

**SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**  
**FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH — TIFTON**  
**(Amended 10/29/2019)**

## I. INTRODUCTION:

1. Throughout the Scriptures, we are taught to provide special care for the most vulnerable among us. In our society, this group includes children, youth and developmentally disabled adults, people who are especially vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Today, the church may be the only place where some people find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to the vulnerable very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our churches. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention.

This policy attempts to do just that for Tifton First United Methodist Church in its ministries to children, youth and developmentally disabled adults.

This policy has a threefold purpose: First, to protect the children, youth and developmentally disabled adults that come to us; second, to protect our Church Staff and Volunteers from potential allegations of abuse; third, to limit the extent of legal liability of our church.

In covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for the protection of children, youth and developmentally disabled adults and for the prevention of abuse in our church. As a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all children, youth and developmentally disabled adults participating in our ministries, as well as all church workers and volunteers.

We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers and volunteers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers and volunteers with children, youth and developmentally disabled adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and methods; we will establish a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to State law; we will be prepared to respond to media inquiries if an incident of allegation occurs.

This Safe Sanctuaries Policy is a "living document" and, as such, will need to be revised periodically. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee, created and described in this policy, is charged with the annual review of this policy and accompanying procedures. Suggestions for revision can be presented to this Committee for approval. Periodic changes made at the Conference level pertaining to Safe Sanctuaries may also be reflected in this local church document. These policies may be modified by Tifton First United Methodist Church at any time.

This policy applies to all programs that are considered a ministry of Tifton First United Methodist Church. In all of our ministries with children, youth and developmentally disabled adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person will be "...surrounded by steadfast love, established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to eternal life." (Baptismal Covenant II, UMH p. 44)

## II. DEFINITIONS

1. "Volunteer" means any person 18 years of age or older who assists in the conduct of activities for children, youth or developmentally disabled adults under the supervision of a Staff person and who will have regular and direct contact with or control over children and/or youth. A person is deemed to have regular and direct contact with children, youth or developmentally disabled adults if the individual is in any leadership or supervisory role such as a teacher, chaperone, driver, counselor, coach, nursery worker, music leader or worship leader.

2. "Worker" means any Church Staff Member or Volunteer.

3. "Helper" means anyone who assists a Volunteer or Staff member in the conduct of any church activity. Helpers are exempt from the screening provisions of this policy but are required to be directly supervised by a qualified Volunteer or Church Staff member.

***4. "Mandated Reporter" is defined by portions of O.C.G.A. 19-7-5 to include 'child service organization personnel', which are further defined as 'persons employed by or volunteering at a business or an organization, whether public, private, for profit, not for profit, or voluntary, that provides care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs, or shelter to children.' Therefore, all church workers (see 2 above) and all church helpers (see 3 above) are defined as mandated reporters, in terms of both state law and church policy.***

5. The "Safe Sanctuaries Administrator" is a church staff member designated by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee to maintain all records related to the Safe Sanctuaries Policy and complete various other duties assigned in this policy.

**6.,** The "Safe Sanctuaries Review Team" is a group of three (3) staff members (Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor and Safe Sanctuaries Administrator) responsible for reviewing volunteer applications and background checks.

## III. SELECTION AND SCREENING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS: 1.

### Volunteer Screening Procedures-

a. Prior to consideration for a position, any volunteer candidate who may be assigned to work with children, youth or developmentally disabled adults shall complete and return a Volunteer Application which includes an Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check.

b. A Background Check will be conducted by an FUMC-selected contact agency

c. The Volunteer Application and results of the Background Check shall be carefully reviewed by the Safe Sanctuaries Review Team.

d. Should the Safe Sanctuaries Review Team have sufficient reason to believe that an applicant poses a threat to children, youth or developmentally disabled adults, and/or the applicant has any prior history of physical or

sexual abuse directed against another person, then such applicant shall be immediately removed from consideration for assignment as a FUMC Volunteer.

e. Prior to beginning work as a volunteer, the applicant must complete an appropriate Safe Sanctuaries review as designated by the appropriate Church Staff member or designee. Upon completing this review, the applicant will be required to sign a Covenant Statement.

f. All completed forms and background check materials are considered "Confidential Materials" and will be maintained in a secure place by the Safe Sanctuaries Administrator. Access to these materials will be granted by said Administrator. A copy of the results will be furnished to the applicant upon request.

g. Drivers who volunteer to drive church vehicles will be designated by the appropriate Church Staff leader. The driver will fill out an Auto Safety Form for each trip, and return it to the Church Secretary or appropriate ministry area staff person. Drivers must be twenty-one (21) years of age, be insured, and have a valid driver's license. No one is allowed to drive church-owned vehicles unless they are listed on the approved driver list, maintained in the church office.

## 2. Employee Screening Procedures-

a. All persons applying for an employee position with children, youth or developmentally disabled adults will submit a FUMC Employee Application which includes an Authorization and Request for Criminal Records Check regardless of position being considered.

b. The Application shall be carefully reviewed by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and/or appropriate church staff members to determine the applicant's qualifications.

c. If the applicant appears to be qualified and appropriate for further consideration, A Background Check will be conducted by an FUMC-selected contact agency. The results of the Background Check shall be carefully reviewed by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and/or appropriate church staff members

d. Should the Staff-Parish Relations Committee and/or appropriate church staff members have sufficient reason to believe that an applicant poses a threat to children, youth or developmentally disabled adults, and/or the applicant has any prior history of physical or sexual abuse directed against another person, then such applicant shall be immediately removed from consideration for employment.

e. The new employee must complete an appropriate Safe Sanctuaries review as directed by the Senior Pastor or designee. Upon completing this review, the new employee must sign a Covenant Statement.

f. All completed forms and background check materials are considered "Confidential Materials" and will be maintained in a secure location by the Safe Sanctuaries Administrator. Access to these materials will be granted by said Administrator. A copy of the results will be furnished to the applicant upon request.

## 3. Updates of Employee & Volunteer Screenings

Church employees and volunteers working in any capacity with children, youth or developmentally disabled adults at FUMC may be required to update their initial application information every five years. All employees and volunteers may be required to submit to a new criminal background check every five years. The Safe Sanctuaries Administrator, in cooperation with the church staff, will review the need for updated background checks on a regular basis.

#### IV. PROCEDURES FOR SAFE MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT FUMC:

1. There should always be at least two unrelated Workers present as often as practical for any church sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children, youth or developmentally disabled adults. When the "two adult rule" is not feasible, a "roamer" will periodically check into rooms and situations where only one supervising adult is present. An example of such a situation would be a Sunday morning when a second teacher is unavailable

2. All events for children, youth or developmentally disabled adults will be open door whenever practical. Each room or space set aside for use by children, youth or developmentally disabled adults shall either have an observation window in the door or wall or the door shall be left open as often as practical. We realize that there are situations where that may not be possible, in the Preschool, working with preschool children, or if you have a "runner" in the VBS classroom.

3. During any counseling session with children, youth, or adults with diminished capacity, at least one of the participants (counseled or counselor) must remain visible from outside the room throughout the entire session. If children or youth request a private meeting, the counseling adult will make all reasonable efforts to have another responsible adult present during counseling.

#### 4. Behavior and Discipline

a. Purpose - The purpose of this section is to ensure that adults should model Christ-like behavior and that children feel confident and secure.

b. Relationships with Children - Adults are reminded to maintain a positive manner when working with children and/or youth. It is the intent of Tifton FUMC to encourage each child to know and grow in Jesus Christ, making each child feel he/she is a gift of God.

Inappropriate misbehavior by children and/or youth should be handled promptly and in a positive manner. Discipline should be fair and sensitive to the group or child. No child will be disciplined by physical force. If the situation warrants, parents should be contacted for help.

While we have no intention of spanking other folks' children, as much as we might wish to at times; there are times when workers have their own children there, and feel that they need to practice discipline consistent with what they do at home. We do not want someone disciplining their own child in an appropriate, non-abusive way, to be in violation of our policy.

5. When entering the Church, a parent, guardian, or other person designated by the parent or guardian should accompany children below the fourth grade level to the designated children's activity area. No child should be left in any church area that is unattended or without proper adult supervision. Any child below the fourth grade level will not be sent to find his/her parents or guardians, or released to await transportation. Workers are to release these children only to parents, guardians, or persons specifically authorized by the parent or guardian to pick up the child.

6. Volunteers or Staff working in any facet of ministries to children, youth or developmentally disabled adults must be at least eighteen years of age. Any person under 18 years of age, serving as a "Helper" must work under direct Adult Staff or Volunteer supervision at all times.

7. It is recommended that any church employee or volunteer be at least five years older than the children or youth group with which he/she is scheduled to work. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of supervisory Staff and/or the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

8. Parents will be notified in advance of any activity other than counseling in which a worker will be alone with a child or youth. Before this event, the parents must give written permission for their child's participation in this event. In addition, parents will be given advance notice and full information regarding any event(s) in which their children and/or youth will be participating.

9. An Off campus Trip Permission Form for each child or youth must be completed and signed before the child or youth will be allowed to participate in a day or overnight off campus trip. Parents/guardians may sign a yearly, "blanket" permission form for Day trips only. A "blanket medical form may be signed. All Off campus Trip Permission Forms will be kept with the worker at all times during the off campus trip. On any overnight event, an effort will be made to include at least two workers of the same gender as the children/youth participating.

10. Additional guidelines for Nursery Staff/Volunteers:

a. Only assigned workers are allowed to remain in the nursery. The only exceptions to this guideline are a mother nursing her child or a parent called to the nursery to calm an upset child.

b. Parents are to sign in their child into the nursery upon arrival. Children will only be released to a parent, guardian, or person previously authorized to pick up the child. 11. Additional Guidelines for Children's Ministry Staff/Volunteers:

c. Children should request permission from workers to go to the restrooms. Children age 5 and under must be accompanied to the restroom by a Worker. Workers should remain outside the restroom. A Worker may enter the restroom to assist the child as needed but the door shall remain open.

12. Additional Guidelines for Youth Staff/Volunteers:

a. At least two adults will supervise overnight activities.

### **1. Rooming for Overnight Events**

#### **A. Purpose**

The purpose of this section is to protect children and the adults who work with them during overnight events sponsored by the church.

#### **B. Requirements**

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. Children or youth of the same sex may room together with one adult or without an adult with written parental consent prior to an event. In situations where family are going, youth may room with a parent or their family unit. A youth may not be in a tent with an adult, unless it is direct family (Brothers, Father-son, Mother-son... Common Sense Prevails!

The UMC recognizes that all humans are of sacred worth and loved by God. We welcome all people in every aspect of our ministries, and wish to both include and protect those whose gender identity or sexual preferences may differ from traditional roles. To that end, any child or youth with transgender identity or nontraditional sexual orientation must be accompanied by a parent or guardian for overnight trips with the understanding the parent and child will occupy a room together. In the event a parent or guardian is not available to attend an overnight trip as pursuant to this section, church leadership or designee and the parent will meet and attempt to create a practical solution which protects the child's interests and provides for privacy for all concerned prior to the trip.

Any adult volunteers with nontraditional gender identity or sexual orientation will be housed in a private room for the same reasons.

b. No adult worker is to date a youth or be romantically or sexually involved with a youth.

### 13. Scouting Groups And Other Outside Groups Using Tifton FUMC's Facilities

#### A. Purpose

The purpose of this section is to provide for operating procedures for Scouting groups and other outside groups using church facilities.

#### B. Procedures for Scouting groups

Although Boy Scout Troop 62, Cub Scout Pack 62, and Girl Scout Troop \*\*\* are youth programs supported by Tifton FUMC, they abide by the guidelines provided by the Boy Scouts of America and the Girl Scouts of the USA. It is understood that these groups have their own Youth Protection Training with procedural and leadership selection policies, and seek to maintain a culture of Youth Protection and awareness and safety congruent with this policy. Since they have their own stringent safety and protection policies in place, and the legality of any scouting event is fully vested in their organizations, they will follow their own Youth Protection Policies. **We do require that they notify the senior pastor if there is any incident where a report is made that happens within their local organization.**

#### C. Other Outside Groups

Other outside groups must abide by Tifton FUMC's Safe Sanctuary Policy. They may provide their own policy for review and approval by the Safe Sanctuary Committee that may allow

them to provide for their own leadership background checks, training, policies, and reporting procedures – if the Safe Sanctuary Committee approves their policy. **We do require that they notify the senior pastor if there is any incident where a report is made that happens within their local organization.**

## V. TRAINING FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

1. All Staff and Volunteer workers with children and youth are required to attend an regular orientation session in which they are informed of:
  - a. Church policies for the prevention of abuse
  - b. Procedures to be used in all ministries with children, youth and developmentally disabled adults
  - c. Appropriate steps to report an incident of abuse
  - d. Details of the Georgia Child Abuse Statute

At this orientation, workers will renew their Covenant Statement to abide by and cooperate with the church's policies and procedures. The church will maintain a master list of Safe Sanctuary Approved Workers. Workers who need to be retrained or have background checks updated will be notified.

## VI. PLAN FOR RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE:

### **Introduction**

The Reporting and Response Plan deals with the actions that are to be taken should accusations of abuse be reported. A quick, compassionate, and unified response to an alleged incident of child abuse is expected. All allegations will be taken seriously. In all cases of reported or observed abuse in a children's activity, the entire staff of that activity shall cooperate with all official investigating agencies and appropriate conference officials.

We recognize the sensitive nature of abuse and alleged abuse. To this affect, church members should refrain from discussing any information with the media and other church members. The church, through the Annual Conference Crisis Team, will appoint a "Church Spokesperson" to address questions from the media.

### **PLANNED RESPONSE TO ABUSE ALLEGATIONS**

- A. Any necessary steps to assure children's safety should be taken. This may include removing a child/children from the threatening situation. The parents/guardian of the alleged victim should be notified, unless the parents/guardian is the accused party.

- B. The accused person should be immediately removed from further involvement with children and/or youth. This is for the protection of the alleged victim, and other children and/or youth, as well as for the protection of the accused person in the event the accusation is unsubstantiated. This should be handled with dignity and respect.
- C. All reports of suspected child abuse must be made immediately to the person in charge of the event, then to the Staff person in charge of the children's or youth activity, the Senior Pastor and/or the Certifying Officer. The Senior Pastor and/or the Certifying Officer will carry out the following procedures.

**Note: Allegations within the FUMC Pre-School**

An alleged incident or report of child abuse that occurs within the Pre-School shall be reported to the Pre-School Director, who will then report to the Pre-School Board and the Senior Pastor.

**Note: Allegations involving the Senior Pastor.**

In all cases where allegations of abuse may involve the Senior Pastor, the Senior Pastor would be exempt from the following procedures, and the procedures would be carried out by the Certifying Officer. In this event, the chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations committee should be the first contact made by the Certifying Officer. The chairperson of the Staff Parish Relations committee will contact the District Superintendent.

**Note: Allegations involving a Staff Member.**

In all cases where allegations of abuse may involve a Staff Member (including all clergy and lay staff), the SPRC is to put the Staff Member on immediate temporary administrative leave with pay, pending the appropriate investigation. This insures the safety of other children/youth, and serves to protect the Staff Member from any further allegations. Document the actions taken, and document the terms of the administrative leave in writing, requesting the Staff member to sign the document certifying his/her comprehension of those actions. If allegations are proven against the Staff Member, then the SPRC Chairperson will work with the District Superintendent and the SPR Committee toward appropriate termination of the Staff Member's employment.

**Note: Allegations involving a Church Volunteer.**

In all cases where allegations of abuse may involve a Church Volunteer, together with another Staff Member or trusted Adult Leader, insist that the Volunteer take a temporary leave of absence from all church functions that include children/youth, pending the appropriate investigation. Document the terms of that agreement in writing. If allegations are proven to be true, require the Church Volunteer to step down from his/her volunteer position and take measures outlined in our Safe Sanctuary Policy to insure that the Volunteer will no longer be unsupervised when around children and youth at and/or during any church sponsored events.

**1. Reporting and Documentation**

The Staff person receiving the report of alleged abuse (including reports within the Pre-School), along with the Senior Pastor and/or the Certifying Officer, will use the "Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse" form (*Appendix \_\_*) to document the incident. All records with respect to each event shall be kept confidential. However, records will be made available to all agencies and persons/parties with a right to know.

**2. Consultation with Annual Conference Crisis Team**

The Senior Pastor and/or the Certifying Officer will immediately contact the District Superintendent and one of the members of the Annual Conference Crisis Team (Bishop, Director of Connectional Ministries, or Director of Communications). The Senior Pastor and/or the Certifying Officer and the Conference Crisis team will consult

to assess the incident, and determine the appropriate comprehensive response to this situation. This consultation will continue as the response is implemented.

3. File oral report with Child Protective Services, within 24 hours. 1-855-GA-CHILD (422-4453). If child is in immediate danger, call 911.  
Other parties that should be contacted, under consultation of the Annual Conference Crisis Team include: 1) proper law enforcement/child protective services, 2) the church's insurance agent, and 3) the church's attorney.

#### 4. Addressing the Media

The Conference Crisis Team will designate the official spokesperson for this incident. This designated person is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the Conference Communications Director, who will provide access to the spokesperson. Those answering phones or receiving in-person inquiries for information will politely refer all those seeking information to the Conference Director of Communications.

**Note:** The following steps will be helpful in dealing with the media when they call:

- Take a written message. (Don't transfer to voice-mail without taking the message.)
- Get the reporter's name, media outlet, direct phone number, and deadline.
- Ask for a topic of the story.
- Explain that the designated church spokesperson will return the call.
- Don't answer questions yourself.
- Be polite, but firm.
- Keep a log or a written record of media calls.

A sample response for those receiving phone inquiries from media representatives: "I want to make sure that we give you the most accurate and up-to-date information. Our *Conference Communicator (or appropriate person)* can best help you. If you give me your contact information, deadline and topic that you're calling about, I'll have that person return your call as soon as possible."

The initial statement of the spokesperson during ongoing investigation of the incident will not assign blame, interfere with the victim's privacy, or violate any confidentiality.

#### D. Pastoral Care for All Parties

Pastoral care and support will be available to all persons involved with the incident. The Conference Pastoral Counselor may be called to assist in providing care. The Conference Sexual Ethics Response Team may be deployed by the Bishop if it is determined that their service would be helpful.

#### E. Diligence

Any and all reports required but not contemplated by this policy shall be made in accordance with O.C.G.A. 19-7-5.

## VII. INTERNET, BROADCAST AND ADVERTISING RESPONSIBILITIES

*Internet, Broadcast, Communications, and Publicity Pictures and Video Recordings in Compliance with Safe Sanctuaries*

1. *The communications of today's world provides the modern church with multiple ways of sharing the life and times of the church family. With that variety, the challenge falls upon the church to use the multiple means of communication in a safe fashion for our children/youth/developmentally disabled adults and for our organization. As already stated, this Safe Sanctuaries policy has a three-fold purpose. At all costs, we seek to protect the children, youth, and developmentally disabled adults who come to us; we also seek to protect our church staff and volunteers from allegations of abuse; and we seek to limit the extent of legal liability to our church. We acknowledge that our communications and advertising are used to communicate the story of our church family. Yet there are individuals who will misuse the technology for personal reasons, possibly leading to the endangering of our young people. Thus we will not intentionally endanger any individual whose well-being is entrusted to us.*
2. *We will offer parents/guardian the opportunity to sign an opt-out form, so their child's photo cannot be used in church media resources (Facebook, website, etc...) and advertising sources (newspaper, TV, etc...). This opt-out form for the children and youth will be an annual document processed at the beginning of the school year in conjunction with the required annual medical forms and blanket off campus trip permission slips.*
3. *Our picture/recording standards are to have visuals that highlight all of our church's age groups effectively and safely. Our published pictures will always be of multiple children (i.e. a choir or singing group) and we will not list the participants' names as captions in any of the pictures.*
4. *Currently, the services of Tifton FUMC are broadcast through a number of outlets. As such, by virtue of attending that worship service, the attendees are yielding their right to privacy and that they have opportunities to appear on the broadcast. If that is a concern, there are places to sit in the sanctuary that will severely curtail being on the broadcast. This situation can be addressed through a meeting with one of our pastors and our technical director. This privacy standard in our broadcasts will be followed as our broadcast ministry grows beyond the current single service.*

## VIII. SAFE SANCTUARIES COMMITTEE

1. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will consist of the following: Senior Pastor, Safe Sanctuaries Administrator, SPRC Representative, Trustees Representative, Staff or Volunteer Program Directors (i.e. Children's Director, Youth Director, Pre-school Director, Activities Director, Christian Education Director), and others as needed, at the direction of the Senior Pastor.
2. The Safe Sanctuaries Committee will review the Safe Sanctuaries Policy on at least a regular basis. Anyone may suggest revisions to the policy by contacting a member of the committee.