**First Methodist Church**

**Amarillo, Canyon, Online**

**Safe Sanctuary Policy**

Throughout the gospels, Jesus provides teachings on providing a peaceable kingdom for all of God’s people, including our most precious gifts, our children and youth (Matthew 5:9, Luke 18:15-17). The peaceable Kingdom begins with sanctuary.

Scriptures provide examples of how sanctuary is to be a community of protective nurture and harmony (Psalms 20:1-2, 27:4-5). As followers of Christ, we are called to create a safe sanctuary in our churches. They must be holy, safe, and protective communities for all of God’s children, regardless of age or ability. The purpose of this policy is to address the safety of our children and youth at our church.

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes a child…. welcome me.” (Matthew 18:5) Children are our present and our future, our hope, our teachers, our inspiration. They are full participants in the life of the church and in the realm of God. Jesus 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 directs us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children.

**Mission of the Safe Sanctuary Policy**

First Methodist Church, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, pledges to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as all workers with children and youth.

In our ministry with children and youth, we as a congregation are committed to demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ so each individual will be “…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, pg. 44).

The following policy and procedures are not based on a lack of trust in workers, but are intended to protect our preschoolers, children, youth workers, employees, volunteers and the entire church body. Careful and confidential documentation is essential to show compliance with policies, to verify information as needed, and to have an accurate record in the case of an incident.

**Definitions for Supervision**

* A **Childcare Provider** is someone that is eighteen (18) years of age or older.
* A **Junior Childcare Provider** is someone between the ages of 14 & 17 who work within the children’s department.
* A **Leader** is someone who is twenty-one (21) years of age or older.
* An **Assistant Leader** is someone eighteen (18) years of age or older, who is supervised by a leader.
* An **Adult** is anyone over the age of eighteen (18).
* A **Youth** is anyone from the 7th grade to the 12th grade in school.
* A **Child** is anyone from birth, to the end of the 6th grade in school.
* The **“Two-Adult “Rule** refers to no fewer than two adults (18 yrs. or older) present at all times during any church-sponsored program, event, or ministry involving children or youth.

**Supervision**

To achieve compliance with the Safe Sanctuary policy it may be necessary to combine groups; recruit, train, and reference additional volunteers; or cancel an event. Recognizing that there is safety in numbers, children and youth will be instructed to use the “buddy system.” There should be present at least one Leader who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at all Conference and District events.

Supervision for Nursery/childcare:

* There shall be a minimum of two (2) Childcare Providers per room.
* We recommend that whenever possible State Childcare Minimum Standards shall be followed, particularly in relation to the number of Childcare Providers to child ratio.

Supervision of children and youth:

* All events shall observe the “2 Leader Rule” (2 leaders per classroom or 2 leaders within line of sight when outdoors.) at all times. Exceptions can be handled on a case-by-case basis.
* An exception to allow 1 Leader and 1 Assistant Leader may be made with the approval of the event Leader on a case-by-case basis.
* There should be at least one Leader, Assistant Leader, or Childcare Provider who is trained and certified in First Aid and CPR at any event where a youth or child will be participating in activities.
* Any one-to-one mentoring, consulting, or individual prayer with children or youth shall not be conducted “behind closed doors” or in an isolated area out of sight of another Leader. No one-on-one meetings in the building.
	+ Best Practice: Public meeting places
* Understanding that there is safety in numbers, one Leader can be in contact with groups of three or more Youth (7th-12th grade) so long as they are in line of sight of other Leaders.
* If both boys and girls are participants, then the Leaders shall also include both men and women.
* Unauthorized visitors will not be allowed to remain at the event.
* Children fourth grade and younger will not be allowed to leave a designated event or room unless a parent or guardian accompanies them as they leave.
* Youth participants in an event will not be allowed to leave a designated event early without the permission of a parent or guardian.
* **No Leader, Assistant Leader, or Volunteer will be allowed to have a dating relationship with a youth or child.**

**Supervision for Offsite and Overnight Children or Youth Activities**

* At least two (2) Leaders present with every group.
* If both girls and boys are participants, then Leaders and Caregivers must include men and women.
* Male and Females must sleep in separate spaces.
* Adults, children, and/or youth will not share sleeping spaces (bed, blankets, sleeping bags, etc.)

**Driving for Children or Youth Activities**

* The driver is **25 or older for the bus, 21 or older for a van** and accompanied by another adult (**18 or older**).
	+ Two drivers (25 yrs. or older) is preferred at all times, necessary for out of town trips.
* The drivers must provide a copy of their driver’s license and insurance to Lead Pastor.
* They must have a clean driving record.
* Any trip needs to include at least one adult that is CPR/First Aid trained

**Procedure for becoming a Volunteer in Ministry with Children/Youth**

 The following forms will be filled out completely and signed:

* Driver’s Background Check Form – all sections under Driver 1 must be filled in to the best of your knowledge
* Consent to Criminal History Background Check Form – all blanks must be completed
* Complete First Methodist Leader Information Form
* Agreement to Follow Policy and Procedure Form

**SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

 Social media is an important part of a student’s life and a great ministry tool.  In order to maintain

 a safe and healthy online environment the follow guidelines have been established.

* The youth minister and leaders are welcome to accept “friend” request from students for their personal social media page.
* We recommend that the youth minister and leaders send a “friend” request to the parents of students that they follow on social media.
* “The Uprising” social media pages will be the primary locations that information is shared.
* Leaders will be careful not to communicate with students via private messages without the student’s parents having knowledge of their communications.

Abuse Prevention Training must be completed within 10 days of receipt of this packet. Follow the instructions on the included Safe Sanctuary Training Registration page.

Packets will be handed out during an informational meeting held prior to the start of semester activities. Policies and expectations will be given at this time. These meetings will include but are not limited to: planning activities, evaluating current activities, setting goals, reviewing policies and procedures, discussing appropriate disciplinary actions that may be needed for children, youth, or volunteers. Meetings can be called at any time to discuss issues or changes.

Persons having a criminal history of any of the following types of offenses shall not be allowed to serve in any ministry:

* Child Abuse, whether physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful
* Violent offenses, including murder, rape, assault, domestic violence, etc.
* Persons having a Criminal History of DUI or DWI conviction within the ten (10) years immediately prior to application shall not be allowed to act as a driver.
* Persons having a Criminal History of a drug related conviction within the five (5) years immediately prior to applications shall not be allowed to participate in ministry.

First Methodist Church will observe the **“6 Month Rule”.** This rule states that in order to be a volunteer holding a leadership position (meaning never left in charge or alone), you must be an active participant at First Methodist Church of Canyon, Amarillo or the West Texas A&M Wesley Foundation for at least six (6) months prior to holding a position as a supervising **Leader**.

**Definitions of Abuse**

* **Verbal Abuse** is any verbal act that humiliates, degrades, or threatens a Child or Youth.
* **Physical Abuse** is any act or omission that endangers a person’s physical or mental health. In the case of physical abuse of a Child or Youth, this definition includes any intentional physical injury caused by the individual’s parent, guardian, leader, or caregiver. Physical abuse may include but is not limited to any non-accidental injury to a child under the age of 18 and may include: beatings, bruises, welts, shaking, burns, bites, strangulation, or broken bones.
* **Sexual Abuse** is the sexual exploitation or use of a Child or Youth for the sexual gratification of another person. It includes but is not limited to: intercourse, sodomy, oral-genital stimulation, verbal stimulation, exhibitionism, fondling, rape, prostitution. Behavior that communicates sexual interest is also not acceptable. Types of this behavior may include social networking, email, displaying sexually suggestive visual materials, making sexual comments or innuendos, touching another person’s body, hair or clothing, touching or rubbing oneself in the presence of another person, kissing or the act of sexual intercourse.
* **Emotional Abuse/Neglect** is the failure of a parent, leader, or caregiver to provide the appropriate support, attention and affection necessary for a child to develop intellectually, emotionally, and physically.

**Actions Taken to Report Suspected Abuse/Neglect**

* Report any suspicions to **Lead Pastor, Campus Pastor,** or **Senior Pastor**.
* Appropriate church leaders, law enforcement, and agencies will be notified as well as the parents involved.
* An incident form will be filled out by the individuals involved and all conversations associated with the incident will be documented and shared only with law enforcement and those conducting investigations.
* Appropriate actions will be taken in all situations and they will be handled with confidentiality and dignity.
* The goal of providing supportive care to both the victim and the accused will be given to restore the wholeness of the individual. This may include procedure by the criminal justice system, counseling, or pastoral follow-up.
* Confirmed reports will remain confidential and kept on file.

**Any knowledge of registered sex offenders need to be brought to the attention of Lead Pastor, Campus Pastor, or Senior Pastor.**