



open hearts  
open minds  
open doors

*First United Methodist Church  
of Santa Rosa, CA*



## **SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

### **Abuse Prevention for Work with Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults**

#### **Introduction:**

Jesus, time and time again, speaks of the importance of young people being included and provided for within the community of faith. God has given us a sacred opportunity and great responsibility to nurture and protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, and the persons who work with them. The California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of safe sanctuary for children, youth and vulnerable adults, and those who work with them. Thus we of First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa establish this Safe sanctuaries Policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected, and every 120 seconds a vulnerable adult is abused. Abuse often happens in settings where children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be able to feel safe - homes, schools, camps, and most sadly, the church. Abuse does occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem, which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines.

As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against the possibility of abuse in our church. It is possible for us to reduce the risk of abuse by following a practical prevention policy.

**Purpose:**

Under the auspices of the 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008 and 2012 Books of Discipline, all United Methodist faith communities are charged to create and employ church policies and procedures for the protection of children (birth -11 years), youth (twelve -18 years) and vulnerable adults (18+ years old with any mental, physical, situational or age-related condition that renders them vulnerable to the decisions and care of others). These Safe Sanctuaries policies and procedures are meant to reduce the risk of abuse to such persons within the community and the Church.

The congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa is committed to making our church a safe and secure place for all people at all times. While we usually rely on common social mores, common sense and Christian ethics to guide our actions towards each other, we believe that special consideration must be given to the most vulnerable of our church family: the children, youth and vulnerable adults. For this reason we have adopted an abuse prevention policy that provides rules to help create a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, vulnerable adults, volunteers, and staff who participate in church-sponsored activities.

The following policies and procedures reflect our commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection, and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

This policy includes many areas of the issue ~ screening, training, supervision, and reporting procedures.

- We will follow stringent safety measures in the recruitment and selection of workers.
- We will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- We will train all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and procedures.
- We will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of California.

In so doing, we hope that following these policies will enable us, in addition to creating an environment of safe sanctuary for children, youth and vulnerable adults, to:

- diminish the opportunity for misperception or false accusations of abuse;
- provide a safe working environment for leadership of the activities; and
- allow leadership to better deal with emergency situations.

**Applicability:**

The Safe Sanctuaries Policy applies to all activities sponsored by the First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa, regardless of the location in which the activity is held, and to all organizations conducting activities on church property, whether or not such organizations are a part of the United Methodist church.

## Definitions:

- “Adult “means a person 18 years old or older.
- “Care providers” are those responsible for providing general care to persons, including but not limited to any of the following actions: feeding, clothing, bathing, or handling personal financial and/or administrative needs. This does not include volunteers for short-term specific purposes, such as providing transportation, “sitting” while the care giver is absent, cleaning or making repairs in a home, etc.
- “Child “means a person under age 18.
- “Child abuse or neglect” as defined under California laws means any of the following when the victim is a child and the perpetrator is any person, including another child:
  - A physical injury inflicted by other than accidental means upon a child. Note that child abuse does not include a “mutual affray” between minors.
  - Sexual abuse, including both sexual assault and sexual exploitation.
  - Willful harming or injuring of a child or the endangering of the person or health of a child, including inflicting or permitting unjustifiable physical pain or mental suffering.
  - Neglect of a child, whether severe or general, by a person responsible for the child’s welfare. The term “neglect” includes either acts or omissions harming or threatening to harm the child’s health and welfare.
- "Vulnerable Adult", under California state law means any person 18 years of age or older with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities. In the spirit of Christian values we extend that definition to include all adults with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities, whether diagnosed or not. A specific example would be a disaster victim whom church people respond to help.
- “Vulnerable adult abuse” includes physical abuse, neglect, financial abuse, abandonment, isolation, abduction or other treatment with resulting physical harm or pain or mental suffering – regardless of whether those specific results actually were intended.
- "Staff member" means the pastors, the office administrative staff who serve as custodian of records for the clergy, and any person employed by the church whose duties include direct contact and supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- "Volunteer" means a person not employed by the church who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of a staff person.
- "Youth" means any person from 12 years old through their 18th birthday. Although legally “a child” until they reach the age of 18, the term youth is used to recognize the differences in the types of events and activities in which the youth are involved.

## Screening:

1. Before beginning work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults, each staff or volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand, and agree to abide by the Safe sanctuaries Policy of Santa Rosa First United Methodist Church. The signed statement is required and is prerequisite to beginning work at any event.
2. All employees and selected volunteers may be asked to provide social security numbers and/or fingerprints to enable an investigative background inquiry through the California-Nevada Conference contracted organization pertaining to fitness to be volunteers or staff members of the church. Such inquiry will be made initially and may again after several years. The background check should be completed prior to the person assuming their new duties.
3. All persons entering employment that makes them mandated reporters must sign statements, provided and retained by the church, informing them that they are mandated reporters and advising them of their reporting responsibilities and of their confidentiality rights.
4. All new staff members working with children and youth must meet with a pastor or pastor's delegate regarding their understanding of this policy before beginning their initial assignment.
5. In the event that a person is alleged to have been convicted of a felony related to children or youth, the pastor and/or Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) representative shall make discrete inquiries of law enforcement agencies and/or the courts to determine the facts regarding the alleged conviction. The pastor and the SPRC representative shall meet with any person who has been convicted of a felony related to children or youth, as determined by law enforcement or court records, to set guidelines for that person's participation in the church community. That person shall not work with children or youth and shall not be engaged with children or youth while on church property or during any church-sponsored event.
6. Adults with a known medical history of mental health disability likely to impact children, youth, or vulnerable adults will meet with the pastor and the SPRC representative to have support and guidance in their relationship with children, youth or vulnerable adults and also with the congregation as a whole.

### **Training:**

1. All staff members will attend annual orientation to Safe Sanctuaries Policies and emergency procedures within the church, including location and use of fire extinguishers, location and use of first aid kits, emergency evacuation procedures, and abuse reporting procedures. Regular volunteers will also be encouraged to attend.
2. All staff members working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will attend First Aid and CPR training at the church's expense. Regular volunteers will also be encouraged to attend First Aid and CPR training.

### **Supervision:**

1. Two Adult Rule: Our goal is to leave no child and adult alone in a "one to one" situation. We will strive to have no fewer than two volunteers or paid staff members present at all times during any activity where there are more than 3 children present. If we are unable to provide more than one adult, that person must be a well-known, long-time or otherwise approved employee or volunteer of the church.
2. Open Space Rule: Whenever children are in a room, the door will be kept open unless the door is a Dutch door or is equipped with a window. Dutch doors will have the top portion open. Door windows will not be covered or otherwise obscured.
3. Visitation Rule: Parents, volunteers, or staff of the church may visit and observe any non-confidential child/youth program at any time.
4. When transporting children, youth or vulnerable adults to or from church-sponsored events, care must be taken to prevent times when the driver ends up with only one child, who is not the child of the driver, in the car with them.
5. A first aid kit is to be present in each area used to provide a church-sponsored activity, whether on church premises or off, as well as in vehicles used to transport children to and from such activities. Trustees will ensure that an adequate number of first aid kits will be located throughout the church campuses  
Suggested locations are:

Montgomery, in the:

- Narthex
- Fellowship Hall Kitchen
- Office
- Teachers Resource Room
- Nursery
- Child Care Center Office
- Susanna Wesley House

Stony Point, in the:

- Giffen House
- Worship Center
- Cottage
- Pump House (for outdoor activities)
- Shed at the Community Garden

These kits are to be inspected at least annually and replenished as needed.

6. Whenever the outer doors to the main buildings are unlocked, phones for emergency calls are accessible without room keys in the small dining room at Montgomery and in the Giffen House and Worship Center classroom at Stony Point. Outdoor activities must rely on cell phones if the buildings are locked and keys are not available.
7. The Safe Sanctuaries Policy will be posted conspicuously at both campuses and will be available upon request from the church office.

8. Care providers and/or supervisors for children and youth must be at least 5 years older than the children or youth being supervised. Care providers for adults must be at least 23 years old.
9. Parents or guardians will be given advance notice and full information regarding all off-site church-sponsored activities in which their children or youth might be participating. This does not include walking trips from the church during Sunday school or by the Child Care Center. Parents must give the church written permission for all other off-site activities, unless the child's parent is physically present during the activity.

### **Social Media, Technologies and the Internet**

Given the increased use of technology and social media in the life of the church and its individual members, faith communities have a responsibility to define social media policies that uphold the covenant to create Safe Sanctuaries for children, youth and vulnerable adults. To this end, the faith communities and pastors of the First United Methodist Church of Santa Rosa affirm the following:

1. We will utilize technology, the Internet and all social media tools to promote Christian community and the building up of authentic relationships.
  - Facebook is a wonderful tool to use in Preschool, Children's and Youth Ministry, and the Child Care Center. It is highly recommended that ministry groups establish their own "page" in order to communicate with community members, participants when appropriate, as well as their parents/legal guardians.
  - Blogs allow adults and youth alike a place to express ideas, thoughts and opinions, and to allow others the opportunity to engage them through response.
  - YouTube and other video websites have proved useful for sharing video clips from any number of faith community-related events, sharing original video produced to promote an upcoming event or idea, or sharing video produced by another individual or group that might be used by your ministry for conversation, worship, or reflection.
  - Texting and Tweeting have proven effective means of communication for getting a message out quickly to one individual or to an entire group.
2. We will protect the privacy and identity of all persons under 18 years of age and all vulnerable adults in online writings, postings and discussions.
  - Adult employees and staff must not post photos or video that identify children, youth or vulnerable adults by name, address, or other specific

identification on any online site or printed publication without written consent from a parent or legal guardian.

- All Facebook groups associated with Preschool, Children's or Youth Ministry areas should be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the group's administrator(s).
  - All faith community-related Facebook groups and pages must have at least two administrators. If an administrator is no longer associated with the ministry, that individual's administrative status must be revoked.
  - Photos of minors may only be published or posted on Facebook after a photo release has been signed by their parent/guardian. It is suggested that all permission slips contain a statement that approval to participate in the event includes approval for photographs to be used in church-related media. Photos used in other mediums, such as church newsletters, websites, blogs, twitpics, etc., must not include any identifying information of minors without permission.
  - Photos may only be posted to the Facebook page by page administrators. Adults (staff, volunteers, parents, etc.) should not identify minors in photographs posted online or in print. Individuals (including minors) are welcome to identify (i.e. "tag") themselves.
  - When checking in on Foursquare, Facebook, or any location tagging social media, only "check in" yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' location without their expressed permission. Rather, create a hashtag to facilitate conversation.
  - In the case of clergy/professional staff and parishioner online connections, Friend Requests, Follow Requests, Circle Requests, etc. should be initiated by the parishioner, especially if the parishioner is a minor or vulnerable adult. This same principle should apply in connectional ministry settings like camps and retreats.
3. We will maintain appropriate relational boundaries with minors.
- No adult shall initiate Facebook contact with or "friend" a minor or vulnerable adult. When accepting the "friend" requests of minors, care should be taken to respect the ministry and discipleship work of the local faith community to which they belong. Any conversations on Social Media with minors or vulnerable adults shall occur in open channels, or with multiple parties present in the conversation thread.
  - When emailing, texting, tweeting, or Facebook messaging a minor, adults should copy another adult (ideally a parent or guardian) on the message,

or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the “two adults present” Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media. Platforms promising discrete conversations and secrecy (SnapChat, Facebook Poke, etc.) should be avoided.

- Social media, even though it offers convenient and private channels, is not an appropriate medium for counseling - especially with minors. Begin or transition a pastoral conversation into an appropriate Safe Sanctuary model (i.e. office with windows, two adult rule abiding settings, etc.).
4. We shall not engage in the creation, viewing or distribution of child pornography. Engaging in this behavior may be a violation of criminal laws, common Christian practice, and clergy ethics and can lead to incarceration, the revocation of clergy credentials and the termination of volunteer and paid positions in our ministries.
  5. We shall not engage in, encourage or condone cyber-bullying. Every children’s ministry and youth ministry group, and adult volunteer training sessions is encouraged to include in its teaching and ministry Code of Conduct a session on the types and consequences of cyber-bullying, including how to identify it and how to report it. (To learn more about cyberbullying, visit: <http://www.stopcyberbullying.org> or various other websites.)
  6. We shall educate young people and their families in the effective use of social media and technology to live out their Christian witness in what they write, post, share, and view.
    - We all must understand, and teach to minors and vulnerable adults, that once something is posted on web, sent via email or sent via text, it is impossible to fully recover or erase it. There should be no expectation of privacy or reasonable expectation that the information stops with the person for whom it was intended. The promises of *privacy* offered by apps like SnapChat are illusionary.
    - *A good rule of thumb*: If you don’t want it posted on the church sign, website, or bulletin, do not text it or post it via social media.

### **Volunteers In Mission Teams:**

1. In accordance with UMVIM guidelines, all people who are members of a Volunteers in Mission team will complete Safe Sanctuaries training and the background check prescribed by the California-Nevada Conference.

2. All adults receiving aid or assistance from UMCOR, UMVIM or similar disaster recovery agencies are considered vulnerable adults.
3. Personal information of people receiving aid or assistance from UMCOR, UMVIM or similar disaster recovery agencies is considered confidential and will not be released by team members to the public, in the disaster area or at home, without written permission of the persons involved. Personal information includes full names, addresses, phone numbers, etc. Release to the public includes TV, radio, newspapers, church bulletins, or the internet. It is permissible to use last names in descriptions, such as “the Jackson’s home.”
4. Photographs of people receiving aid or assistance from UMCOR, UMVIM or similar disaster recovery agencies, including their children, will not be used in any form accessible to the public without their written permission. With their approval, photographs of people receiving aid or assistance are acceptable for personal collections, providing they remain personal and do not enter the public domain.

### **Reporting Child Abuse**

Any person is asked to report what they believe to be inappropriate behavior or inappropriate activities to one of the pastors. Even if it is “second-hand” information, such as a youth hearing from a friend that something inappropriate has occurred, the information should be passed on to a pastor. The pastor has full discretion on how to handle the matter.

Staff members whose duties include direct contact and supervision of children, youth, or vulnerable adults, including the pastors and the office administrative staff considered custodians of records, who have reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused or neglected, are legally mandated to report the suspected abuse, whether it has occurred at a church event or elsewhere. Any suspicion of abuse or neglect of a child, or youth must be reported to the Pastor. Though not legally mandated to report, volunteers are strongly encouraged, and expected, to report any suspected child, youth or vulnerable adult abuse to the pastor.

- Child abuse must be reported when a mandated person “in his or her professional capacity or within the scope of his or her employment, has knowledge of or observes a child whom the mandated person knows or reasonably suspects has been the victim of child abuse or neglect.”
- The Child Protective Services for Sonoma County maintains a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, hotline to respond to reports of abuse or neglect. The phone numbers are 565-4304 or 800-870-7064. In addition, if the abuse can be considered a crime, the Santa Rosa Police Department, or the law enforcement agency where the abuse occurred, should be contacted. A written report must be sent within 36 hours of receiving information regarding the incident. Written reports must be submitted on Department of Justice form SS8572.
- The person making the report should consider it confidential information. The church will respect the privacy of the person making the report and will not tell their

name to others except as legally required.

- The Staff-Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) shall designate a member to be knowledgeable about and responsible for evaluating reports of suspected abuse together with the Pastor or the District Superintendent and for reporting to child abuse agencies as required. The SPRC person will be provided training materials preparing them for this responsibility.

### **Reporting Vulnerable Adult Abuse**

The pastors are legally mandated to report known or suspected instances of vulnerable adult abuse. All other staff members and volunteers, though not legally mandated to report, are strongly encouraged, and expected, to report any suspected abuse to the pastor.

The Adult Protective Services for Sonoma County maintains a 24 hours a day, 7 days a week hotline to respond to reports of abuse or neglect. Their phone numbers are 565-5940 or 800-667-0404. In addition, if the abuse can be considered a crime, the Santa Rosa Police Department, or the law enforcement agency where the abuse occurred, should be contacted and a report made.

### **Response to Abuse Reports:**

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 be at the service of all official investigating agencies.

The senior pastor or his/her designee, is the only person authorized to make statements to representatives of the media. All requests for statements should be directed to the senior pastor. Training in how to handle media requests should be a regular part of staff training. A spirit of cooperation in helping the media find the "official spokesperson" is often helpful.

If the allegation is against a staff person or volunteer or if it occurred in the course of a church activity, the staff person in charge of the activity and the pastors shall be contacted immediately. The senior pastor will see that the church's insurance carrier is advised.

In any reporting of abuse or removal of a person from church activities based on an allegation of child, youth or vulnerable adult abuse, care must be taken to handle the matter in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is being conducted and understanding the possible consequences of a premature and/or unsubstantiated allegation being made public.

In any case, pastoral support will be available to all persons involved with the incident as indicated.

Notes:



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