

**Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse  
at Thomasville First United Methodist Church**

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## **I. Thomasville First United Methodist Church Policy Statement on *Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse***

In April 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child abuse in the church. The adopted resolution includes the following statement:

Jesus said, “Whoever welcomes [a] child...welcomes 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 as 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 calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states: “...children must be protected from economic, physical, and sexual exploitation, and abuse.”

God calls us to make our churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from sexual and ritual abuse. God calls us to create communities of faith where children and adults grow safe and strong (From The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church – 1996 Copyright © 1996 by the United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission. [pp. 384-386])

### Purpose

Our congregation’s purpose for establishing this policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth.

## **II. Statement of Covenant**

AS A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH AND A UNITED METHODIST CONGREGATION, we pledge to conduct God’s ministry in ways that assure the

safety and spiritual growth of all our children and youth as well as workers with children and youth.

We will:

- 1) follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of paid and volunteer workers.
- 2) implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events.
- 3) train our workers working with or around children and youth regarding policies and methods.
- 4) implement a clearly defined procedure for reporting suspected incidents of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law, responding appropriately to victim and accused and for responding to media inquiries if an incident occurs.

### Conclusion

This congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that each child 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, p. 44).

### **III. Educating the Congregation**

Educating the Congregation is key to the success of reducing the risk of child abuse. Dissemination of information may include, but not be limited to:

1. Articles in Publications
  - a. Bulletins
  - b. Fliers
  - c. Parents' Manuals
  - d. Staff Employee Manuals
2. Children's Committee meeting reports
3. Nursery Committee meeting reports
4. Children and youth parent meetings
5. Information given in adult Sunday school classes
6. Discussions with all potential workers with children and youth
7. Orientation and training sessions for workers with children and youth
8. Educational displays/bulletin boards
9. Opportunities for parents to attend seminars and workshops

## **IV. Recruiting and Placing Paid and Volunteer Staff**

### **A. Procedures for hiring paid staff**

1. Each applicant will:
  - a. Fill out an Employee Application, including a complete work history
  - b. Provide three references to be called by hiring staff member or committee member
  - c. Fill out and sign Application for a Criminal Background Check
2. Each new employee will:
  - a. Receive a copy of the Employee Handbook and Sexual Harassment Policy, signing that they have read and understood all items
3. The appropriate person/committee will:
  - a. Review applicant information, process Criminal Background Checks, and contact references
  - b. Provide appropriate materials

### **B. Recruitment of Volunteer Workers for all Age Level Ministries:**

1. Each volunteer working with children or youth will:
  - a. Fill out, sign and submit application for a Criminal Background Check
  - b. Be actively involved in the life of the church
2. May be interviewed by a Ministry Staff Person
3. Any volunteer working with children or youth on a short-term, unexpected or last minute basis (Examples include, but are not limited to: substitute Sunday school teachers, parent helpers in the youth area, assistants in Nursery or Sunday school classes) must be placed with someone who has been cleared through a Criminal Background Check
4. The selected representative will:
  - a. Collect, evaluate and record relevant results of Criminal Background Check
5. After the process is complete and the applicant for volunteer ministry has been approved, the applicant will:
  - a. Be notified of approval for working with all children/youth
  - b. Be cleared for working in all ministries involving children/youth at the discretion of the Ministry Director

### **C. Recruitment of volunteer by volunteer:**

Although TFUMC will make every effort to disseminate and publicize the policy requirements as discussed in sections III and V of these procedures, it is possible that unexpected or last-minute circumstances may occur in which church staff is unaware of a staffing need, and a church member/volunteer recruits last-minute volunteer help to ensure that children are properly supervised. In such situations, it is recognized that the requirements of Sections

IV and VI may not be followed.

### A Note on Confidentiality

Sensitive, personal information must be provided in order to complete a thorough background check for volunteer and staff positions. However, all information provided for background and/or reference checks will be kept confidential. Only one designated law enforcement official will have access to the background check results. Ministers and staff of TFUMC will not have access to background check results and will not be privy to sensitive information that may compromise the privacy or dignity of the individual. If any individual is not “cleared” for involvement with youth and children, the reasons for that decision will be disclosed only to the senior minister.

## **V. Orientation and Training Content and Procedures**

- A. Orientation for Children’s Area (birth-6th grade):
  - Yearly orientation for paid or volunteer staff, clergy or lay person may include information concerning:
    1. Nature and consequences of child abuse
    2. Church policies for prevention of child abuse
    3. Procedures for all ministries with children
    4. Identifying abuse
    5. Steps for incident reporting
    6. Details of state laws regarding child abuse
- B. Ongoing Training for Children and Youth Workers & Staff
  - Agenda for training sessions may include:
    1. Information dissemination
      - a. Occurrences in local churches as reported in the news
      - b. Statistics
      - c. Reasons for implementing Prevention Strategies
    2. Recognizing, naming and defining types of abuses
      - a. Physical
      - b. Emotional
      - c. Neglect
      - d. Sexual
      - e. Ritual
    3. Recognizing who abusers can be
      - a. Familiar adults who are trusted by the children

- b. Usually not strangers
  - c. From all segments of society
  - d. Anyone who is in direct contact with children or youth
4. What are we doing to keep children and workers safe?
- a. Screening workers
  - b. Training workers
  - c. Supervising workers
  - d. Reporting suspected child abuse

## **VI. Procedures for Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in Programs for Children and Youth**

- A. Standards for accepting, reviewing and renewing Child Abuse Policy:
  - 1. Policy and Operating Procedures will be reviewed annually by the church staff.
  - 2. Criminal Background Checks may be repeated on individuals periodically.
- B. Standards to be applied by all paid and volunteer staff while working with children/youth on site:
  - 1. Two-adult rule – There will be two adults present with children 6<sup>th</sup> grade and under. If one adult needs to leave the room, the classroom door should remain open. One adult present with youth (7<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade) is sufficient, as long as more than one youth is present.
  - 2. Rooms where children or youth are gathered should have a window in the door or half-door open when children or youth are present. If there is not window or half door, the door should remain open when one worker is in the room.
  - 3. When a last-minute substitute is needed, reasonable effort will be made to select one from a list of volunteers who have been cleared through Reference and Criminal Background Checks.
  - 4. All Nursery workers, paid and volunteer, must be at least eighteen years old. Teens under eighteen years of age may assist in an activity, but may not be in charge of a room.
  - 5. Unsupervised workers should be at least 5 years older than the children or youth they are supervising. Workers must be 7<sup>th</sup> grade or older.
  - 6. All children in the Nursery and Preschool age group should be registered and/or signed in at the room where parents leave them. Parents pick up child from assigned location.
  - 7. Adults supervising elementary programs should expect children and

- youth to remain with them, unless special written permission is given by the parents to leave that group.
8. Parents should receive advance information about the event that their child/youth is attending.
  9. Appropriate touch must be used when the need arises to have physical contact with children or youth.
- C. Off site program standards to be applied by paid and volunteer staff of children and youth when leaving church property
1. Written permission must be obtained from parent before child/youth leaves with individual(s) or a group on a church sponsored event, with emergency contact information provided.
  2. Adequate supervision must be provided for trips, retreats, lock-ins, etc.
    - a. Ratio of adult:children – 2:12 (2 adults always present)
    - b. Ratio of adult:youth - 1:10 for Middle High, 1:15 for Senior High
  3. Every effort will be made to keep the gender ratio of leaders in line with the gender ratio of children and/or youth participating.
  4. Trip information, including location, phone numbers, adults attending, departure and return times, must be provided to the church office before departing.
  5. If personal vehicles are used to transport youth to an off-site location, every effort should be made to have at least two children/youth should be present.
  6. When sleeping away from home, no adult may share a bed with a child/youth other than his/her own.
- D. Standards to be applied to diapering or restroom activity:
1. Procedures for all workers with children in diapers
    - a. Every effort will be made to ensure that another adult is in the room when a diaper is being changed.
    - b. Diapering should occur in a visible area.
  2. Procedures for all workers with preschool children using restrooms
    - a. If a toilet adjoins the room in use, teachers must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
    - b. If there has been a potty "accident" and a worker needs to assist a child (changing clothes, clean up, etc.), every effort will be to have two adults present.
  3. Procedures for all workers with elementary age children
    - a. Tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom.
    - b. Take more than one at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible.
    - c. Inform other adult when you have returned.

E. Discipline:

Under no circumstances should paid or volunteer staff administer corporal punishment. Training will be provided and may include, but not be limited to these topics:

1. Using positive words
2. Establishing rules and behavior expectation
3. Informing parents of negative behaviors
4. Determining when to involve church staff with regard to discipline issues
5. What to do when child threatens safety to self or others

F. At the conclusion of on- or off-site activities, and before leaving the facility, supervising adults should make sure all children have been claimed by the appropriate person.



## VII. Georgia Code and TFUMC's Procedures for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

### A. When a TFUMC Staff Member Suspects Child Abuse:

1. Any TFUMC staff member or volunteer who suspects child abuse should immediately report suspicions to their Program Staff person or designee.
2. The Program Staff person should complete *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* Form.
3. The Program Staff Person will contact his/her supervisor to discuss the appropriateness of a referral to Child Protective Services. The Senior Minister will be notified.
4. If a referral is to be made, the administrator will contact the Insurance Company, and the District Superintendent will be notified.
5. The Program Staff person or his/her supervisor will call the appropriate Child Protective Services office to report the suspected abuse. In emergency situations, staff should call 911 for assistance.  
The report should be made to Thomas County DFCS: (229) 225-4005
6. If staff observes an incident of concern which does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, but does warrant further investigation by the Program Staff person, an *Incident Report* Form should still be completed.
7. The family of the abused shall receive immediate ministerial support from TFUMC by a staff member. Support will also be provided for the abuser and the abuser's family if needed.

### B. When member or visitor suspects child abuse at TFUMC by a staff member – Paid or Volunteer:

1. The staff member – paid or volunteer who is contacted by a member/visitor reporter should immediately refer the Reporter to the appropriate Program Staff person over the staff member in question. If they are not available, the reporter should be directed to that Director's Supervisor or to one of the Ministers.
2. Immediate action and contact with church staff person is recommended. The staff member receiving the report should complete the *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* Form.
3. The Program Staff person or his/her supervisor will telephone the appropriate Child Protective Services office to report the suspected abuse. In case of emergency, staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to

the child's county of residence. (See above)

4. If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report* Form should be completed.
5. Program Staff, Supervisors and/or Ministers should indicate on the bottom of the *Incident Report* Form how the situation was resolved.
6. Any staff member (paid or volunteer) who is implicated on an *Incident Report* Form should be removed from direct involvement with children immediately after the report is made until the situation is adequately investigated and resolved.

## **VIII. Glossary of Terms**

Definition of Age Levels:

Children – Birth through 6th graders

Nursery age: Birth through age 2

Preschool age: 3 through 5 year olds

Elementary age: Kindergartners - 6th graders

Youth: 7th through 12th graders

Locations:

Off Site: Church sponsored activities that take place away from the church property (Retreats, trips to other locations)

On Site: All church sponsored activities that take place on Thomasville First United Methodist Church property, in the buildings, on the grounds, at the parsonage, or in church-owned vehicles.

**Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse  
at Thomasville First United Methodist Church**

I have received and read a copy of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy for the First United Methodist Church of Thomasville, Georgia (TFUMC).

By signing below, I am acknowledging that I have read and understand all the policies and procedures outlined within the policy, and I understand that they apply to me as long as I volunteer or am employed at TFUMC.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Witness \_\_\_\_\_