sure the restroom is unoccupied and safe before the child enters.
 - b. Shepherd will be in Hallway as children need to use restrooms
 - c. Nursery restroom is in the nursery – help as needed.
 - d. A parent of guardian should accompany children under the age of 8.
- L. Medical Treatment and/or Emergency
 - a. A basic first aid kit will be kept in the nursery, the kitchen and the church office. Minor cuts, scrapes, burns, etc. that are treated by the adult volunteer are recorded on an Incident Report form (kept in the first aid kit) and this form will be filed in the Sunday School office. The parent/guardian of the minor will be informed the day of the accident and they will receive a copy of the Incident Report. The parent/guardian will sign the church copy.

- b. In the case of serious injury, one of the adults will stay with the minor and administer first aid and the other adult will call 911 and attempt to locate the parent/guardian. After the emergency is addressed, the incident will be documented by the adults and a copy will be given to the parent/guardian and the church copy will be signed by the parent/guardian and filed.

M. Fire Emergency

- a. In case of a fire, the children/youth will be evacuated by one of the adult volunteers. If the fire is small and it is safe to do so, the other adult volunteer should attempt to extinguish the fire with a fire extinguisher.

3. Response/Reporting Procedures – Reports of abuse are required by law.

Any person who reasonably believes that a minor is or has been the victim of physical injury, abuse, child abuse, a reportable offence or neglect that appears to have been inflicted on the minor by other than accidental means, shall immediately report or cause reports to be made of this information to a peace officer or to child protective services in the department of economic security.

- A. Take steps to protect the alleged victim.
- B. Immediately notify the adult in charge who will immediately notify the pastor.
- C. The incident must be reported to either CPS or the local law enforcement. In the absence of the pastor, the director of education or another designated adult will make the report.
- D. Take notes to record what was said to whom, when authorities were
- E. notified, who was involved, etc.
- F. Do not confront the accused.
- G. Do not contact the family. The pastor or investigating agency will do this.
- H. Act discreetly and maintain confidentiality of all involved. Remain unbiased recognizing that allegations must be fully investigated.

- I. If the accused is an adult staff or volunteer, this person will be suspended from his/her position until the allegations are fully investigated and resolved.
- J. The pastor will designate a single spokesperson who will be the only person to convey information concerning the situation. The privacy and confidentiality of all parties should be protected and information provided only as necessary.
- K. In the event of a case involving clergy, follow the above guidelines *and* the procedures outlined in the current *Journal of the Desert Southwest Conference of the United Methodist Church* under the title 'Policies and Procedures for Dealing with Clergy Sexual Misconduct.' The most current copy is available in the church office.
- L. Pray for the child/youth and his/her family and the accused. Maintain an attitude of prayer throughout the process.

Notes:

**Adult is defined as someone who is 18 years old or older.*

***Arizona law particularly protects "vulnerable" adults. An adult is deemed vulnerable when he (or she) "is unable to protect himself from abuse, neglect or exploitation by others because of a physical or mental impairment." [Arizona Revised Statutes section 46-451(A)(10)]*