

Fairmont United Methodist Church
Safe Sanctuaries Policy
Approved March 2014

Purpose

We at Fairmont United Methodist Church understand that working with children and youth is a ministry, and we welcome and support those individuals who feel called to this ministry. In a world where abuse and exploitation of children and youth occur, we also choose to consciously and explicitly adopt a Safe Sanctuaries policy for the protection of both the children and youth in our community and the adults who work with them.

Our Safe Sanctuaries Policy focuses on 1) proactive and responsible screening and selection of adults who work with children and youth on an ongoing basis, 2) implementation of practical and prudent procedures in the day to day operation of programs and events, 3) regular education and training, and 4) a clear reporting process for suspected incidences of abuse that complies with state law. This policy applies to any church-sponsored programs and events involving children and youth, including Sunday School, nursery, Youth meetings, and Vacation Bible School.

The elements of our Safe Sanctuaries policy are detailed below.

1. Requirements for Staff Members

The Staff Parish Relations Committee shall determine which staff members' duties require significant and/or regular interaction with children or youth under the age of 18. Those staff members will be required to complete a background check and undergo training as specified in the following sections of this policy.

In the event that a concern arises through the background check or other due diligence regarding a staff member, the Pastor may consult with the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee as she deems necessary.

2. Requirements for Adult Volunteers

All adults who volunteer with children or youth under the age of 18 on an ongoing basis should be members of Fairmont United Methodist Church and have been part of the church community for at least 6 months prior to stepping into volunteer roles. Adult volunteers will also be required to have background checks and undergo training as specified in the following sections of this policy.

3. Background Checks

All adults working with children or youth on an ongoing basis shall be required to have a background check through Castle Branch, a firm contracted with Fairmont United

Methodist Church to provide this service. Only the Pastor will be authorized to access the background checks performed by Castle Branch.

Updated background checks will be conducted every three years for all adults working with children and youth. A list of authorized adults will be maintained by the Children's Team working with the Pastor. Any adult whose background check is more than 3 years old shall be removed from the authorized list.

Information from background checks will be maintained online by Castle Branch. In most cases, no additional information will be kept by the Church. In the case that the Church does have any additional information, the information will be maintained in a file for that individual or, in the case of staff members, in the individual's personnel file. This information will be kept in a locked file cabinet and only the Pastor shall have access to these files. However, in situations where the Pastor deems it necessary, she may discuss such information with the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

Any complaints or allegations of abuse against a staff member or adult volunteer shall be maintained in their individual volunteer or personnel file, whether or not substantiated. The purpose for maintaining unsubstantiated records is to verify that the church received the complaint and acted appropriately. This information shall be treated as confidential and kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only by the Pastor.

4. Eligibility of Adults

Any finding of the following will make an adult ineligible to work with children or youth:

- Child abuse
- Child neglect
- Domestic violence
- Sexual assault
- Other violent criminal offenses

Other information will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Pastor. Such information may also be shared with the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee if the Pastor deems it necessary but shall otherwise remain confidential.

5. Special Event Volunteers

Adults who do not work with children or youth on an ongoing basis but who may step in to assist or lead events of a limited time or duration do not have to undergo a background check or training.

6. Protective Measures in Day-to-Day Operations

To ensure the safety of our children and youth, we will maintain visible and/or open access to all spaces at Fairmont United Methodist Church where children are present. Doors will be kept open as much as possible; where doors are not open, visual access should be available through windows or glass panes in the doors.

Whenever feasible, adults will work in teams of at least two people who are unrelated/unmarried. When only a single adult or a team of related/married adults is working with children or youth, the adult(s) should take special care to ensure that the area is fully accessible and visible.

When necessity requires that a single adult is working alone with children or youth, the adult will take care not to be alone with individual children or youth unless the area is visible and readily accessible to others.

Adults working with children and youth should be at least 18 years old and at least five years older than the children/youth with whom they are working. Youth volunteers may assist with a supervising adult, but they are not considered a second adult under this policy.

7. Education and Training

At least once a year, Fairmont United Methodist Church will provide training for adults working with children and youth. This training will include the Church's Safe Sanctuaries policy as well as other policies related to children and youth and information about recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect.

Every adult working with children and youth should receive training at least every two years. Records of training will be maintained by the Children's Team.

8. Reporting Suspected Abuse

If any staff member or adult volunteer is suspected of abuse of a child or youth on the church premises or in relation to any church program or activity, North Carolina law requires a report to be made to Wake County Child Protective Services. A report can be made in person at the Child Protective Services office, by calling the CPS reporting hotline at (919)212-7990, or, in case of emergency, through 911. A report should also be made immediately to the Pastor. If the case involves the Pastor, a report should be made to the Chair of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.

If a staff member or volunteer becomes aware of possible abuse of a child or youth occurring outside the church community, a report should be made with Child Protective Services in the county in which the abuse occurred/is occurring.

Any adult accused or suspected of child abuse will be immediately removed from their work with children and youth pending the outcome of an investigation.