

Safe Sanctuary Policy ⁽¹⁾

Safety Policy of
First United Methodist Church, Grove, Oklahoma
for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults

Introduction

Jesus said, "Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes me." (Matthew 18:5) He also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones...it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea" (Matthew 18:6) Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to those who cannot protect themselves.

In response to this call and action of the 2003 Oklahoma Annual Conference, we hereby commit ourselves as a community of faith to this policy of safety for children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Purpose

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Safe Sanctuary Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to create within our ministries a "safe sanctuary" that will foster healthy growth and development in spiritual and other dimensions as we have opportunity to provide ministry.

Statement of Policy

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and an Oklahoma United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults as well as all those who work with them. It is our policy to:

- Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers;
- Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events;
- Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury;
- Provide workers with adequate training regarding the implementation of our policy, procedures, and preferred methodologies;
- Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf;
- Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policy and procedures;
- Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm, or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law;
- Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following all incidents of harm, injury, or abuse;
- Regularly review our policy and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards.

Conclusion

In all of our ministries with children, youth, and vulnerable adults, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each person is "surrounded by steadfast love,...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II, *United Methodist Hymnal*, p.44).

Procedures for the Implementation of the Safety Policy for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults of First United Methodist Church, Grove, Oklahoma

(Policy statements below are in bold type and numbered procedures describe how policy will be implemented)

Follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers:

1. Leaders of children, youth, or vulnerable adults will have been active with their peers in the life of this congregation for at least six months prior to their taking leadership responsibilities in our ministries.
2. Every person, staff or volunteer, working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will complete an application form, provide three non-family references to their character and relational skills, and submit to a formal background check.
3. All applications and background checks, whether for volunteer or paid staff, will be kept confidential and in the Senior Pastor's office. This information will be reviewed and updated at least every four years as recommended by the Oklahoma Conference of the United Methodist Church.
4. All workers shall enter into Covenant to adhere to this policy and procedures.

Implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events:

1. At least two adults will be present for all activities, programs, and events for children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Leaders should never be alone, one-on-one, with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult in an isolated or closed situation.
2. When planning activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults, the following ratios shall be used as guidelines. Rare exceptions may be approved by the Senior Pastor in circumstances where attendance cannot be pre-determined (i.e. Vacation Bible School, youth rallies, etc). *HERITAGE Childcare and Preschool will follow DHS guidelines for adult-children ratios.

a. Nursery and Toddlers	1 adult to 4 children
b. Preschoolers and Kindergarten	1 adult to 6 children
c. Elementary	1 adult to 8 children
d. Youth	1 adult to 10 youth
e. Vulnerable Adults	1 adult to 12
3. Youth workers are welcome to serve as assistants under direct adult supervision with the leader's permission providing that the young person is at least four years older than the age-group with whom he or she will work.
4. If there are not two adults per classroom, a hall monitor will check with leaders and offer assistance as needed during activities, programs and events.
5. Parents will be informed of details and will be asked to give permission for children and youth to participate in ministry activities that take place away from the church. Parents will be asked to sign a release of liability form for the event. Leaders will see that parents are informed of any changes made in plans otherwise published, even at the last minute. (see attached forms)
6. Youth are required to sign a covenant of expected behavior prior to all off-premises events. (see attached form)
7. Volunteers providing transportation for programs, activities, or events for children, youth or vulnerable adults will:
 - a. Hold a valid driver's license,
 - b. Not have more than two moving violations in the past year,
 - c. Use a vehicle in good mechanical condition,
 - d. Carry no more people than can be secured in seat belts or appropriate restraints.
 - e. Adhere to the traffic laws of State of Oklahoma and all other jurisdictions where operating a motor vehicle.
8. Nursery workers will follow sanitary procedures when changing diapers and caring for toilet needs of children.
9. Sick children will be removed from nurseries and classes to avoid exposure of others.

10. Only adult leaders (non-students) can move or set up TVs, projectors or other heavy equipment. Any such moveable equipment must be securely attached to its conveyance (e.g. TVs belted or bolted to cart).
11. Children will be under supervision anytime they are in the church building or on the playground. When official childcare is not provided, parents are expected to provide supervision at all times.
12. At least two people should accompany children to the playground area to provide supervision of whom one must be an adult.
13. Emergency exit plans are posted in each area of the building. Also posted are instructions for tornado safety. These plans are reviewed regularly with parents, leaders, teachers, and caretakers of vulnerable adults.

Conform our facilities to meet reasonable safety standards to reduce risk of harm or injury:

1. Every classroom and office door will have a window providing a view of the interior. At Senior Pastor's discretion, an exception may be made when counseling non-vulnerable adults.
2. Trustees will regularly check facilities for safety hazards.
3. Toxic materials, including cleaning and other supplies, will be stored in locked facilities well out of the reach of children, youth and vulnerable adults.
4. Electrical outlets in the children's wing, classrooms, and other areas frequented by children will be covered when not in use.
5. Playground areas will be checked regularly for dangers.

Provide workers with adequate training regarding the implementation of our policy, procedures, and preferred methodologies:

1. Before taking responsibility for children, youth or vulnerable adults, workers will attend an orientation where policy, procedures, and preferred methodologies will be reviewed.
2. Annually there will be opportunities to update and improve knowledge and skills useful in our ministries. Volunteers and staff are expected to take advantage of these opportunities.

Provide adequate supervision and support for workers as they are in ministry on our behalf:

1. Leaders and teachers will work in pairs whenever possible. When this is not possible, a designated person will be responsible for occasionally observing an individual at work, checking with them about needs, offering affirmation and suggestions for improvement.
2. Leaders and teachers will know to whom they can go for assistance whenever it is needed.
3. Leaders and teachers will be recognized and affirmed by the congregation on an annual basis.

Educate parents and others in our congregation as to our policy and procedures:

1. Policy and procedures pertinent to a specific area will be posted in an easily accessible location (for example, nursery policy will be posted outside the nursery door).
2. All policy and procedures will be available to anyone interested. Copies will be kept in the pastor's office and the church library and on our web site, www.groveumc.org <<http://www.groveumc.org>>.
3. From time to time throughout the year, portions of our policy and procedures will be published in our newsletter or distributed in our worship services.

Have in place a clearly defined procedure for reporting instances of injury, harm or abuse that conforms to requirements of state law:

1. Any instance of injury, harm, or abuse that occurs in the context of any of our ministries with children, youth or vulnerable adults, will be reported immediately to the Senior Pastor and/or the Lay Leader. Any incidence of such injury will require the completion of the appropriate form that will be kept on file in the pastor's office. Any instances involving clergy will also be reported to the District Superintendent. (see attached forms)
2. Suspected abuse of any kind is to be reported immediately to the Department of Human Services hotline, 800-522-3511, as required by state law.

Respond with compassion and integrity to needs as they present themselves following all incidents of harm, injury, or abuse:

1. When instances of injury, harm, or abuse occur, the Senior Pastor, Lay Leader or other congregational leaders as deemed appropriate for the situation, will take the lead in determining the need for ministry and will coordinate its implementation.
2. Those whose needs should be considered:
 - a) the alleged victim and his/her families
 - b) the alleged perpetrator and his/her families
 - c) the members and others active in the ministry of our church
 - d) persons serving in the same or similar ministries as the accused
 - e) our church at large and the general public
3. The Senior Pastor or Lay Leader, working in concert, will act as official spokespersons for our congregation with the community and the media.

Regularly review our policy and procedures to assure that they conform to current legal, health, and safety standards.

1. Annually the Church Council will conduct a "Safety Audit" to assess adherence to our safety policy and procedures.
2. When the need arises, the Church Council will convene a Safety Task Force to bring our policy and procedures up to date. This task force should include representation from the Board of Trustees, the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, the Committee on Lay Leadership, parents of children and youth, workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults and others with knowledge, skills, or expertise that will assist the task force in doing its job effectively.
3. Annually the Board of Trustees will assess our insurance coverage.

(More detailed procedures may need to be developed for nursery care, playground use, field trips or excursions, transportation or bus/van use, evacuation or tornado safety, or building use.)

Definitions:

Activities: any activity or program in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Children: persons from infancy to 11 years of age, or not having completed 5th grade.

Youth: persons from 12 years old to 18 years of age, or in grades 6 through 12.

Adult: persons 18 years old or older.

Vulnerable Adults: persons at least 18 years of age with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

Staff: persons employed by the church, responsible for activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Volunteers: persons at least 18 years of age who assist in conducting activities under the supervision of a staff person.

We, Our, or Church means the First United Methodist Church, Grove, Oklahoma