

# Child and Youth Protection Policy

Adopted by the Church Council on March 25, 2014

## Introduction

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

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. 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. 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 and other vulnerable persons from abuse.

"Child abuse prevention and Ministry Protection policies and procedures are essential for congregations, not only for the protection and safety of our children and youth, but also for our volunteers and staff working with youth."

"The Gospel calls us to be engaged in ministry with children and youth. We should not allow the risks to undermine or stop our ministry. Rather, we must:

- Acknowledge the risks and develop a practical plan to address these issues;
- Take steps to prevent harm to our children; and
- Continue to answer the Gospel's imperative to be in ministry with children, thus making a difference in their lives."

## I. Definitions

### A. "Child" and "Youth" and "Adult"

Following the public school system, a "child" is anyone age of 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 and has finished high school.

### B. "Paid Staff Person," "Adult Volunteer," and "Screened Adult"

A Paid Staff Person is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. An Adult Volunteer is someone who has not been screened. They can work in a room with a Screened Adult or paid staff person. A Screened Adult is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process. These persons may or may not be members, but they must be regular attendees and active in church activities for at least six months.

### C. Youth Helpers

Youth below the age of 18 years assisting with child or youth activities. They can assist with activities but should not be considered an adult volunteer and should be supervised themselves.

### D. "Child/Youth Abuse"

For purposes of this Policy, child/youth abuse includes any of the following:

1. Physical Abuse: Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts, and burns.
2. Sexual Abuse: Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.

3. Emotional Abuse: A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child's/youth's spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.

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

The Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising of non-appointive church staff and adult volunteers. (§ 258.12 2008 Book of Discipline)

**A.** Adult volunteers who regularly work with the Church's children and youth and each church paid staff person will be screened. Those who work regularly with children/youth will be trained on child protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth. The procedures for screening are as follows: Each person being considered to work regularly with children and/or youth, whether as a volunteer or paid staff person, shall fill out an application form (See Appendix I). This screening is good for 5 years after which time a re-screening will be necessary.

**B.** Before placing the applicant in a position of responsibility with children or youth, a designated paid staff member or other person charged with specific responsibility will interview the applicant reviewing with them the written application. (See possible questions for interviews in Appendix II.)

**C.** The person conducting this interview will contact the references provided on the application form and any additional persons as the circumstances dictate. A written record of such contacts will be retained with the application form. (See Appendix III).

**D.** Each person applying to work with children and/or youth shall "authorize" the church to conduct a criminal background check. At a minimum, the background check will include the one offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. (This may be done online at <http://www.FDLE.state.fl.us/CriminalHistory>) You must get written authorization to run a background screening. The Conference Department of Ministry Protection also offers a national criminal background screening program ([www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection](http://www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection)) For persons who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a national background check needs to be conducted. (See Appendix IV).

**E.** Before beginning work with either children or youth, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child and Youth Protection Policy. (See Appendix V - Participation Covenant)

**F.** After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with youth and/or children.

**G.** 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 and supply pastors or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.

**H.** It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet in the appointed clergy's office. There should be a system in place that gives those who need these records easy access and a safe place to be stored when they are not needed.

**I.** Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy and supply pastors shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) through (H) above.

## **III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work With Children and Youth**

The Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff members, screened and non-screened adult volunteers who work consistently with children and/or youth.

The training should include:

- The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.

- The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.<
- Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

## IV. Supervision of Children and Youth

### A. General Rules

1. All activities involving children and youth will be supervised by at least one screened adult.
2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks). Half doors should be considered for Toddler to Second Grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.
3. The “Two Person Rule” is defined as having at least two people in any classroom or setting, one of which must be a screened adult volunteer or staff person.

### B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

#### 1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade

At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. When feasible, there should be two screened adults present, and where the two adults are family members, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Two persons in the classroom is the expectation, at least one of them must be a screened adult.

#### 2. Grades 3-5

At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person who checks on all classrooms. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors are to remain open.

#### 3. Grades 6-12

At least one screened adult will be present for all classroom activities. A designated person should periodically check all classrooms.

### C. Open Door Policy

Parents, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

### D. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler should sign-in their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through second grade should sign their child in and out of Sunday School and other children’s activities. Picking-up children by non-authorized adults is forbidden.

### E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two screened adults will be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Any meetings held in an individual’s home will be supervised by at least two adults who are not members of the same family. Meetings held in an individual’s home must be pre-approved by the child’s/youth’s parent or guardian.

### F. Counseling of Youth and Children

In instances of youth or child counseling where circumstances dictate that counseling would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate church paid staff person may meet individually with a youth with the knowledge of at least one other paid staff member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to 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.

### **G. Time Following Group Events**

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's transportation arrive after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, a child/youth may unavoidably be supervised by one screened adult. Under these circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being

## **V. Transportation**

### **A. General Rules**

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This Policy includes both Requirements and Guidelines. When feasible, there should be adherence to the recommendations in the Guidelines. It is expected that the Requirements will always be followed.

### **B. Requirements**

1. Drivers must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or a paid staff person who is at least 18 years old.
3. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age; provided, however, exception is made when the driver is a paid staff member who is at least 18 years of age and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found by the Appointed clergy and supply pastors or his/her designee to be satisfactory.
4. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
5. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
6. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
7. Drivers should not use cell phones unless required for communication with other drivers and should not text message while driving.
8. When there is reason to believe it would not be safe for a youth to ride in a vehicle driven by another youth, the adults responsible should intervene and take reasonable steps to make alternative arrangements for all concerned.
9. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
10. Persons who regularly drive church owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
11. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search must be conducted and the appointed clergy and supply pastors or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory. (The Ministry Protection Conference office will advise how to obtain a Motor Vehicle Record of a driver. It is usually without charge. Call (800) 282-8011, ext. 137.
12. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix IV).

### **C. Guidelines**

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult.
2. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle being operated.
3. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety.

## **VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are Requirements and Guidelines of this Policy. The Requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the Guidelines should be implemented. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

### **A. Requirements**

1. There will be at least two screened adults present 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 one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat shall carry parental permission slips including permission for emergency medical care. (See Appendix VI)

### **B. Guidelines**

In a hotel type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children youth per room.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/ youth rooms.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by two adults of the same gender as those being checked.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

## **VII. On-line Safety**

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

Church computers that are set up for guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic places and randomly monitored by staff. Controls should be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.

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

Florida Statute 39.201 entitled "Mandatory Reports" states that: "Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child's welfare, as defined in this chapter,... shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department"

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for a child's welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or pre-school does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative, and potentially the legal requirement, is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-960 ABUSE (1-800-962-2873)

**A.** 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.

**B.** If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the appointed clergy and supply pastors. If the appointed clergy and supply pastors are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent. If the accused is the

appointed clergy and supply pastors or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of The Book of Discipline with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office in Lakeland.

**C.** Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. NOTE: If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.

**D.** 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.

**E.** The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.

**F.** After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy and supply pastors is to report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.

**G.** Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. (See Appendix VII). The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed.

**H.** Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy and supply pastors.

NOTE: The Conference Communications Department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

NOTE: The question that sometimes arises is: What about a "confidential communication" with a clergy person? Florida law (FS90.505) provides that some specific communications may be considered confidential if they occurred in the context of "seeking spiritual counsel or advice" from a clergy person. Thus a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2008 UM Discipline, par. 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect. Again, the moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children.

## **IX. Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

## **X. 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.

## **XI. Adoption**

This Child and Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the Staff Parish Relations Committee of Chaires United Methodist Church this 25th day of March, 2014. Appointed clergy and supply pastors Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee