



Chelsea First
United Methodist Church

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION..... 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS 2

DEFINITIONS..... 2

SCREENING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES AND POLICIES..... 3

 Screening Procedures for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children 3

 Training Requirements for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children 3

 Safe Sanctuary Policy Procedures for Volunteer Screening..... 4

 Response to Background Check Information..... 4

 EMPLOYEE SCREENING PROCESS..... 4

 VOLUNTEER SCREENING PROCESS..... 5

PROTECTION POLICIES 5

REPORTING PROCEDURES..... 6

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS..... 6

 Appropriate response toward the victim..... 7

 Appropriate response toward the accused 7

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICY 8

Clergy Guide for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect..... 11

INTRODUCTION

Chelsea First United Methodist Church believes that all persons are significant to the growth of God's kingdom and should have opportunity to worship, learn, and serve in various capacities to ensure personal growth and growth of others. We seek to provide an environment that is physically, emotionally and spiritually safe for all persons who enter our doors, especially children and youth. We seek to provide a safe environment in which opportunities for abuse are minimized through proper enlistment and supervision of those persons working with them.

All volunteers and employees who are in leadership roles in these ministries are living out the vow church members take during baptisms to nurture our children and youth in the Christian faith. Every church worker plays a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community. It is our goal is to strive to be a "Safe Sanctuary" where we can work hand-in-hand growing our children and youth in their faith and a life devoted to Christ.

This policy contains theological foundations, definitions of child abuse, and policies/procedures related to prevention, response, and reporting. It would be the expectation that the policies herein may be also extended to other vulnerable populations.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

"Then Jesus took a little child and put her among them; and taking her in his arms, he said to them, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' (paraphrase of Mark 9:36-37) 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)

The Church, above all institutions, is called to welcome and nurture children. Our goal is to maintain a safe, secure, loving place where children may grow and where those who care for them may administer to their needs in responsible ways. As caring Christians, we are committed to protect and serve as advocates for children and youth, participating in the life of our church.

The policy and procedures set forth below will apply to all people who provide supervision or have custody of children or who have opportunity to have contact with children in church facilities or church sponsored activities.

DEFINITIONS

Child - A person under 18 years of age

Child Abuse – "Child abuse" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare that occurs through non-accidental physical or mental injury, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, or maltreatment, by a parent, a legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare or by a teacher, a teacher's aide, or a member of the clergy. Refer to [Michigan Child Protection Law, 1975 PA 238, MCL 722.622 et. seq.](#)

Neglect – "Child neglect" means harm or threatened harm to a child's health or welfare by a parent, legal guardian, or any other person responsible for the child's health or welfare that occurs through either of the following:

- (i) Negligent treatment, including the failure to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, or medical care.
- (ii) Placing a child at an unreasonable risk to the child's health or welfare by failure of the parent, legal guardian, or other person responsible for the child's health or welfare to intervene to eliminate that risk when that person is able to do so and has, or should have, knowledge of the risk.

Refer to [Michigan Child Protection Law, 1975 PA 238, MCL 722.622 et. seq.](#)

Paid Staff – Any person who is paid by the church on a full-time or part-time basis

Volunteer – A person who works with children or youth but is not paid by the church for such service

Youth – A child aged 12-17 years old

Youth Volunteer – A person under the age of 18 who assists in a non-supervisory role with children and receives no income for such service

SCREENING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

Screening Procedures for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children

All persons who intend to work with children and youth at Chelsea First United Methodist Church must be properly screened and all documentation of screening will be kept on file.

	Criminal Background Checks (iChat*)	Sexual Offender Registry check**	Reference Check	Letter of Recommendation	Volunteer and Employee Information Form
Paid Staff	X	X	X		
Adult Volunteers	X	X	X		X
Youth Volunteers			Youth can choose either reference checks or letter of recommendation.		

*if a paid staff member has a previous address outside of Michigan (as an adult), a criminal background check must be pursued in that state

** this will be checked via <http://www.icrimewatch.net/index.php?AgencyID=55242>

Training Requirements for Paid and Volunteer Staff Working with Children

- Paid Staff
 - Read [Safe Sanctuaries for Ministers: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church](#) by J. Melton (book provided)
 - Review Safe Sanctuaries policy (annually)
 - Review Michigan DHS mandated reporter information and Michigan Child Protection Law (annually)

This policy was adopted and implemented for employees and volunteers beginning in September 2016.

- View insurance carrier video
- Regular Adult / Youth Volunteers
 - Review Safe Sanctuaries policy (annually)
 - Review Michigan DHS mandated reporter information and Michigan Child Protection Law (annually)
 - View insurance carrier video (youth volunteers may opt out if desired)

Safe Sanctuary Policy Procedures for Volunteer Screening

Interested volunteers should be given application packets containing the Safe Sanctuary Policy (SSP) and volunteer and employee information form. Assignments should not begin until volunteers have completed the Safe Sanctuary policy process.

The completed paperwork should be mailed or given directly to the Office Manager or placed in his/her mailbox by the applicant. When the Office Manager receives a completed SSP packet, the background check form will be submitted for clearance. If advised by the Office Manager that additional information is needed, the Director of Children's or Youth Ministries, Office Manager or designee may contact additional references as indicated on the application or request an interview to determine placement.

Upon completion of the Safe Sanctuary Policy forms including the background check, the Office Manager will advise the Director of Children's and/or Youth Ministries if volunteer is approved.

Response to Background Check Information

- If the background check information is clear, the applicant may volunteer.
- If the background check information or other documents contain information that states the applicant has been charged with, convicted of, or plead guilty to a crime, either a misdemeanor or felony, including but not limited to crimes against minors, child molestation, crimes involving pornography, sexual or physical abuse, other crimes of violence, or theft, the applicant should not be allowed to work with minors.
- If the background check or other documents contain anything questionable that should require special consideration, reasonable efforts will be made to investigate the matter. The information shall be presented to a panel of the Senior Pastor, the Administrative Council, and Chair of the SPRC for further consideration. At that time, it will be determined if the applicant may work with minors.
- If the applicant refuses to submit a background check form or consent to release confidential information, then applicant may not be permitted to work with minors.
- Applicants will be notified if they are not approved to work with minors.

EMPLOYEE SCREENING PROCESS

- Complete a volunteer and employee information form, including Covenant Statement and consent to release confidential information
- Complete an interview by appropriate staff members
- Minimum of two references checked and verified
- Complete criminal background check as dictated by the "Screening Requirements"
- Drug and/or alcohol screening as deemed necessary and/or on demand

This policy was adopted and implemented for employees and volunteers beginning in September 2016.

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the employee's confidential personnel file. These files are kept by the Staff Parish Relations Committee and are available to the Pastor and the employee's immediate supervisor.

VOLUNTEER SCREENING PROCESS

- Complete a volunteer and employee information form, including Covenant Statement and consent to release confidential information
- Background check as dictated by the "Screening Requirements"

All records, forms and reports will become a part of the church's confidential Safe Sanctuary filing system. The files will be maintained by the Office Manager.

PROTECTION POLICIES

The vitality of our ministries demands active volunteers who use their God-given gifts in service of others. The following rules are designed to give a structure to volunteers while providing adequate care for our children.

Five-year Rule - All paid staff working with children and youth must be at least five years older than the age group that they are leading/supervising.

Six-month Rule - A volunteer must be a member of Chelsea First United Methodist Church, or a regular attendee, for a minimum of six (6) months to work in a supervisory role with children. Only with approval of the appropriate children's or youth minister or senior pastor, may a volunteer serve as supervisor, who does not meet the six-month rule requirement.

Two Caregiver Rule – Two non-related adult workers will be present with children and youth during church related activities whenever practicable. At a minimum, one caregiver will be an adult and the second may be a minor 12 or older. An adult supervisor acting as a "floater" will make unannounced visits frequently when the two-adult rule is not feasible. In a room where there is a husband and wife team, they will be considered as one worker for purposes of this policy.

Minors – Volunteers under the age of eighteen (18) will be allowed to volunteer in children's ministry in a support function, but not in a supervisory role. Minors who volunteer must complete a Volunteer and Employee Information Form. Parents or guardians must sign the application stating that the parent or guardian knows of no reason that the minor should not be allowed to work with other minors.

Windows/Doors – Reasonable efforts will be made to keep doors unlocked and/or windows unobstructed where children are in view during church-related activities. Workers will avoid being alone with a child without being visible to those in the immediate area.

Local Activities – Compliance with this Safe Sanctuary policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related activity.

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Out-of-town Activities – A written parental consent form and medical release form will be provided for all participants. A consent form may be kept on file for the period of one year and will be considered valid until expiration at the end of said year. Compliance with this Safe Sanctuary Policy is required of all employees and volunteers during any church-related non-local activity.

Over-Night Activities – Males and females will have separate sleeping areas. There will be male and female chaperones if there are male and female children.

Transportation – Any activities that require transportation of minors will adhere to both the policies contained within this document and CFUMC's Transportation Policy (included in CFUMC's Child & Youth Protection Policies Manual).

REPORTING PROCEDURES

- When should a report of physical abuse or sexual abuse be made?
 - Upon witnessing any suspicious physical contact or any sexual contact
 - This contact may be between an adult and a child/youth or between a child/youth and a child/youth
- Who should report the suspicious physical contact or sexual contact?
 - Any adult who witnesses the suspicious physical contact or any sexual contact between an adult and a child/youth or between a child/youth and a child/youth
 - Any adult to whom an adult or child /youth has reported witnessing or knowledge of suspicious physical contact/abuse or sexual contact/abuse occurring.
- To whom should the report be made?
 - Any adult or child/youth will notify any pastor, director of children ministries, director of youth ministries or any church staffer of the event.
 - The notified church staffer will report the incident to the senior pastor.
 - Post-report, the senior pastor will submit, in writing, the notice of such event to the Administrative Council.
 - Upon receiving notice, the Administrative Council will acknowledge receipt of the report with the person filing the report.
 - The senior pastor will update the Administrative Council, in writing, on the status of the investigation as needed but no less frequently than quarterly.

In addition to mandated and permissive reporting to DHHS and local law enforcement, incidents of child abuse and/or neglect must also be reported to local and district church authorities. Please review:

http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,4562,7-124-7119_50648_44443---,00.html

Mandated Reporters include members of the clergy, regulated child care providers and many other professions which any member of our congregation might be a member of:

http://www.michigan.gov/dhs/0,4562,7-124-7119_50648_44443-157836--,00.html

Please review the Appendix, "Clergy Guide for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect."

RESPONSES TO ALLEGATIONS

All allegations of child abuse will be taken seriously. Appropriate action for reporting an allegation will be taken immediately by church staff in accordance with the reporting laws of the State of Michigan,

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insurance policies and the advice of legal counsel. All care shall be taken to ensure confidentiality of all parties involved. Disclosure of information in relation to allegations is prohibited, except as required for reporting purposes.

Appropriate response toward the victim

1. Seek appropriate emergency care for the victim, if abuse occurs while victim is in church care.
2. Notify parent(s)/guardian(s) of the victim. If victim is in church care, take necessary precautions to insure the child's safety until parent(s)/guardian(s) arrival.
3. Protect evidence (area/room should be secured until proper authorities can investigate).
4. Provide pastoral care to victim and family.

Appropriate response toward the accused

1. If abuse occurs while accused is still on the premises, treat the accused with dignity, but immediately remove him/her from further involvement with minors.
2. Remind accused of the Child Protection Policy and that the allegation must be investigated.
3. Provide pastoral care to accused and his/her family.
4. If the accused individual is a church staffer or volunteer,
 - a. He or she will be removed from contact with children and youth immediately pending the outcome of an investigation.
 - b. Only upon unanimous decision from the Administrative Council and pastor would the individual return to responsibilities.
5. The pastor in consultation with other staff as well as the Administrative Council will decide upon the appropriate response plan. This will include:
 - a. Designating an individual to lead an internal investigation.
 - i. The church has an obligation beyond that of the police or other authorities to conduct its own investigation and return findings in writing.
 - ii. Holding the leader of the investigation accountable for reporting findings and ensuring that he or she gets the most support possible.
 - b. Designating an individual, if warranted, to communicate and coordinate with the local authorities, including but not limited to the police, and Department of Human Services, etc.
 - c. Designating an individual to communicate with, receive direction from and report to the Detroit Annual Conference.
 - d. These responsibilities may all be assigned to the same individual or they may be divided among multiple individuals.
6. The results of any internal investigation will be submitted, in writing, to the Administrative Council.

DIGITAL COMMUNICATION POLICY

As an ever-increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication over other forms, it is essential that the church be present in this mission field. Social networking sites, on-the-spot communication devices and email can enhance communication, faith sharing and deepen relationships.

The following recommended practices and guidelines apply principles of healthy boundaries and safe church to the virtual world of digital networking and communication. They are intended to raise awareness of issues and open doors of conversations with ministry teams. We encourage all ministry teams to discern together the following guidelines, considering the nature of your ministry and being mindful that our calling is to meet children and youth where they are; model healthy boundaries; and love and care for them safely. Adults engaged in ministry to youth and children should consider their relationship with the youth or child when interacting with them using digital media, and should conduct themselves in a manner that would be acceptable on church grounds.

CONNECTING ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES

1. In addition to participating on the ministry pages, youth may wish to establish personal social media connections with church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in youth ministry. Adults who are willing to participate in these relationships should use the following guidelines when establishing these connections:
 - a. Adults should not submit 'friend' requests to children or youth. Minors may feel like they are not able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and adults.
 - b. Due to the greater potential for misinterpretation, inappropriate discussions, and inadvertent exposure of youth to inappropriate content; personal pages / accounts / profiles should be maintained appropriately.
 - c. As additional social media sites gain popularity, the Safe Sanctuaries Committee reserves the right to apply this approach to the various methods of digital communication.

BOUNDARIES

2. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set strict privacy settings on any personal social networking profile, making every effort to prevent youth and children from being introduced to objectionable content. Privacy settings on personal pages and information should be thoroughly scrutinized on a regular basis to prevent this information from being available to minors. In the event that a church leader or adult volunteer does not feel that they can set the proper privacy settings and/or regularly check their personal pages (2-3 times per day) for inappropriate material that might have been posted by others, they are asked to completely restrict child/youth access to their pages / profiles. For this reason, it is recommended that all church leaders and/or adult volunteers enforce this boundary by no youth "friends" on Facebook.
3. For the sake of their own privacy and the well-being of the child/youth participants, church leaders and adult volunteers should not add or invite children or youth to any groups, events, pages, chat

rooms, etc. that are not solely dedicated to activities directly related to the children or youth ministries or ministry activities.

4. Given the continuing evolution of privacy settings and capabilities on many social networking sites, church leaders and adult volunteers must be willing to continue to educate themselves on what settings are needed to support the above recommendations.

COMMUNICATION

Social media is an excellent way to quickly share both good and sad moments in a person's life with a large number of people. However, as with all forms of communication, users should be respectful of the privacy of others. This is particularly the case with youth and children's ministry leaders. Leaders should be especially mindful of how information is presented in such a permanent medium, and should never share news about another person without their express prior consent.

5. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact youth and children through social media, e-mail or other forms of digital communication. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule to use – normally do not text or chat with youth at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 9:00AM or after 9:00 PM. Exceptions to this rule are as follows:

- a. In emergency situations or when children or youth reach out to a church leader or adult volunteer with issues that they feel that they need to discuss immediately.
- b. During weekends, vacation times, and other times when children or youth may have parental permission to stay up later than normal, adult leaders may respond to youth initiated communications outside of these hours, at their discretion.

In all of the exception situations, adults should use good judgment in deciding when discussions should continue or be picked up at a more appropriate time, in order to support and demonstrate good boundaries with their personal time.

All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) may be shared or reposted to others. Adults should be mindful that comments sent to a youth may be shared by that youth in a number of ways and that misinterpretation of those comments may occur.

6. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth should consider the content and nature of any posts that will be seen or read by others. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.
7. 'One on one' video or chat room interaction is generally not appropriate between adults and minors.
8. When the content of received communications raises concerns or questions, it should be shared with a member of the Pastoral team, and law enforcement, where appropriate.
 - a. Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally sensitive, emotionally charged, or that require extensive conversation.
 - b. Email may be more appropriate where matters are deemed legally sensitive.

- c. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted, and should be used only where appropriate.
- 9. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies and should be used when possible to provide the appropriate level of support.

IDENTITY PROTECTION

We will seek to protect the privacy and identity of all minors in our use of social media. All church leaders and adults leaders in youth and children's ministry should closely monitor the privacy settings of any posted youth images to ensure that they are not accessible to individuals who do not have permission to view them. Both youth and adult participants should remember that the focus of the event is the experience of being present in ministry, not the documentation.

- 10. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with minors must not post photos or video that identify children or youth by name on any online site or printed publication.
- 11. Parents, youth, and adult volunteers should remember that pictures that include a child or youth that is not your own should not be posted without verbal consent from said child / youth's parent, even if your child / youth is also in the picture. Be mindful.
- 12. We strongly encourage the respect and dignity of every person depicted in an image. If a picture would make the youth feel self-conscious, vulnerable, or would subject the youth to ridicule, the picture should not be posted.
- 13. When checking in with any location tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in minors.

ADMINISTRATION OF OFFICIAL SUMC SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS

- 14. Each church related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of two unrelated administrators, who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry. One of the administrators should be a staff member.
- 15. Sites must be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
- 16. If a closed group exists, at least two administrators should review the access to the CFUMC Youth 'Closed' group account to remove:
 - a. Adult leaders who no longer actively participate in the youth program
 - b. Former youth members, and their parents, who no longer actively participate in the youth program. Any inappropriate material posted to a church related social media site, group or page must be deleted and addressed. Refer to the CFUMC Safe Sanctuaries Policy 'Reporting Allegations of Abuse' section for further information and reporting guidelines.

Clergy Guide for Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect
(see enclosure)