
ANONAUMC

13233 Indian Rocks Road, Largo, Florida 33774

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Child & Youth Protection Policy

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Anona United Methodist Church
Largo, Florida

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 Anona 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.

The Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church has promulgated a recommended statement of policy for the protection of children and youth. Anona United Methodist Church approves and hereby adopts that policy. Minor modifications to the written policy, to tailor that policy to the administrative structure of Anona UMC have been incorporated. All reasonable efforts will be made to comply with the letter and spirit of the policy. In any circumstance where absolute compliance is impossible or unreasonable, then best reasonable and possible compliance shall be aspired to and asserted.

I. Definitions

A. "Child," "Youth," and "Adult"

A "child" is anyone age 11 and under. A "youth" is anyone who is 12 and older participating as a "youth" in a "youth" activity. An "Adult" is anyone 18 years of age or older who is not participating as a "youth" in a "youth" activity.

B. "Paid Staff Person," "Adult Volunteer," "Screened Adult," "Administrative Committee," "Administrator"

Administrators are the Director of Children's Ministries and the Director of Youth Ministries. The **Administrative Committee** consists of the Administrators and designated clergy. A **Paid Staff Person** is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened. 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 for at least six months. A regular attendee is someone who would be missed if they aren't in church.

An **Adult Volunteer** is someone who has had limited screening, including a formal interview and local criminal background check.

A **Volunteer Assistant** is a person who occasionally helps with a specific event for children or youth. They are not screened and are always supervised by a screened adult.

C. “Child/Youth Abuse”

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** is defined as 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.
- 4. Neglect:** The failure to meet the physical or emotional needs of a child, or to supervise a child, to such an extent that serious physical or emotional damage results, or may presently result, or so that the child’s ability to thrive is seriously impaired.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

Adults who regularly work with the Church’s children and youth and each church paid staff person will be screened. This screening is good for 5 years after which time a re-screening will be necessary. Those who work regularly with children/youth will be trained on child protection issues prior to beginning their regular involvement with children and youth.

A. The screening process will include:

Screened Adults, Paid Staff, Administrators:

1. Application Form
2. Interview
3. Reference Check
4. Criminal Background Check
 - Federal
 - Local criminal background
 - Acknowledgment Form
 - Affidavit of Good Moral Character

Adult Volunteer:

1. Application Form
2. Interview
3. Reference Check
4. Local criminal background check
 - Acknowledgment Form
 - Affidavit of Good Moral Character

All of the above are to be reviewed by an administrator or if necessary, administrative committee.

The Administrative Committee may accept alternative criminal background screening if it is deemed to be current and equivalent.

B. A paid staff person or other person charged with the specific responsibility will conduct interview. They 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.

C. Each adult applying to work with children and/or youth shall “authorize” the church to conduct a criminal background check. For persons who have not lived in Florida for the past five years, a local background check will be conducted for their previous address(es). You must get written authorization to run a background screening.

D. 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 / Youth Protection Policy.

E. After the interview and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant.

F. 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 or her/his designee should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.

G. It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet in the Administrator’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. These files are to be kept confidential.

H. Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy 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 Church 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 regularly with children and/or youth.

The training should include:

1. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
2. The Church’s policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
3. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
4. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
5. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
6. 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. 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. One of these two people who must be a screened adult designated by an administrator, will be considered as fulfilling this requirement if they are sharing their time as needed among those classrooms or settings. Such a designated floating person may also act to periodically check other classrooms, settings, and may act to escort children or youth outside of classrooms or settings.
3. All children and youth on the campus of Anona UMC, who are not directly engaged in a church supervised activity must be accompanied or directly supervised by a family member adult or an adult expressly designated by a family member adult.
4. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for children/youth should have door(s) with windows. Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, thus reducing the possibility that abuse will go unnoticed. Half doors should be considered for Toddler to Second Grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities:

1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade: At least one **screened** adult should be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2. When feasible, there should be two **screened** adults present. Visual and/or auditory contact with children must be maintained. 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 should be present for all activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated person should periodically check each classroom. Visual and/or auditory contact with children must be maintained at all times. Where two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors are to remain open.
3. Grades 6-12: At least one screened adult should be present for all activities. A designated person should periodically check all classrooms.

C. Open Door Policy: Parents, volunteers or staff of the church should be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs at any time.

D. Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure: Adults responsible for children who are infants and toddlers, should sign-in their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Children in PreSchool through fifth grade must remain within the supervised classroom until picked up by a family member adult or an adult designated by a family member adult. Picking-up children by non-authorized adults is forbidden.

E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities: With the exception of the circumstances identified under the “Special Rules for Supervision of Specific Activities and Transportation”, 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 or member of the child/youth leadership team working directly under the supervision of a paid staff member, may meet individually with a youth with the immediate knowledge of when and where such counseling shall occur. 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 youth and children 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. Persons who drive church owned vehicles must be listed on an “approved driver list” maintained in the campus manager’s office.
2. In order to be listed on the “approved driver list” of drivers, a driver must be at least 21 years of age with a Motor Vehicle Record search conducted and the appointed clergy or his/her designee must determine if the record is satisfactory. (The Risk Management 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 for information.) Copies of each approved driver’s insurance card and driver’s license are required.
3. Drivers must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.

4. 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 adult volunteer.
5. 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.
6. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times when they are present in the vehicle and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
7. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
8. 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 campus manager's office.
9. Drivers will read and sign an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child/Youth Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.

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, if needed.
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.

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. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse by Church Leadership

A. Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. In any instance of perceived possible abuse, the circumstances shall immediately be brought to the attention of the appointed pastor. The appointed pastor shall make a determination of peril and shall act on that determination to protect those endangered from any further injury. If suspicion is present, the pastor will notify the proper authorities as required by the Florida “**MANDATED REPORTER**” law.

B. At the appropriate time the appointed pastor determines, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, the appointed pastor and/or designee shall remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth and inform the Staff Parish Relations Committee of this action. 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.

C. If the accused is the appointed clergy 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.

D. The appointed pastor and/or designee will 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.

E. 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.

F. 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.

G. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy 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.

H. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. 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.

I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a **pre-determined** spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy.

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 well-being of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

VIII. Reporting Procedure for Suspected Abuse Observed at the church or during church program: Not involving church leadership.

If during the course of church program, abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff member of the church, which does not involve church leadership, if there is immediate injury occurring or apparent danger of injury, call 911. Otherwise, the observer shall report the incident immediately to his/her supervisor who will take it to the appointed clergy. The appointed clergy or designee will contact the proper authorities and follow their directions.

IX. Implementation: Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee or its designee 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.

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