

# **ABUSE PREVENTION POLICY SIERRA FOOTHILLS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

**3301 Green Valley Road  
Rescue, CA 95672**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Jesus, time and time again, spoke of the importance of young people being included and provided for within the community of faith. Our hope and belief today is that the Church is a place where children and youth will find the unconditional love and care they so desperately need to grow and thrive.

Every 15 seconds a child is abused or neglected. Abuse often happens in settings where children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be able to feel safe – homes, schools, camps, and most sadly, the Church. Abuse does occur in churches, large and small, urban and rural. It is a problem, which cuts across all economic, cultural, and racial lines.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in the Church. As Christians, we must take our responsibilities to our children, youth, and vulnerable adults very seriously. We fail in our responsibilities if we neglect to take adequate precautions against abuse in our church. It is unlikely that we can completely prevent abuse in every situation, but it is possible for us to greatly reduce the risk by following a thorough practical policy of prevention. This policy attempts to do that for Conference agencies that deal with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

## **PURPOSE**

God has given us a sacred opportunity and great responsibility to nurture and protect children, youth and vulnerable adults, and the persons who work with them. The California-Nevada Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church bears affirmative responsibility to create an environment of safe sanctuary for children, youth and vulnerable adults, and those who work with them in a conference setting. Thus we establish this Abuse Prevention Policy to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all our children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

It is the purpose of this policy first of all to protect the children, youth, and vulnerable adults that come to us. The second purpose of this policy is to protect our staff, both paid and volunteer, from unfounded and/or malicious allegations of abuse.

We have developed a comprehensive plan that includes all areas of the issue: screening, training, supervision, reporting procedures, and a response plan. We will follow stringent safety measures in the recruitment and selection of workers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs and events; we will educate all of our workers with children, youth, and vulnerable adults regarding the use of all appropriate policies and procedures; and we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of the laws of California.

## **DEFINITIONS**

Adult means a person 18 years old or older.

Child abuse as defined under California laws means any of the following:

- A child is physically injured by other than accidental means.
- A child is subjected to willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment.
- A child is abused or exploited sexually.
- A child is neglected by a parent or caretaker who fails to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care or supervision.

Child means any person from birth until they turn 12.

Activities means any activity or program in which children, youth, or vulnerable adults are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

Staff person means any person employed by the Church who is responsible for activities for children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

Volunteer means a person 18 years of age or older who assists in conducting activities under the supervision of a staff person.

Vulnerable Adults means any person 18 years of age or older with diagnosed diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities.

We means the Foothills United Methodist Church (FUMC).

Youth means any person from 12 years old through their 18th birthday.

Event staff is a person in any position of responsibility at an event sponsored by FUMC or any person who takes instruction and direction from a Church staff person or another event staff person at such an event.

## **SCREENING PROCEDURES**

Careful screening is one way to prevent the abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults. It can be time consuming and expensive, but provides some assurance that the

most reliable, committed and experience staff and volunteers are in place for every program that involves children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

We require these MINIMUM standards:

All adults, volunteer or staff persons, who have regular and direct contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults shall be required to fill out an application that includes:

- Standard contact information
- All felony convictions.
- A listing of 3 non-related references with complete contact information. Reference checks may be waived by the SPRC on a case by case basis.
- A signed release and waiver form allowing the Church to perform a background check.

The policy shall be implemented in the following manner:

All staff persons and volunteers, who have regular and direct contact with children, will submit to the screening procedures as outlined by this policy.

All new applicants, persons having a break in service of one or more years, and those persons who have not been screened in five years since their last background check at this Church shall submit to the screening procedures again.

The Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) is responsible for reviewing and approving each application before a person's service begins.

All records are confidential and will be maintained by the SPRC.

In the unfortunate situation where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with children/youth, the Church will handle such a decision in a confidential manner which is sensitive to that person.

## **SUPERVISION**

1. Before beginning work with either children or youth, each staff or volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understand and agree to abide by the Child Protection Standards of the Foothills United Methodist Church. Such a signed statement is required of all persons and is prerequisite to beginning work at any event.
2. Two Adult Supervision - At least two unrelated adults will be present for all activities involving children or youth. There are at least 4 reasons for this standard:
  - To remove an opportunity for abusive situations
  - To remove an opportunity for false accusations of abuse
  - To provide support for leadership at the events
  - To provide sufficient leadership to deal with emergency situations

3. When youth assist with an activity and the “Two-Adult” rule is not feasible, one youth may be counted toward fulfilling the Two-Adult rule, provided the youth assistant is at least 5 years older than the youth or children being supervised.
4. Adult supervisors must be at least 5 years older than the youth being supervised.
5. Permission Forms - Permission Forms indicating a parent’s knowledge of the event or series of events and release for emergency medical treatment are required for each child/youth attending the activity. The forms will be retained by the person responsible for the event for the duration of the event and by the Church for at least one year following the event. If the event includes travel to another site, the forms will be kept by the leaders traveling with the group and copies will be kept by the leader of the event.
6. Co-ed Events - There will be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two or more adults present will be of the same gender as the children/youth.
7. Transportation - The following standards will be followed when the Church is providing transportation to, from, or as a part of a Church sponsored event:
  - a. Driver must be at least 25 years old
  - b. Driver must have a valid California license for the vehicle being operated
  - c. The vehicle must be insured. Driver must have proof of insurance in his/her possession and on file in the church office.
  - d. Driver must be accompanied by at least 2 children/youth and be part of a caravan with other vehicles or be accompanied by another adult
  - e. Driver must have read and signed the Participation Covenant Statement
8. Open Door Policy - Parents, volunteers, or staff of the Church may visit and observe any non-confidential Church program at any time.
9. Sensitive Areas - Leaders of a program should avoid being in sensitive areas such as bath rooms, shower areas, and changing rooms with participants. No leader will ever be the only adult in such areas when children/youth are present.
10. Housing - The following standards will be followed when the Church is providing housing as a part of a Church sponsored event:
  - Whenever possible, males and females will sleep in different areas (e.g. Rooms, floors, cabins, etc.)
  - Adults must keep an appropriate distance from children/youth sleeping near them
  - Whenever possible, separate bath rooms will be designated for each gender. When only one bath room is available, privacy will be assured by means of a lock, a sign or a sentry
  - Adults will not share a room with less than 4 children/youth

11. Medical Support - Leaders will know the location of the nearest medical facility and have telephone access to emergency medical assistance.
12. Hazing/Initiations/Bullying - Hazing is any situation where some are entertained at the emotional expense of another. This is sometimes intentional harassment and sometimes “innocent fun.” Both are abusive exercises of power which erode the self-esteem of the child/youth. Such abuse has no place in the program of the Church and shall be avoided. Common examples of “innocent fun” hazing include: a “snipe” hunt, skits involving a victim, good-natured put downs, or secret organizations. Even when the “victim” agrees to the “joke,” we are still teaching that such behavior is acceptable.

## **REPORTING**

Persons who have reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 has been abused is mandated to report the suspected abuse. Volunteer leaders and workers are no exception.

At any Church event, if an adult suspects the abuse or neglect of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult, whether it has occurred at the event or prior to the event, that person must report his/her suspicions to either the chair of the SPRC or a Church pastor. This report must be made within 24 hours. The report should include the following information, if obtainable:

1. The name, address, age and sex of the alleged victim;
2. The name and address of the alleged victim’s parents or other person responsible for his/her care;
3. The nature and extent of the alleged abuse or neglect;
4. Any evidence of previously known or suspected abuse or neglect of the alleged victim or their siblings;
5. The name, address and relationship, if known, of the person who is alleged to have perpetrated the abuse or neglect; and
6. Any other information known to the person making the report that would be helpful to the investigation of the alleged abuse.

The person making the report should consider it confidential information.

In any removal of a person from any activities, care must be taken to handle this in a discreet manner, recognizing that an investigation is still being conducted.

A designated member of the SPRC and the Church pastors shall be properly trained to evaluate and address allegations of abuse.

## **EDUCATION OF WORKERS**

The Church will provide training focused on issues of child protection for those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training (or comparable training) shall be required for all persons in on-going positions of responsibility for children/youth and all

paid staff. It is recommended for all adults and youth helpers who will have any direct contact with children or youth.

Trained leaders of Church sponsored events shall brief untrained workers on the Child Protection Standards and their application in this event.

This training should include:

- The definition and recognition of child abuse
- The Church policy and procedures and their purpose as protection for children/youth and for those working with them
- The policy/procedures on reporting abuse and appropriate forms
- The meaning and importance of confidentiality
- The maintenance of a positive learning environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics
- Appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders.

# Application

Employee and Volunteer Disclosure Form

## FOOTHILLS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_ CITY/STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

BIRTHDATE \_\_\_\_\_ SOCIAL SECURITY # \_\_\_\_\_

VOLUNTEER OR STAFF POSITION \_\_\_\_\_

The church desires to ensure the safety and well-being of all church members, visitors and staff – particularly children, youth, vulnerable adults and developmentally challenged persons. All volunteers and employees of the church must therefore fill out this form completely and return it at least two weeks prior to commencing work.

**HISTORY (Please answer yes or no – if yes, attach explanation)**

Have you ever been convicted of a felony crime? \_\_\_\_\_

I understand that as volunteer or staff member of this church, it is my responsibility to avoid sexual contact with children, youth, and adults, even if the other person attempts to initiate the contact. Under no circumstances will I use corporal punishment as a means of discipline. Further, I understand that by providing my social security number and fingerprint, an investigative background inquiry through the Department of Justice will be made pertaining to my fitness as a volunteer or a staff member of this church. I understand that this inquiry will be made by church pastors and a single member of the Staff Parish Relations Committee, and that this inquiry will be kept strictly confidential. All background review documents will be destroyed at the conclusion of the review.

I certify that the information I have provided is true and correct. I understand that the Staff Parish Relations Committee reserves the right to terminate my service if it is found that the answers given above are false.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to:

# Covenant Statement

The Foothills United Methodist Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the Church. The following policy statements reflect our Church’s commitment to preserving Church gatherings as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. Adult volunteers and employees working with children and youth shall observe the “Two-Adult Rule” at all times so that no adult is ever alone with children or youth.
2. Adult volunteers and employees working with children and youth shall attend regular training and educational events provided by the Church to keep volunteers informed of Church policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
3. Adult volunteers and employees shall immediately report to a Church pastor or the chair of the Staff Parish Relations Committee (SPRC) any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

**Please answer each of the following questions:**

1. As a volunteer or employee in this Church, do you agree to observe and abide by all Church policies regarding working in ministries with children and youth?  Yes  No
2. As a volunteer or employee in this Conference, do you agree to observe the Two-Adult Rule at all times?  Yes  No
3. As a volunteer or employee in this Church, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the church related to your volunteer assignment?  Yes  No
4. As a volunteer in this Church, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior to a Church pastor or the chair of the SPRC?  Yes  No

I have read this Participation Covenant and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth above.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please return to: