

# CHILD and YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

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*“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Matthew 19:14*

April, 2019

As Reviewed by L. Battles 4/8/19

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First United Methodist Church  
Lakeland, FL

**Child and Youth Protection Policy  
April, 2019**

**INTRODUCTION**

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The First United Methodist Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children recognizes that:

*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 states 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, and exploitation. . . occur in Churches, both, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. . . . God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. (Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth).*

Since 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has mandated that each local congregation have a child/youth protection policy ("CYPP").

Coverage under the Conference Insurance Program requires that churches have a CYPP in place. All employees of a local church are required to review and acknowledge their church's CYPP on an annual basis.

Accordingly, First United Methodist Church of Lakeland adopts the following policies for the protection and safety of the children and youth participating in the life of the church.

*The policies set forth below apply to all persons who provide supervision over or have care and custody of children/youth or who come into contact with children/youth in church facilities or church-sponsored activities. Please note that all persons who are employed in, or volunteer for 10 or more hours per month, at any church preschool, daycare, or other childcare program, charter school, VPK, other government-licensed program, or summer camp are subject to additional requirements under Florida statutes or DCF regulations, including Level II background screening, mandatory adult:child ratios, educational certification requirements, and, in some cases, mandatory reporting requirements which are not addressed in this policy*

## I. DEFINITIONS

### A. CHILD / YOUTH / ADULT

Following the model of the public school system:

- A **CHILD** is under the age of 12 years
- A **YOUTH** is anyone at least 12 years of age, but not yet 18 years old or anyone 18 years old or older who is still attending high school.
- An **ADULT** is anyone 18 years of age or older who has finished high school

### B. CHURCH PERSONNEL

For purposes of this CYPP, **CHURCH PERSONNEL** are defined to include the following:

- A **PAID STAFF PERSON** is anyone employed by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. This includes all appointed or supply clergy and all other staff on the payroll of the church.
- A **SCREENED ADULT** is a volunteer or paid staff person who has undergone the church's screening process. A screened adult does not need to be a church member but must have been a regular attendee and active participant in church activities for at least six (6) months prior to undergoing the screening process.

***Exceptions to the 6-month rule:** the spouse of a newly appointed clergy or a transferee from a Florida United Methodist Church congregation, upon verification of screening and participation from the prior church. Screened Adults (volunteers or paid staff) that do not meet the above requirements will undergo a Level II screening prior to serving.*

Church Personnel do not include the following:

- An **ADULT GUEST** is any adult who attends programming or an event as a speaker, observer or special guest in a non-supervisory role for a specific purpose and period of time as determined by the ministry leader. Adult Guests are always to be supervised by two, non-related, screened adults.
- A **YOUTH HELPER** (A youth who age is either below the age of 18 or if 18 or older, is still in high school) may assist in activities involving children and/or youth but must be supervised by at least two screened adults at all times.

### C. CHILD / YOUTH ABUSE

For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse includes any of the following:

- **Physical Abuse:**  
Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
- **Sexual Abuse:**  
Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
- **Emotional Abuse:**  
A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit or attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
- **Neglect:**  
Failure to provide for a child's/youth's basic needs or failure to protect a child/youth from harm.

## II. SCREENING AND SELECTION OF CHURCH STAFF AND ADULT VOLUNTEERS

The Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising of non-appointed church staff. (2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 258.12). The Pastor and the Paid Staff Person(s) or Screened Volunteer(s) in charge of Children's/Youth ministries at the church are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising adult volunteers.

- A. All church personnel who work with the children/youth shall comply with the following Screening and Selection Requirements prior to beginning their involvement with children/youth:
- a. Complete an **Application and Background Investigation Consent Form** (see *appendix I, page 12-13*) with 3 reference checks.
  - b. Receive appropriate clearances from all reference checks and Florida or national background check, as appropriate;
  - c. Undergo personal interview;
  - d. Attend training on current issues of child protection and the church's child/youth protection policies at least once per year;
  - e. Read and sign the **Participation Covenant Statement**, (See *Appendix II, page 14*). By signing, you are agreeing to abide by this Child/Youth Protection Policy.
  - f. Undergo a Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person will be transporting children/youth;
  - g. Undergo a renewed background check every 3 years.
- B. Related Screening and Selection Procedures for the Church:
- a. A designated Paid Staff Member or Member of the SPRC shall interview an applicant and contact the applicant's references.
  - b. A designated Paid Staff Member or Member of the SPRC shall ensure that an applicant submits a background check consent and that an appropriate background check is performed. At a minimum, the background check will include the one offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. (This may be done online at <http://www.FDLE.state.fl.us/CriminalHistory>) and a national criminal background screening. The Conference Department of Ministry Protection offers a criminal background screening program ([www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection](http://www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection)).
  - c. The application, background check consent, documentation of reference checks, interview notes, background check reports, interview notes, motor vehicle screening (if applicable), and signed participation covenant shall be maintained as ***confidential*** files in a locked cabinet where other church records are kept. Access to such files shall be limited to those charged or involved with supervising Church Personnel or involved in determining whether an applicant should be approved to work regularly with children/youth.
  - d. Information gathered about an applicant will be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination, in consultation with the Pastor, SPRC, or Director of Children and/or Youth ministries, as appropriate.
  - e. Anyone whose background check indicates a conviction or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere* for any offense listed in the **Disqualifying Convictions/Arrests** (see *appendix III, page 15*), shall not be approved for working with children/youth. Anyone whose background check indicates a pending arrest for any offense listed in *appendix III* shall not be approved to work with children/youth unless and until the arrest has been resolved in such a way that does not result in a conviction or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere*.

### **III. ONGOING EDUCATION OF ALL PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Annual training shall be required of all paid staff persons and screened adult volunteers who work with children and/or youth.

The training should include at a minimum:

- a. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- b. Current child protection issues.
- c. The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- d. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- e. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
- f. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- g. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

### **IV. SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

#### **A. General Rules**

1. **Two Adult Rule**: Two non-related screened adults must be present at all non-classroom programs or activities involving children/youth. All activities involving children/youth must be supervised by at least two screened adults.
2. **Three Year Rule**: All screened adults supervising children/youth must be at least 3 years older than the age group they are supervising. Adults who do not meet this criteria must be under the direction of a screened adult who is at least 3 years older than the age group.
3. **Six Month Rule**: Adult Volunteers working with children/youth must be a member or regular attendee at church for at least 6 months prior to working with children/youth. Exceptions to the 6-month rule: the spouse of a newly-appointed clergy or a transferee from a FL UMC congregation, upon verification of screening and participation from the prior church. Screened Adults (volunteers or paid staff) that do not meet the above requirements will undergo a Level II screening prior to serving.
4. **Windows/Open Doors**: Each room set aside for children/youth must have a door or wall with a window, half doors, or open doors. Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks. Half doors should be considered for Toddler to Second Grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.

## **B. Supervision of Classroom Activities**

### **1. Crib/Toddler to Fifth Grade**

Two screened adults must be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-5. Where the two screened adults are related a third screened adult must be present. In addition, a designated floating screened adult should periodically check all classrooms. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person. Whenever two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors must remain open and the designated floater must be visible. Children Kindergarten and older are not to be held on any adult or youth laps.

### **2. Grades 6-12**

Two screened adults must be present for all classroom activities involving students in grades 6-12 and where the two screened adults are related a third screened adult must be present. In addition, a designated floating screened adult should periodically check all classrooms. Whenever two screened adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors must remain open and the designated floater must be visible.

## **C. Open Door Policy**

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church should be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

## **D. Check-in/Check-out Procedure**

Programs for infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-5 must have procedures to ensure that children are released only to their parents, guardians, or those adults designated by them. With written permission, siblings age 16 and older will be permitted to check in/out his/her grades K-5 sibling(s) only. Adults responsible for children who are infant through 5<sup>th</sup> Grade should register their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be checked out. Children must be checked in and out for all church programs and activities using current safety protocols and procedures. Picking-up children by unauthorized adults is forbidden.

## **E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities**

At least two unrelated, screened adults must be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Permission from the child's/youth's parent or guardian must be obtained prior to a child's/youth's attendance at a meeting held in an individual's home or any off-site activity.

## **F. Mentoring Programs**

Although mentoring programs inherently promote the development of a one-to-one relationship between an adult mentor and a child/youth, such programs should be conducted in a group setting in compliance with the other requirements of this policy, including that at least two screened adults be present at all times, and that the open door policy is observed. Gift giving should be done on a group basis. Mentors must never serve as a financial resource. The general prohibition on one-to-one communications between church personnel and children/youth is relaxed in the context of mentoring relationships; however, mentors must obtain permission from the parent/guardian regarding the forms of communication a mentor may use in communicating with a mentee. *(For more information, see ministry leader)*

## **G. Counseling of Youth and Children**

In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling of a child/youth would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate screened adult may meet individually with a child/youth with the

knowledge of at least one Paid Staff Member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if they are qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should be considered.

NOTE 2: This policy is not intended to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.

## H. Time Following Group Events

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, two screened adults will remain until the child/youth is picked up. In an emergency, and only with pastoral approval AND the express permission of the parent/guardian, a paid staff member may transport a child/youth home, provided that the transportation complies with the requirements set forth below.

## V. Church Vehicle/Transportation Policies

### A. GENERAL USE AND OPERATION POLICIES

The following policies apply to the use and operation of all Church-owned vehicles and all church sponsored trips using alternative methods of transportation as approved by Church policy:

1. **Definition of Vehicle.** The definition of "vehicle" for the purpose of this policy is any four wheeled, gas, diesel, or battery powered vehicle, including but not limited to bus, sport utility vehicle, pickup truck, golf cart or any other type of utility vehicle.
2. **Vehicle "Check out"/"Check in."** All vehicles must be "checked out" either by the person operating the vehicle or by the person in charge of the trip through the facilities department. All vehicles must be returned to their designated parking areas and "checked in" as soon as possible upon its return.
3. **Keys/Usage Log Books.** Vehicle keys and "Vehicle Usage Log" will be provided to the driver, by the Facilities Administrative Assistant or the Facilities Manager, at the Facilities Office. Keys and the completed "Vehicle Usage Log" must be returned to the facilities department as soon as possible after the trip is completed. The operator shall notate any vehicle deficiencies on the "Vehicle Usage Log".
4. **Only The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, Inc. Programs.** Vehicles will only be used for programs and ministries of The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, Inc. or other United Methodist organizations. Vehicles must be operated by The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, Inc. approved drivers only
5. **Legal and Other Requirements.** The operation, maintenance and usage of any church-owned vehicle shall at all times be subject to the requirements of the most current edition of the Florida Statutes, Chapter 316 and to such additional rules, policies and requirements as the Florida Annual Conference, United Methodist Church, and the Board of Trustees of The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, Inc., may from time to time, enact. The driver and any adult riding as a chaperone, if transporting children or youth, shall meet all requirements of the Child and Youth Protection policy as maintained by The First United Methodist Church of Lakeland, Florida.
6. **Required Operators and Chaperone Personnel; Out of State Trips.** Vehicles shall be used and operated with the required number of operators and any required chaperone personnel. Every church-owned vehicle shall be operated with at least one adult chaperone as a passenger when the bus is being used to

transport children or youth. No vehicle shall be used for any trip outside of the State of Florida, or on an intrastate trip exceeding 500 miles round trip, unless a Conference "Church Trip Form" has been completed and submitted to the Conference office of Ministry Protection, with a copy submitted to the Facilities department. At least two (2) qualified drivers are required per vehicle for trips 200 miles or greater in distance. (Example: If two vehicles are taken on a trip, in excess of 200 miles, 4 qualified people must be listed as drivers).

7. **Per Mile Charges.** Per mile charges for vehicle use are set annually by the Board of Trustees. Rates are set July 1 and effective Jan 1 of the following year.
8. **Number of Passengers.** Church-owned vehicles shall not be operated when the number of passengers exceeds the rated capacity of the vehicle. The rated capacity includes the operator of the vehicle.
9. **Seat Belts.** Each passenger or driver of a church owned vehicle shall wear a properly adjusted and fastened safety belt at all times while the vehicle is in operation.
10. **Cleaning.** Church groups using any church-owned vehicle are responsible for cleaning the interior of the vehicle at the conclusion of the trip. All garbage and personal belongings must be removed from the vehicle and the vehicle must be locked before returning the keys and the completed "vehicle usage log" to the facilities department.
11. **Use of Wireless Communication Devices while the vehicle is in operation.** For purposes of this policy, wireless communication devices (WCDs) means any handheld device used or capable of being used in a handheld manner, that is designed or intended to receive or transmit text or character-based messages, access or store data, or connected to the Internet or any communications service that allows text or voice communications. WCDs include, but are not limited to, cellular and wireless telephones, pagers/beepers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), Blackberries/Smartphone, and other Wi-Fi-enabled or broadband access devices.

WCDs, including WCDs equipped with ear pieces, ear buds, headsets, and/or Bluetooth, shall **not** be used by the driver for any purpose, including, but not limited to, placing or receiving phone calls, sending or receiving text messages, or sending or receiving e-mails, anytime the operator is actively driving a church owned vehicle.

Hands-free GPS (Global Positioning System) systems may be used as long as the device requires no input from the driver while the vehicle is in motion.

12. Any church sponsored trip, transporting children or youth, must involve the transporting of more than one student in the same assigned vehicle. Children or youth participating in a church sponsored trip, requiring transportation, cannot be assigned to a vehicle with fewer than (2) two children or youth.

## **B. REQUIREMENTS SPECIFIC TO TRANSPORTING CHILDREN OR YOUTH**

1. Drivers will be given a written route to follow and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
2. *Youth Drivers* are not permitted to drive themselves or others from church to an off-site church activity. Youth drivers may either meet the group at the location of the church activity or must be transported from the church by adult drivers, using church operated vehicles, in accordance with this policy.
3. Children or youth may only be transported to and from church sponsored events using approved charter services or church owned or rented vehicles driven by individuals approved to operate church vehicles as defined in this policy.

## **C. OPERATOR QUALIFICATION POLICIES**

The following policies apply to the operator of all Church-owned vehicles:

1. **Valid and Current License.** All operators of any church owned vehicle shall be in possession of a valid appropriate State of Florida Driver's License for the vehicle they plan to operate. This includes any required endorsement(s).
2. **Drug Screening.** All operators shall consent to drug screening, either randomly or on request by the Church. All operators shall, if requested by the Church, submit to a drug screen as soon as possible, but no later than 12 hours after any motor vehicle crash involving personal injury or property damage. Any person who fails a drug screen, or refuses to submit to a drug screen as requested by the Church shall be automatically disqualified from operating any Church-owned vehicles.
3. **Age and Experience Qualifications.** No person under the age of 21 years or over the age of 70 is permitted to operate any church-owned vehicle. All drivers must have at least five (5) consecutive years of verifiable licensed driving experience within the United States.
4. **Drivers 21 – 25 years of age.** Drivers between the ages of 21 and 25 are not permitted to drive any church owned vehicle on interstate highways.
5. **Church Qualification Test.** All persons operating Church-owned buses must meet the Church's driving evaluation criteria including safety, equipment, and/or operational tests according to criteria established by the Church.
6. **Insurance Requirements and Driving Record.** All persons operating church-owned vehicles must satisfy the Church's insurance provider's underwriting criteria. The criteria may be amended by the insurance provider from time to time, as appropriate. Copies of these criteria are available to all prospective and current operators by the Church. Any person, who does not meet the criteria for initial qualification or who, after initial qualification, no longer satisfies the criteria shall not operate any Church-owned vehicle. The Church will obtain, through the Conference office of Ministry Protection, a Motor Vehicle Report (MVR) prior to a prospective driver being approved as a qualified driver and will obtain an updated MVR at least annually thereafter. The approved Drivers List is maintained on the Conference website and is accessible to the church staff as needed. It is the responsibility of church approved drivers to report all moving violations, identified in the "Motor Vehicle Driver Guideline" to the Facilities Manager within 72 hours of receiving a citation. Failure to do so could result in the revocation of your privilege of driving a church owned vehicle.
7. **New Driver Application.** All prospective operators shall complete a new driver application. Copies of the application shall be available at the Church office or on the Church website. All drivers must be initially approved by a recommending Program Director or an Appointed Pastor.
8. **Disqualifying Incidents.** Disqualifying incidents that would result in denial or revocation of driver authorization is outlined by the current Florida Annual Conference "Motor Vehicle Driver Guideline" and is subject to change by the Florida Annual Conference.
9. **Policy Changes.** The Board of Trustees may amend these policies from time to time as the Board of Trustees deems necessary or as changes in the law or insurance provider criteria may require. All such amendments may be made with or without prior notice; however, revised policies shall be made available to qualified operators as soon as practicable.

## **VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are Requirements that must be followed and recommended Guidelines. Whenever feasible the recommended Guidelines should also be followed, allowing for the use of discretion and good judgment depending upon the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

### **A. Requirements**

1. There must be at least two unrelated, screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other event where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There must be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present must be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. Church personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same bed, sleeping bag, tent, or room with children or youth, unless the child/youth is an immediate family member of the adult.
4. When children/youth are participating in an event held in one open space, such as the church gym or camp lodge, multiple screened adults may sleep in the same space. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat must carry parental permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care. *(For form, see ministry leader)*
5. When groups are away from the church campus, there must be access to a phone, cell phone, or mobile device.
6. If the outing involves a swimming pool or deep bodies of water, a certified lifeguard should be present onsite or accompany the group. If a certified lifeguard is not available, at least one screened adult who is certified in CPR must accompany the group.

## **B. Guidelines**

In a hotel type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth room.
2. Assignments should be made so that a screened adult room is between two children/youth rooms. Whenever not feasible, the screened adult room should be adjacent to the child/youth rooms.
3. Two screened adults of the same gender as those being checked should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

## **VII. Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups**

All outside groups that use church facilities, with or without a fee, must: agree to operate in compliance with this Child/Youth Protection Policy and to ensure that all of their employees or volunteers have been trained on and agree to comply with this Policy; demonstrate that they enforce screening, safety, and supervision procedures that are consistent with this Policy. Such outside groups must provide documentation agreeing to this requirement. Having an officer of the group sign the Adoption statement of this Policy is acceptable. Church Trustees should monitor compliance in connection with any agreement to allow outside groups to use church space or facilities. Documentation should be maintained with other church records.

## **VIII. On-Line Safety**

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

- a. Church computers that are set up to permit guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic areas and be randomly monitored by staff or screened adults. Controls shall be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.
- b. Church Personnel (as defined in Section I.B above) are prohibited from using the Internet, whether via church computers or personal devices, to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children/youth.

- c. Electronic communications with children/youth should be limited to information about program dates and activities and should be made only by group emails or on the church's official website or the church's public Facebook page, or other social media platforms, of which the parents are aware and have given consent or can access publicly. One-to-one communication with children/youth is generally prohibited. If there are extenuating circumstances that require one-to-one communication with a child/youth, the communication should be made via email or text, on which the parent or legal guardian is copied. (See ministry leader for more information re: Electronic Communications with Children/Youth)
- d. Church Personnel should not "friend" or otherwise initiate one-on-one connections with any unrelated youth/child on Facebook, or similar social media site or platform, or "tag" any photograph of a participating child/youth on Facebook.
- e. Church personnel should not post photos of children/youth participating in church activities on their personal social media sites, websites, or other communication platforms, and shall not post any photos of participating children/youth on websites, social media sites, or other communication platforms hosted/owned by the church without obtaining prior written permission from the parent or guardian. (*For form, see ministry leader*)
- f. No personally identifiable information of participating children/youth should be posted on line or on any social media site. Refrain from using names and do not post a last name, address, or phone number when posting photos.

## **IX. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse**

Florida Statute 39.201, entitled Mandatory Reports states that: *"Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter, ... shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department"*

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for a child's welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or pre-school does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative, and potentially the legal requirement, is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-96 ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

- A. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons may, if appropriate, inform the accused that abuse has been reported. **NOTE:** Follow the advice of the investigating authorities regarding whether the accused may be notified of the allegations.
- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff person of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the appointed clergy or supply pastors for immediate report to the authorities as required by state or local law. If the appointed clergy or supply pastors are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.  
If the accused is the appointed clergy or supply pastor or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of *The Book of Discipline* with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office in Lakeland.
- C. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

- D. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the first priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim’s family.
- E. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
- F. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy or supply pastors should report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop’s office.
- G. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.
- H. Church Personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, they should be at the service of the official investigating agency and law enforcement.
- I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy and supply pastors. NOTE: The Conference Communications Department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

NOTE: The question that sometimes arises is: What about a “confidential communication” with a clergy person?

Florida law (FS 90.505) provides that some specific communications may be considered confidential if they occurred in the context of “seeking spiritual counsel or advice” from a clergy person. Thus, a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the **2016 Book of Discipline**, ¶ 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

In the process of implementing or interpreting this CYP, err at all times on the side of protecting children/youth. The moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children/youth.

**X. Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to implement this Policy, to ensure that training pursuant to this policy is conducted at least annually, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

**XI. Application**

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation -- are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

**Adoption**

This Child and Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the **Staff Parish Relations Committee** of the First United Methodist Church this **8<sup>th</sup> day of April, 2019.**

  
 W David McEntire, Senior Pastor

  
 Ben Coppolo, Chairperson  
 Staff Parish Relations Committee

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH  
APPLICATION AND BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION FORM

|  |
|--|
| DEPARTMENT: _____  |
| REQUESTING STAFF: _____                                  |
| FINGERPRINT REQUIRED: (Check one)                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO |

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize First United Methodist Church of Lakeland (First UMC) and/or its agents to make an independent investigation of my background, references, character, past employment, education, criminal or police records, including those maintained by both public and private organizations and all public records for the purpose of confirming the information contained on my application and/or obtaining other information which may be material to my qualifications for EMPLOYMENT or as a VOLUNTEER now and, if applicable during my tenure at First UMC.

I release First UMC and/or its agents and any person or entity, which provides information pursuant to this authorization, from any and all liabilities, claims or law suits in regards to the information obtained from any and all of the above referenced sources used.

The following is my true and complete legal name and all information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge:

\_\_\_\_\_

|                     |       |        |      |
|---------------------|-------|--------|------|
| Full Name (Printed) | First | Middle | Last |
|---------------------|-------|--------|------|

|                                 |               |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| Maiden Name or Other Names Used | Email Address |
|---------------------------------|---------------|

|                 |           |
|-----------------|-----------|
| Present Address | How Long? |
|-----------------|-----------|

|      |       |          |
|------|-------|----------|
| City | State | Zip Code |
|------|-------|----------|

|                |           |
|----------------|-----------|
| Former Address | How Long? |
|----------------|-----------|

|      |       |          |
|------|-------|----------|
| City | State | Zip Code |
|------|-------|----------|

|                |                        |                         |                |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| *Date of Birth | Social Security Number | Driver's License Number | State of issue |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|

\* NOTE: The above information is required for identification purposes only and is in no manner used as qualifications for employment. Approved by Administrative Board, Oct 24, 2015

**Appendix I Continued**  
**Application and Background Consent Form**  
**Page Two**

Have you ever been charged with, convicted of, or pled guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or a felony (including but not limited to drug-related charges, child abuse, or other crimes of violence, theft or serious motor vehicles violations)?  YES  NO If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever had to deal with a child abuse situation in any way, including being abused, being accused of abuse, knowing someone who was abused, etc.?  YES  NO If yes, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**References:** List three personal references (i.e. people who are not related to you by blood or marriage) and provide a complete address, email address and phone number for each.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_  
Daytime Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Do we have your permission to contact these references as well as anyone else in order to obtain information about you for considering you for a position of one who would work with children and/or youth?  
 YES  NO

Do we have your permission to share this information with those persons who will participate in acting on this application?  
 YES  NO

I further acknowledge this is written notice that my fingerprints (*if required*) will be used to check the criminal history records of the FBI.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix II**

**PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT**

The congregation of First United Methodist Church, Lakeland is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy statement reflect our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of god through relationships with others.

No adult who has been convicted of child abuse (either sexual abuse, physical abuse, or emotional abuse) should work with children or youth in any church-sponsored activity.

All adults involved with children or youth of our church must comply with the stated church’s screening process.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall observe the Child Protection Policy at all times.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the church to keep volunteers informed of church policies and laws regarding child abuse.

All adults involved with children and youth of our church shall immediately report to their supervisor any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please answer each of the following questions:

1. Do you agree to observe and abide by all church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?       Yes    No

I have read this Participation Covenant, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

---

Print Name of Applicant

---

Signature of Applicant

---

Date

## Appendix III

### Disqualifying Convictions/Arrests

FS 435.04., which applies only to employment by a licensed childcare facility, provides useful guidelines regarding the offenses that should disqualify a paid staff person or volunteer from working with children/youth in other non-licensed settings. The list of disqualifying offenses under FS 435.04 includes the following:

1. Any offenses listed in s. 943.0435 (1) (a) 1, relating to the registration of the individual as a sexual offender.
2. Section 393.135, relating to sexual misconduct with certain developmentally disabled clients and the reporting of such sexual misconduct.
3. Section 394.4593, relating to sexual misconduct with certain mental health patients and the reporting of such sexual misconduct.
4. Section 775.30, relating to terrorism.
5. Section 782.04, relating to murder.
6. Section 787.01, relating to kidnapping.
7. Any offense under Chapter 800, relating to lewdness and indecent exposure.
8. Section 826.04, relating to incest.
9. Section 827.03, relating to child abuse, aggravated child abuse, or neglect of a child.

Conviction or pleading guilty or *nolo contendere*, to any of the offenses listed above (or to similar offenses under the law of any other jurisdiction) shall disqualify an individual from a position involving working with children/youth. Conviction or pleading guilty or *nolo contendere* to any other felony offense or to criminal conduct involving minors under Florida law or any similar statute of another jurisdiction should be seriously considered as a factor that would disqualify an individual from employment or serving as a volunteer in a position involving work with children/youth.

Anyone whose background check indicates a pending arrest for any offense listed above shall not be approved to work with children/youth unless and until the arrest has been resolved in such a way that does not result in a conviction or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere*.