

# **Cypress Lake United Methodist Church**

## **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY**

### **Requirements and Guidelines**

**July, 2009**

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# SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Cypress Lake United Methodist Church  
Fort Myers, Florida

## Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children, youth, vulnerable adults and older adults are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The Cypress Lake United Methodist Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect such people who participate in the life of this congregation.

- I. We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our children recognizes that:

*Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the children and youth. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that "...children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children and youth. Child sexual abuse and exploitation...occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines...God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children/youth and other vulnerable persons from abuse.*

- II. We believe that conducting ministries under this Policy will give us the strong foundation we need to be able to continue to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world in every generation and every age group.

## Definitions

### 1) **Child, Youth and Adult**

Following the public school system guidelines, a **child** is anyone age 11 or under. A **youth** is anyone not a child and under the age of 18. An **adult** is anyone 18 years of age or older who has finished high school.

### 2) **Paid Staff Person, Adult Volunteer, Screened Adult and Non Screened Adult**

- a. A **paid staff person** is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened.

- b. A **screened adult** is a volunteer over the age of 18, out of high school, and who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members of the church, but they must be regular attendees for at least six

months. A regular attendee is someone whose absence is noticed.

- c. An **adult volunteer** is over the age of 18, out of high school, has been background checked, but has not completed the screening process. He or she may work in a room with a screened adult or paid staff person.
  - d. A **non screened adult** is a volunteer who comes to work with the children/youth for a special event or project, and must always work in the presence of a screened adult or staff person.
- 3) **Two (2) Person Rule**
- a. In any classroom, event, or setting with children/youth, there must be two (2) designated supervisory persons, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or paid staff person; and
  - b. The two persons must not be related by blood or marriage; and
  - c. Both persons must be 5 years older than the oldest youth/child under their supervision
  - d. However, on Sunday mornings, if two (2) screened adults and/or staff persons are not possible in every child/youth classroom, there will be a designated floater, who will be a paid staff person or a screened adult, to move between the classrooms, nurseries and Youth Center at random intervals to verify that appropriate classroom procedures are being followed to ensure the safety of our children/youth.

4) **Child/Youth Abuse**

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** is defined as any of the following:

- a. **Physical Abuse:**  
Violent, non-accidental contact that results in injury to the child/youth. This will include, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries may include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
- b. **Sexual Abuse:**  
Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at church, home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
- c. **Emotional Abuse:**  
A pattern of intentional conduct that crushes a child's/youth's spirit, or attacks his/her self-worth. These patterns include, but are not limited to, rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

## **Requirements of This Policy**

### **I. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers**

- 1) The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) is charged with the responsibility of implementing and overseeing this Policy. The SPRC shall appoint a CLUMC Child/Youth Protection Policy Team (hereafter referred to as the Team) of 3-4 people, only one of which needs to be a member of the SPRC.
  - a. The Team will implement and oversee the Policy following the guidelines set by the Staff Parish Relations Committee.
  - b. The Pastor and/or The Team will receive and review the screening reports. When there is a negative item on the report, they will follow the procedure set forth in this Policy (see Section I. 8).
  - c. The Team will follow the Policy of the steps to be taken when abuse is suspected (see Section VIII, *Responding to Allegations of Abuse*).
  - d. The Team will schedule training opportunities for paid staff members and volunteers as they are needed.
- 2) All paid staff will be screened.
- 3) All adult volunteers who regularly work with CLUMC's children/youth will be screened prior to beginning regular involvement with children/youth ministries.
- 4) Any adult, whether paid staff or volunteer, prior to working regularly with CLUMC's children/youth, will be screened by the following procedures. The adult:
  - a. Must give written permission for a background check. The background check is good for 5 years, after which time a new background check will be necessary.
  - b. Must fill out an application form and provide references.
  - c. Must be interviewed by a staff member.
  - d. Must be trained in the church's Child/Youth Protection Policy.
  - e. Must sign a participation covenant agreeing to abide by the Child/Youth Protection Policy.
- 5) Persons new to the church community who desire to volunteer in children/youth ministry must first be a regular attendee in worship for at least six months. A regular attendee is someone whose absence is noticed. After the six month period,

these persons will be screened by the following procedures. The adult:

- a. Must complete all requirements listed in section four (4) above
  - b. Must agree to work actively in children/youth ministry for six (6) months prior to becoming a screened adult leader.
- 6) Screened Adults and Adult Volunteers shall be placed in the Children/Youth Program at the discretion of the Director of Christian Education and in consultation with either the Family and Children's Ministry Director, the Youth Director, or the Superintendent of Sunday School, taking into consideration the needs of the church and the experience, ability and preference of the screened adult volunteer.
- 7) The background check must meet the minimum standards offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. It must be a state wide check. For people who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a national background check must be conducted.
- 8) When either a background check or a reference check comes back with unfavorable information, the matter shall be handled by the Pastor and any others given the responsibility and authority to oversee the screening process. Where it has been determined that an applicant should **not** work with children or youth, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The appointed clergy or his or her designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.
- 9) Record Keeping
- a. Records pertaining to this Policy must be stored on the church premises in a locked cabinet with limited access, supervised by the Pastor or his designee.
  - b. The actual background check request forms and reports shall be stored separately in a locked cabinet supervised and maintained by the Pastor.
- 10) Although they are not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy will be responsible for ensuring compliance with points 1-9 above.

## II. Ongoing Education

CLUMC's Child/Youth Protection Policy Team will ensure that regularly scheduled training (i.e., at least annually) focused on current issues pertaining to child/youth safety and the requirements of this policy is available and is received by those working with children/youth. Attendance at this training is required of all paid staff members and screened and non screened adult volunteers who work consistently with our

children/youth. This training may be presented by someone in the church. The training should include:

- 1) The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- 2) The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse prevention and the reasons for having them.
- 3) A review of this Policy
- 4) The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- 5) The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
- 6) Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- 7) Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries
- 8) Other topics as deemed necessary.

### **III. Required Supervision of Children and Youth**

#### **1) On Campus Requirements**

- a. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have windows and/or a door with a window.
- b. The Two (2) Person Rule and all its requirements is in effect for all children and youth classes and activities.
- c. Parents, volunteers or staff of the church must be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.
- d. Adults responsible for children between birth and age 3 who utilize a CLUMC nursery must take a pager and sign their child in. The sign in process includes recording the pager number and the names of authorized person(s) to whom the child may be released. Children will only be released to the authorized adult who presents the numbered pager. In addition, appropriate nursery policy and procedures must be followed.
- e. Adults responsible for children aged 3 through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade who are dropped off for a class or event will sign their child in and out of children's activities utilizing the sign in procedure in place for that event. Non authorized adults are not allowed to pick up children from an event or

activity.

- f. Youth in grades 9 -12, if accompanied by an adult, must be signed in and out of the class or event by the adult. If arriving independently of an adult, the youth must sign him or herself in and out of the class or event.
- g. The designated supervisory adults must sign and date the attendance roster. All rosters/attendance records must be turned in to the designated staff person for retention under the church's records policy.
- h. When possible, a designated screened adult shall periodically check each classroom.

2) **Off Campus Requirements**

Supervision for off-campus activities must adhere to the Two (2) Person Rule. A child/youth's parent or guardian must give written notarized permission for any off campus activity. When appropriate, the supervisory adult must collect a "Permission to Transport" form for each child/youth.

3) **Counseling and Mentoring Youth and Children**

- a. When one-on-one counseling and/or mentoring would be most effective, it must be preapproved by the Pastor.
- b. The appropriate staff person or screened adult volunteer will contact the parent for permission prior to the meeting and notify another staff person of the time and place for the meeting.
- c. At any counseling session on the church premises, another adult not related by blood or marriage to the counselor/mentor must be in the building and the door of the room being used must remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall that gives a clear view into the room; or the session may occur in a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

**NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if they are qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another, more qualified, counselor should be considered.**

**NOTE 2: This is not meant to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.**

d. **Time Following Group Events**

If, at the close of any child/youth event or activity, there is one child/youth waiting for pick up, the staff person or screened adult volunteer will wait with the child/youth and follow these procedures:

- a. Contact the parent or guardian by phone to be sure they are on the way or can make alternative arrangements;
- b. Contact another staff person, spouse, or another screened adult to inform them of the situation;
- c. If safe, go out doors to wait for pickup, and
- d. Once the child/youth is picked up by the authorized person, let those contacted know that the situation is resolved.

Under these circumstances, the Two (2) Person Rule is suspended and the screened adult or staff person is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being.

IV. **Transportation**

Transporting youth and children is an important concern. It is expected that the requirements listed below will always be followed.

**Requirements**

1) Church Vehicles

- a. Drivers of church vehicles must be screened according to this Policy, approved to drive by the Conference Ministry Protection Office, and adhere to *CLUMC's Bus Policy*;
- b. The driver must be known to the designated adult leader of the event; and
- c. Two screened adults must be on board the bus to supervise the children/youth, according to the Two (2) Person Rule.

2) Private Vehicles

- a. When children/youth are transported to and from the church campus for a church sponsored event in any private vehicle, the driver must be a parent/guardian of one of the children/youth in their car, or a screened adult and at least 21 years of age.

- b. The exception is made when the driver is a paid staff member who is at least 18 years of age, an approved driver and is deemed satisfactory by the appointed clergy.
  - c. All drivers are required to show proof of adequate insurance when they use their own vehicles. A copy of the insurance card must be on file at the church.
- 3) All drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. The driver of any vehicle over 15 passengers must have a Commercial Drivers License for the vehicle. A copy of the driver's license must be on file at the church.
  - 4) Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times. The number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts in the vehicle.
  - 5) Drivers should be advised of the designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours. If there is more than one car going to the same destination, communication between vehicles is required.
  - 6) Youth are never to drive other youth on an official outing of the church. If driving independently, they may not leave from or return to the church campus.
  - 7) All drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child/Youth Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.

#### V. **Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are requirements of this policy.

- 1) The Two Person Rule applies for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
- 2) There will be at least two screened adults for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, there must be two screened adults of the same gender as the participants.
- 3) The person in charge of children/youth for each overnight trip and/or retreat will carry parental permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care.
- 4) Choice of lodging must be approved by the Pastor and consider not only cost, but the best setting for the safety and protection of our children/youth according to the following guidelines:

- a. The selection of lodging accommodations should be considered in the following order: churches, retreat centers, camps, hotels, and motels.
- b. Separate rooms for adults and children/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth per room.
- c. Room assignments should be made so there is an adult room in between two children/youth rooms.
- d. Hall and room checks should be made randomly during the night by two screened adults of the same gender as those in the rooms being checked.
- e. A hotel/motel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

## **VI. Cyber Safety**

- 1) All church owned computers must be secured with a password to open the system.
- 2) Church owned computers that can be used by children/youth must be secured to prevent anyone from accessing inappropriate web sites.
- 3) Children/youth can use computers only when they are carefully monitored by a screened adult or staff member.
- 4) Those responsible for church computers must put parental controls on inappropriate sites.

## **VII. Older and Vulnerable Adults**

- 1) CLUMC recognizes a need to protect certain adults who, due to mental and/or physical disabilities, may need additional protection, and we will attempt to accommodate their needs as much as possible. This Church values these persons, whether members or not, who can and do contribute much to our congregation.
- 2) Visitation policies:
  - a. Church volunteers who meet with or visit with any vulnerable or older adult outside of the church setting (such as home visits, hospital visits, etc.) shall be screened adults.

- b. Volunteers shall not assist a vulnerable or older adult with banking, investments, transferring or managing money, or handle their financial affairs.
- c. Volunteers should not physically assist a vulnerable or older adult with toileting, transferring, significant feeding or dressing or undressing. If there is an ongoing need for such care and assistance, the volunteer should contact the facility staff, or if on a home visit, contact the Parish Nurse or other church staff for further direction.
- d. If an emergency situation presents itself during a home visit, the volunteer should first call 911, wait until emergency personnel arrive and, as soon as practical, notify the Parish Nurse, Clergy or other church staff of the incident. Family members may also be contacted as appropriate

### VIII. **Responding to Allegations of Abuse**

- 1) Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help.
- 2) Pastors and staff members working with children and youth are by law mandated reporters. This means when a person under the age of 18 discloses an abuse to a pastor or staff member that takes place in a setting or by an individual that is not related to church activities, it must be reported to the Florida Child Abuse Hotline; 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). Mandated reporters are also required to report suspected abuse. Examples could be suspicious bruising on a child or a verbal report by child/youth of physical or sexual abuse by parent, step-parent, other relative or babysitter. Reporting these actions does not require notifying the Office of Ministry Protection, except as a resource.
- 3) When abuse of a child/youth by another child/youth (both under the age of 18) is observed, reported or suspected, whether related to church activities or not, call the Florida Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).
- 4) When abuse of a child/youth by an adult volunteer, paid staff person, or any adult is reported, observed or suspected within the church or at church related activities, follow this process:
  - a. Call the Lee County Sheriff, 911 or (239) 477-1000. If medical attention is needed, call 911.
  - b. Call the District Superintendent (941) 371-6511. (Leave a message if he or she cannot be contacted.)

- c. Call the Office of Ministry Protection; 1-800-282-8011 ext. 137. (Mark Thomas)
  - d. The Pastor oversees the process of action and follow-through unless the pastor is the alleged perpetrator. If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator, the District Superintendent oversees the process in response to a call from a church representative.
  - e. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
  - f. Take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child/youth, until a parent or guardian arrives.
- 5) Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim's family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim and the victim's family.
- 6) Keep a written report of the steps taken by the church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be written in ink or typed (not word processed) to prevent it from being changed. The report must be signed and dated by the person who received the allegation and those involved in the reporting process. It should be kept in a secure place.
- 7) All media should be instructed to contact the Conference Communications Department. Under no circumstances should someone from the church talk with the media.

#### IX. Application

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation – are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum. When there are groups who have their own organizational policies that are equal to or stronger than this policy, such as Boy Scout and Girl Scout Troops, they must give the church a copy of their policy and a statement that agrees to abide by the policy. In the event of any incident of abuse or injury, these individuals, organizations and groups agree to notify the church of the incident and the steps taken as a result of the incident.

**Adoption**

This Child/Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the Staff Parish  
Relation Committee of the Cypress Lake United Methodist Church this  
\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 2009.

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Appointed Clergy

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Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee

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Chair, Administrative Council