

Safe Sanctuary Policy
First United Methodist Church
Presented to the Church council May 7, 2026

People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them, and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is just such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. -Mark 1:13-16

I. Scope of Safe Sanctuary Policy:

A. Application – This policy and its provisions shall apply to all persons, including all paid and unpaid leaders, whether lay or clergy, who have any responsibility for children, youth, or vulnerable persons who participate in any activities or events sponsored by First United Methodist Church, Missouri City (hereafter referred to as FUMCMC).

B. Protection for all – The following policies are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our children, youth, workers, employees, volunteers, and congregation.

II. Definitions

Child: In the United States, this term is commonly used to identify anyone age eleven or younger.

Youth: Anyone not a “child” and under the age of eighteen (age of legal majority).

Adult/Leader: Anyone who has reached the age of legal majority and has finished high school.

Vulnerable person: A person whose ability to protect themselves from violence, abuse, or neglect is significantly impaired through social, physical, or mental disability or illness.

Paid staff person/leader: Someone paid by the church, overseen by the staff/pastor parish relations committee, and screened according to the church’s Safe Sanctuary policy and any additional required personnel screening.

Unscreened adult: Someone who has not been screened. The individual may work in a room with a screened adult or a screened paid staff person. He or she should never be alone with children, youth, or other vulnerable people. Unscreened adults may or may not be church members, but they must be regular attendees and active in the church for at least six months. Use of unscreened adults should be an exception rather than a normal practice. *Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge in special situations.*

Screened adult: A volunteer who has gone through the screening process involving a criminal background check, reference check, and possible risk reduction training.

Youth helpers: People under the age of eighteen who are assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities, but should not be considered adult volunteers and should always be supervised. Youth helpers should be at least three years older than the children or youth they are helping. A youth helper will normally be considered “unscreened.”

In situations concerning infants through 5th graders, youth aged 16-18 can be considered the second adult when the first adult is twenty-one (21) years of age or older. For example, in the Nursery caring for toddlers aged three and under, it is acceptable for the first caregiver to be 25 years old and the second caregiver to be 17 years old.

Roamer: A Safe Sanctuaries-trained/screened adult leader who meets the minimum age requirements as defined in

this policy and moves throughout the facility to provide additional oversight and supervision during activities.

Ministry supervisor: A screened individual, staff, or volunteer, responsible for a particular ministry with oversight of the leaders in that ministry.

Physical abuse: Violent, non-accidental contact that results in injury.

This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns. Any act that endangers a person's physical well-being. In the case of child or youth physical abuse, this definition includes any intentional physical injury. Physical abuse may result from punishment that is overly punitive or inappropriate to the individual's age or condition. In addition, physical abuse may result from purposeful acts that pose serious danger to the physical health of a child or youth.

Sexual abuse: Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth/other vulnerable person, whether at the church, at home, or any other setting.

Child or youth sexual abuse is the sexual exploitation or use of a child or youth for the satisfaction of sexual drives. This includes, but is not limited to: 1) incest, 2) rape, 3) prostitution, 4) romantic involvement with any participant, 5) any sexual intercourse, or sexual conduct with, or fondling of any individual enrolled as a child or youth in FUMCMC-sponsored activities, 6) sexualized behavior that communicates sexual interest and/or content.

Examples include but are not limited to: displaying sexually suggestive materials, making sexual comments or innuendo about one's own or another person's body, touching another person's body, hair, or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing, and sexual intercourse. (#6 taken from Resolution #36 Book of Resolutions 2004).

Emotional abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child's/youth's/other vulnerable person's spirit and attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

Neglect: When a person with responsibility for a child, youth, or other vulnerable person fails to care for that individual's physical and/or emotional needs.

II. Creating A Safe Environment

A. Appropriate Discipline – Children or youth should be made aware that appropriate behavior is expected at all church events. Gentle reminders are always necessary when dealing with children and youth. When these reminders don't work, then discipline needs to move to the next step. In no case is physical discipline an appropriate measure to deal with problems. A reasonable response might include a period of "time out" for the child or youth. This should be done with necessary supervision, keeping the safe sanctuary policies in mind. Keeping parents/guardians involved is important. They need to be kept up to date on the behavior of their child or youth. For serious offenses, the appropriate response may be to send the child or youth home immediately.

B. Appropriate Physical and Emotional Boundaries – Physical boundaries are important to consider when working with children or youth and should be respected by youth, children, and adults. Emotional boundaries are equally important. It is important for all persons to maintain appropriate boundaries for the safety of all. It is important for the person in authority to be wary and to steer clear of inappropriate talk. When a volunteer recognizes that there might be an issue with any boundaries, the volunteer and participant in question should be separated, and it should be reported to the leader of the program or a staff person.

C. Creating a Safe Physical Environment – Only an adult who is either a parent, grandparent, guardian, or conservator of a child/youth attending and/or a Safe Sanctuary trained leader/assistant leader is allowed in rooms where child/youth programming is taking place. An exception would be an adult who is making a presentation but does not have responsibility for the children/youth. Appropriate measures should be taken to ensure the safety of children/youth regarding physical surroundings.

III. Plan for Reducing the Risk of Abuse or Incident

A. Requirements for Serving as Paid and Unpaid Leaders, Youth Helpers, and Childcare Providers.

1. At least 21 years old. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
2. At least three years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
3. A regular attendee at FUMCMC for at least six months. Exceptions can be made for spouses of staff members, for persons who were active in a previous church, for Vacation Bible School, and for some off-site activities. Other exceptions will be allowed only with consultation and approval from the pastor or staff member in charge.
4. Paid and unpaid persons serving with children and youth are required to review the FUMCMC-approved safe sanctuary policy accessible on our website (fumcmc.org/safe) and may be required to complete the TAC conference Safe Sanctuary training and quiz.
5. Two or more adults shall supervise any child or group of children and youth. The "two adult" rule will be a core value for all settings for children and youth. It is recognized that there may be cases where this is not practical and that these instances will be reviewed on an individual basis and a decision made by the staff member in charge of the ministry area sponsoring the event. For example, the second adult teacher in a children's Sunday School class is ill. The Director of Children's Ministry may decide that the adult teacher of the class may continue class with the door open, and the Director will check on the class from time to time.

B. Ministry Supervision Guidelines for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable People

1. Whenever supervising activities involving children and youth at FUMCMC:
 - a. At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present.
 - b. Children, youth, and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent or legal guardian or people authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
 - c. Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.

- d. One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all. The pastor, parent or guardian, or another screened adult should be aware of any such interactions.
 - e. Activities with children, youth, and other vulnerable populations should be publicly accessible. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced, as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
 - f. All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
 - g. Windows will be kept free from adornment.
 - h. If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
 - i. For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.
2. Whenever FUMCMC transports children, youth, or other vulnerable people away from the church campus:
- a. No youth should drive to/from events.
 - b. An adult should never transport a child/youth/other vulnerable person alone.
 - c. Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
 - d. Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

C. Screening for Paid and Unpaid Leaders, Assistant Leaders, and Childcare Providers

1. Application/Consent Forms – Prior to employment or acceptance as a leader or assistant leader, or childcare provider (paid or unpaid), the staff person in charge of an event or program shall direct each prospective applicant to complete the application/consent forms portion of the FUMCMC-approved safe sanctuary policy. By signing the forms, the applicant gives permission to FUMCMC to perform the necessary investigation to complete the review of the application. Any physical application/consent forms will be kept in a locked file cabinet.

2. Criminal Records Check – A criminal background check will be conducted by the relevant staff person and must be completed before the beginning of service and yearly thereafter. This will be sent via email for the applicant to complete. Upon completion, it is the responsibility of FUMCMC to notify the applicant of cleared or uncleared status. No exceptions will be made.

3. Results of Background Check – All information generated in this process shall be maintained in strict confidence. The determination of whether a particular crime is serious enough to result in FUMCMC giving a negative recommendation shall be made by FUMCMC in its sole discretion. If a background check comes back with concerns raised by the company about the applicant, the following steps will be taken:

- a) The company that ran the background check will be contacted by the staff person running the report and asked to investigate the concern further.
- b) All conversations and communications will be documented.
- c) If questionable results come back from the background company, the Senior Pastor and the staff person who ran the background check will meet with the applicant, who will be given the opportunity to respond to the concern, being careful to use open-ended questions.
- d) The applicant will be asked to respond in writing to the accuracy of the report.
- e) The Senior Pastor will then consult with the church attorney to determine what action, if any, is needed.
- f) Without in any way limiting those crimes which FUMCMC may determine to be serious, the following examples are offered as guidelines: Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses or charges pending shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry with children and youth.

- Child abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual or neglectful.
- Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
- Persons having a criminal history of a drug-related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application.
- Persons having a criminal history of DUI or DWI conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.

D. The Use of FUMCMC Facilities by Outside Groups

Each group requesting the use of FUMCMC facilities will be required to read our Safe Sanctuary policy and submit the signature page prior to using said facilities. The signature page will require a signature from an authorized representative of the group, agreeing to the fact that they have read the Safe Sanctuary policy and that they will comply with it.

If the group is having children, youth, or vulnerable people in attendance, then there must be at least one screened adult present in each room where children, youth, or vulnerable people are present.

E. The Use of FUMCMC Facilities by the Methodist Day School

The Methodist Day School of FUMCMC is licensed by the Texas Health and Human Services. Its operation is governed by the Minimum Standards for Licensed Childcare Centers and will be held accountable to meet these standards, as well as standards required by the local Fire and Health Department to ensure a safe environment for children.

All staff and volunteers must complete a background check and review and sign the FUMCMC-approved safe sanctuary policy accessible on our website (fumcmc.org/safe)

IV. Action Plan for Response to Suspected or Alleged Incident

Conduct that is abusive or inappropriate according to this policy should be reported immediately.

Texas Law requires that suspected abuse or neglect of a child be reported to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

Anyone who suspects abuse should report the event to an appropriate FUMCMC staff person or person in charge, who will then:

A. Provide Emergency Care for the Victim

1. Notify parents and/or guardians of the child/youth in question.
2. Provide emergency healthcare as needed. The care and safety of victims is the first priority.
 - a. First Aid
 - b. Emergency Services
 - c. Hospital Emergency Room
3. Arrange for crisis counseling/therapy and/or long-range counseling where deemed appropriate.

B. Secure the Area

1. Maintain the integrity of the area and protect all evidence for the professional investigation.

2. Separate all parties involved.

C. Assist the Victim and Victim's Family

1. Take all allegations seriously and do not prejudge the situation.
2. Offer and provide pastoral resources as needed.
3. Provide care and support as appropriate to prevent further hurt.

D. Deal with the Accused

1. Remove the accused from any further contact with children, youth, and staff.
2. Treat the accused with dignity and respect:
 - a. Do not confront the accused until the safety of the child or youth member is secured.
 - b. Offer and provide pastoral care to the family of the accused as appropriate.
 - c. Refer to outside clergy if deemed more desirable or as requested by the family.

E. Determine Communication Goals

1. Notify legal authorities as required.
 - a. Report incident to Children's Protective Services (Fort Bend County Rosenberg office at 281.341.7753; or TX State office at 1.800.252.5400).
 - b. Cooperate fully with civil authorities under the guidance of the church legal counsel.
2. The Senior Pastor or designated representative will be informed of all details of the incident and will release any information that is to be disseminated to the media.
 - a. Immediately contact the church's insurance carrier.
 - b. Inform the FUMCMC Board of Trustees, Church Council, and church legal counsel.
 - c. Inform Church staff of the incident on a "need to know" basis to ensure privacy of the victim and/or accused and enlist their support as needed.

F. Document Actions Taken

1. Document all your efforts at handling the incident within 24 hours.
2. Do not attempt an in-depth investigation.
 - a. This should be left to professionals who are familiar with this type of case. This is to protect the rights of the victim and the accused.
 - b.
3. Individual files will be kept documenting all actions, conversations, etc.
4. Files will be retained in a locked and secure area to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

V. Policy Administration

1. Safe Sanctuary policies for the church will be managed and overseen by the church staff and Church Council.
2. Appropriate staff members will be responsible for implementing this policy.
3. Safe Sanctuary policy changes may only be made with the approval of the Church Council.
4. When changes have been approved by the church council, an updated version of the policy will be sent to the conference office.

Safe Sanctuary Policy Signature Page

Attached, you will find the Safe Sanctuary Policy for FUMCMC. Please review this policy carefully. A copy of this policy is kept in the church office and can be found online at fumcmc.org/safe.

*Outside group leaders, it is your responsibility to read and incorporate the policy in your group meetings and activities.

Thank you!

I acknowledge that I have received, read, and understand the information in the Safe Sanctuary Policy. I clearly understand that FUMC MC may change or modify these policies and procedures at any time and without notice.

Ministry area or outside group name: _____

*Outside Group Leader/Representative name: _____

I am over the age of 18: Yes / No

Applicant Name (Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Email (for background check form to be sent): _____

Phone Number: _____

If under the age of 18

Parent or Guardian Name(Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____