

First United Methodist Church of Lincoln, Maine
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Safer Sanctuaries

Policies and Procedures for the Safety of our Congregation

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1.1 Preface

The General Conference of the United Methodist Church adopted the following resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual abuse in the church in 1996:

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 and in the realm of God.

Jesus also said, "If any of you put a stumbling block before 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 the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church state that "children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation, and abuse" (P66C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse occur in churches, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines. It is real, and it appears to be increasing. Most annual conferences can cite specific incidents of child sexual abuse and exploitation in their churches. Virtually every congregation has among its members adult survivors of early sexual trauma.

Such incidents are devastating to all who are involved: the child, the family, the local church and its' leaders. Increasingly, churches are torn apart by the legal, emotional, and monetary consequences of litigation following allegations of 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. In response to this churchwide challenge, the following steps should be taken to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse:

Local churches should:

- 1. Develop and implement an ongoing education plan for the congregation and its leaders on the reality of child abuse, risk factors leading to abuse, and strategies for prevention;*
- 2. Adopt screening procedures (use of application forms, interviews, reference checks, background clearance, and so forth) for workers (paid and unpaid) directly or indirectly involved in the care of children and youth;*
- 3. Develop and implement safety procedures for church activities such as having two or more unrelated adults present in the classroom or activity; leaving doors open and installing half doors or windows in doors or halls; providing hall monitors; instituting sign-in and sign-out procedures for children age ten or younger; and so forth;*
- 4. Advise children and young persons of an agency or a person outside as well as within the local church whom they can contact for advice and help if they have suffered abuse;*
- 5. Carry liability insurance that includes sexual abuse coverage;*

6. Assist the development of awareness and self-protection skills for children and youth through special curriculum and activities; and
7. Be familiar with the annual conference and other Church policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

1.2 Purpose

Our Mission Statement: The First United Methodist Church of Lincoln, ME (FUMCL) is dedicated to making disciples of Jesus Christ by helping people know and live into God's way. It is a place where all come to experience meaningful worship, to love and be loved, to grow in Christ and to reach out in justice and mercy to others. Because our church is a community of faith providing both a safe haven and sanctuary, it is a place where all people can be confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal. Therefore, it must have policies in place that will reduce the risk of abuse to any at-risk person participating in church-sanctioned activities. We must also try to help at-risk persons who may be abused at FUMCL or in other settings, to help them physically and emotionally. We know that no policy can prevent all abuse, but we can lessen the chance of problems through adherence to these procedures.

1.3 Definitions

Child Abuse:

1. *Physical Abuse: Abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child.*
2. *Emotional Abuse: Abuse in which a person exposes a child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty.*
3. *Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers a child's health, safety or welfare through negligence.*
4. *Sexual Abuse: Abuse in which sexual contact between a child and an adult (or older, more powerful youth) occurs.*
5. *Ritual Abuse: Abuse in which physical, sexual or psychological violations are inflicted regularly, intentionally, and in a stylized way by a person or persons responsible for the child's welfare.*
6. *Reputational Abuse: Abuse in which a person's moral and/or ethical character is unfairly degraded through communication of falsehoods or breach of confidentiality.*

At-risk persons: *Any person whose background predisposes them to vulnerability. Common examples are youth (i.e., anyone under 18 years of age), elderly (anyone over 65 years of age), residents / homeowners at mission trip work sites, or a special needs person.*

Volunteers: *Any member of the congregation who works with children in the church without pay or compensation. This includes Sunday School teachers, youth group leaders, chaperones, acolyte coordinators, Stephen ministers, VIM team members, and others.*

Paid employee: any of the church staff who is hired for pay, currently including the pastor, secretary, sexton, nursery worker and music director.

Nominations Committee: responsible for selecting volunteers for church positions.

Maine State Bureau of Identification: A Maine state agency, which is responsible for criminal background checks on Maine's citizens.

Maine Criminal History Record: The criminal background check performed by the Maine State Bureau of Identification.

Maine Criminal History Record Administrator: The Maine Criminal History Record contact person for the church.

Maine Criminal History Record Submitter: An individual approved by the Maine State Bureau of Identification who has the authority to request and receive Maine Criminal History Record reports.

Participation Covenants: A written agreement for all leaders and participants in children's or youth ministry to take part in the ministry, give their best effort to the ministry, respect the other participants, treat others with respect.

Corporal punishment: Any physical punishment including spanking or slapping.

2.0 Selecting and Screening Volunteers Working with At-Risk Persons

2.1 Volunteer Application Process

The church will request a Maine Criminal History Record check through the Maine State Bureau of Identification or the equivalent state board if they move from another state within the last 12 months. All volunteers are required to consent to this to have contact with at risk persons. (Appendix F) These reports will be filed in the locked cabinet for Maine Criminal History Record reports in the pastor's office. See State Sex Offender regulations in Appendix B.

Any person with a documented history of child abuse, child sexual molestation, or elder abuse will be prohibited from working with at-risk persons participating in church-sanctioned activities. The church leaders will encourage the person to contribute to church life in a way that does not place others at risk. Any other issues which are noted on the Maine Criminal History Record check will be discussed in an interview that includes the Maine Criminal History Record submitter and the pastor.

No one will be able to volunteer in the Sunday School or work with at-risk persons until they have been attending this church regularly for at least six months. This does not include parents staying in the Nursery with their child or parents monitoring Sunday School.

2.2 Paid Employee Application Process

All applicants for any paid position in the church will complete an employment application. Current employees will complete an application to have on file. The Staff Parish Relations Committee will review all applications.

The church will request a Maine Criminal History Record check for the final candidate and current employees, or the equivalent if they move from another state. The candidate will need to consent to this to be considered for a position.

Any person with a documented history of child sexual molestation or child abuse will not be hired. If this information is omitted from an application the employee may be fired for misrepresentation of information.

2.3 Maintenance of Records

Maine Criminal History Record evaluations must be kept secure. They may only be accessed by the Maine Criminal History Record Administrator and the Maine Criminal History Record Submitters, as defined by state regulation. Only one Maine Criminal History Record evaluation may be stored for each person, prior Maine Criminal History Record forms must be shredded when a new one is received. The Maine Criminal History Record file must be locked and will be stored in a locked box in the pastor's office. All state regulations regarding Maine Criminal History Records will be followed.

Maine Criminal History Records on all volunteers and staff will be maintained through the persons association with the church plus 3 years. The Sex Offender Registry for the town of Lincoln will be checked for Lincoln residents who are volunteering in or attending our church, and for neighbors of our church building.

3.0 Supervising Activities with At-Risk Persons

3.1 Supervising Children and Youth in the Sunday School

*All children and youth will be in a classroom with a window in the door, or classroom doors will be left open. Designated adults will be available to monitor classrooms each Sunday. If the Superintendent is not available another volunteer will substitute. If possible there will be three teachers in each classroom, otherwise the minimum number of teachers is two. **At no time** will one teacher be alone with one child or youth.*

Teachers in classrooms should be over 18 years of age. Teacher aides may be under the age of 18, but should not be alone with minors in the classroom. All teacher aides must be at least five years older than the students in the classroom.

If the Sunday School class leaves the church property for a special event, the parents will be informed during the morning announcements or in the bulletin and will have the option to keep their child in the Worship service that morning if they are concerned about their child leaving the premises.

When a teacher takes a toddler to the bathroom, the bathroom door should be left open. Infants may be diapered in the Nursery, with parental consent, when two adults are in the classroom.

3.2 Youth in Youth Group

All youth group activities will be supervised by at least two adults, preferably three. Parents will be notified in advance of activities occurring outside the church building through the youth group schedule. At the beginning of the school year, parents will be asked to sign a general consent form for activities located in the area. (Appendix A) For special events with long drives, or overnight events, parents will be asked to sign a specific consent form for the event, including a description of the plans. If a leader is going to take a young person home after the meeting or event, the parent must sign a consent form. (Appendix B)

When driving young people to an event, there will always be two approved adults in the car. The cars will leave together, drive together and arrive together. There will be at least 2 youth with the driver. Only adults, age 21 and over, will be allowed to drive on youth group trips.

For overnight events with the youth, there must be at least two chaperones with the young people. In addition, during the night, there will be one adult who is awake and monitoring the doors. If a youth awakens during the night, the youth or the adult will awaken another chaperone to stay up until the youth has returned to sleep. If the event takes place at a retreat center or campground, there will be at least one chaperone of the same gender as the youth on the trip. When the activity is not held on FUMCL property, the chaperones do not need to be from FUMCL, but need to meet FUMCL's background requirements (e.g., CORI). All youth group leaders must be at least five years older than the oldest member of the youth group.

3.3 Open Door Counseling

At any counseling sessions with children or youth, the door of the room used will be left open for the entire session. The session will be conducted at a time when others are nearby, even if they are not within listening distance.

3.4 Participation Covenants

All volunteers will sign a Participation Covenant (Appendix C) before they may volunteer.

3.5 Accidents and Injuries

If a child is injured and requires first aid of any type, including a Band-aid or ice, an accident report (Appendix D) will be filled out, with one copy given to the parents and the original kept on file. Accident Report Forms will be placed with the First Aid kits in the supply closet and the Sunday school office. The completed reports will be placed in the Safe Sanctuaries Folder on the shelf in the Ladies Parlor.

3.6 Discipline

There will be no corporal punishment. If a child misbehaves and cannot be managed with verbal redirection, the child will be escorted to the Sanctuary to stay with his/her parents for the remainder of the session. If his/her parent is not at the Worship Service the child will sit with one of our designated church members.

3.7 Other Activities with At-Risk Persons

Where applicable and transferable, policies and processes as described in sections 3.1 through 3.6 above will apply to all other FUMC-sanctioned activities in which at-risk persons participate. The five year age differential requirement for group leaders as specified in section 3.2 above only applies to youth.

Rooms with glass doors may have the door closed for counseling with adults.

3.8 Mission Trips

All participants in FUMCL Volunteer In Mission (VIM) teams will adhere to FUMC's background check requirements if youth will be on the team. (Youth do not participate in Emergency Response Teams.) VIM teams will not photograph owners or residents of worksite home homes without first securing their permission to take the photograph and share via email and/or social media. No mission trip photograph published on the open Internet (including social media sites such as X and FaceBook) will include the address of the work site or the last name of the resident / owner.

4.0 Computer and Digital Resource Use

4.1 Scope

The scope of this section of the policy applies to all users of digital FUMCL-managed technology resources. FUMC-managed technology includes all technology owned or leased by FUMCL for its official business and/or sanctioned activities, including, but not limited to the following: computers, printers, digital cameras, etc. All persons requiring access to such resources must be required to read the Policy and sign the acknowledgement form (Appendix E).

4.2 Use of Technology

Only software owned or leased by FUMCL shall be installed on FUMCL-managed technology resources. All users of such resources must comply with all federal and state laws, and the church's rules and policies including: software license agreements, laws of libel, privacy, copyright, trademark, obscenity, pornography, child pornography, as well as the electronic Communications Privacy Act and the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act, which

prohibit hacking, cracking, and similar activities. While this list is not all encompassing, FUMCL-managed technology resources are not to be used for: chain e-mail misuse (e.g., SPAM), derogatory or harassing e-mail or images, sexually explicit, obscene or pornographic materials, any and all communication that is illegal or contrary to FUMCL's policies, ministry, or business interests, gaining of unauthorized access to remote computers or networks.

All FUMCL-managed software such as instant messaging and all other forms of Internet-based chat are restricted to authorized adult users. All documents to include e-mail traffic created on FUMCL computing resources are considered the property of FUMCL.

All electronic communications conducted on FUMCL-managed equipment may be subject to audit by appropriate authority so designated by FUMCL Trustees. Moreover, all users should be aware that no activity, including activity related to controlled information as described below, is private in any way and is subject to monitoring or audit at any time. The use of unauthorized encryption software or devices is strictly prohibited on FUMCL computing resources.

Children should always be supervised while utilizing FUMCL-managed technology so as to ensure their compliance with said guidelines.

No use of FUMCL-managed technology shall compromise the privacy of any person covered under the scope of this policy.

No posting of the likeness of a person under 18 years of age on a FUMCL-controlled web site available on the open Internet (i.e., available to anyone without login) shall include that person's last name, address or phone number. For the purposes of this policy, public social interaction sites and services such as X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, etc. are considered FUMCL-controlled web sites if a FUMCL employee or volunteer serves as site administrator under direction of the FUMCL Pastor, Trustees, or Church Council. Sites maintained under such direction should include appropriate labeling to indicate that the site is maintained as part of the ministry of FUMC.

4.3 Controlled Information

All users with access to FUMCL-managed technology shall protect controlled information for persons covered under the scope of this agreement. Controlled information shall include the following:

- 1. Personal identifiers including social security number / social insurance number (e.g., for non-US residents), and date of birth.*
- 2. Any information provided in confidence to the FUMCL Pastor or other member acting in official FUMCL capacity.*
- 3. Financial giving information.*
- 4. All users IDs / password credentials to FUMCL-managed technology.*

Access to any FUMCL-managed technology that creates or stores controlled information shall be controlled by unique login ID / password credentials..

The pastor shall be responsible for all user logins and passwords for users with access to FUMCL managed technologies and/or equipment. This information will be kept in a locked file in the church office and updated as needed.

4.4 Email and private messaging.

As established elsewhere in this Policy, physical interaction with at-risk persons will not occur in 1:1 settings behind closed doors. Similarly, direct 1:1 electronic communications with at-risk persons are prohibited. Any direct electronic communication with at-risk persons will include a cc: to include a Safe Sanctuary email account established and maintained by FUMC. Communications sent to this account will be considered confidential controlled information as described in section 4.3 above. The account shall be managed at the direction of the FUMCL trustees. FUMCL staff shall not have access to this account. In the event that an at-risk person initiates 1:1 communication with FUMCL staff, then the staff member will reply compliant with this policy.

All online communication between staff members and minors/vulnerable adults needs to adhere to the two-adult rule (i.e. instant messaging and email communication must always include more than one adult).

4.5 Use of WiFi

At the pleasure of the Trustees, FUMCL will provide access to FUMCL-managed WiFi. All use of FUMCL WiFi must comply with all provisions in this policy.

5.0 Process

5.1 Supervision By Parents After Worship Services and At Church Special Events

For safety reasons, we discourage children from playing in the parking lot or on the wheelchair ramp, rails or steps. Instead, we expect parents to supervise their children in the grassy areas around the church. If a child is injured while playing on the ramp, rails or in the parking area, the church will not be responsible.

5.2 Outside Groups Using Our Church Building

All groups which use the church building must show documentation for having screened their volunteers and have safety procedures in place that are consistent with, or more stringent than, our church policies. The Trustees will monitor this compliance as they agree to allow groups to have access to our building. If a group wishes to use the building for a one-time event, they would need to have policies only if they offer child-care or specific children's or youth programs, otherwise parents would be responsible for monitoring their children.

5.3 Annual Training

Prior to volunteering, training on this policy will be provided. Periodic training will also be required of all volunteers working with children and youth. If a volunteer can not be present at the training session, they will be required to review the training material and sign that they have reviewed it.

5.4 Safety Equipment

All volunteers will be aware of the location of first aid equipment, fire extinguishers, emergency exits in case of fire, and whom to call in the congregation for on-site emergency first aid.

6.0 Reporting Incidents of Suspected Abuse

6.1 Reporting Requirements

All clergy people in Maine are mandatory reporters. If the clergy person has reasonable cause to believe that a child is being injured, that information needs to be reported to the Maine Office of Child and Family Services immediately. In addition to clergy, the law applies to anyone performing duties on behalf of the church in the role of a pastor and to employees who supervise, educate, train or counsel children on a regular basis. While the law does not cover volunteers, it is the expectation of the Annual Conference that volunteers report any suspected abuse to the pastor.

Allegations of Abuse: *If a child or youth reports abuse to a volunteer, or if a volunteer suspects abuse, a verbal report will immediately be made to the pastor. Once the pastor has been made aware of an allegation of abuse either directly or through information from a volunteer, they will notify the Maine Office of Child and Family Services. A written report will be initiated by the first person that suspects abuse and filled out through section 6. The pastor will complete the form. The pastor will contact the parents of the victim and the District Superintendent within twenty-four hours.*

If the Pastor is the accused abuser, the report will be made to the Chairperson of the Staff-Parish Relations Committee, who will then make the necessary calls to the Department of Social Services and the District Superintendent.

All reporters will maintain confidentiality and will not identify either the victim or the accused, except to those who must know.

If the abuse is reported as occurring during a church event or on the church property, conference officials will be notified by the pastor or chair of Staff-Parish Relations Committee as appropriate, and the church will follow their direction in notifying the Conference attorney and insurance agent.

A media spokesperson will be named to deal with any calls from the press. Either the Lay Leader or the pastor will ask the congregation to refrain from making comments to the press.

Witnessed abuse: *If anyone witnesses an incident of abuse in the church, that person should remove the child to a safe location, then call 911, explaining the need for emergency care of the child/youth as well as apprehension of the perpetrator. The area where the incident was observed should be closed off to everyone, until the police arrive. The District Superintendent will be notified, as well as conference attorneys and the insurance agent. A media spokesperson will be named. The Conference Emergency Response Team will be asked to assist.*

Ministry After an Incident of Abuse: *Healing ministry will be needed after an event of this nature. A letter setting out the pertinent facts of the situation should be written to all members of the congregation, without disclosing the name of the victim or the alleged abuser. This letter will be written by the pastor or Staff-Parish Relations Committee chair as appropriate with the assistance of the Conference response team.*

A formal meeting should be scheduled to discuss the issues, the feelings of the congregation and further safety measures to protect the safety of all the children in the future. Counselors should be available for members of the congregation at the meeting.

The church should offer to assist in finding and providing funding if possible for counseling for the victim and victim's family if incidents occurred during church activities, or assist in finding counselors for abuse occurring in other settings.

Policy Review: *This policy will be reviewed every five years next in 2029, and as needed. The review committee will be made up of the Pastor, Lay Leader, Education Committee Chair, a Staff-Parish Committee representative, and a Trustees representative.*