



CANTON
 FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
cantonfirstumc.org

930 Lower Scott Mill Rd
 Canton, GA 30115
 Office phone: 770-479-2502
cantonfirst@cantonumc.org

Safe Sanctuary Policy

I. Introduction and Purpose

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church, in April 1996, adopted a resolution aimed at reducing the risk of child sexual 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 and 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 the little ones, the children. The Social Principles of The United Methodist Church state that “children must be protected from economic, physical, emotional and sexual exploitation and abuse” (§ 162C).

Tragically, churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, exploitation, and ritual abuse [“ritual abuse” refers to abusive acts committed as part of ceremonies or rites; ritual abusers are often related to cults, or pretend to be] 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 within 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. (From *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church – 2000*, pp 180-181. Copyright © 2000 by The United Methodist Publishing House. Used by permission.)

Thus, in covenant with all United Methodist congregations, we adopt this policy for reducing the risk of abuse of children, youth, and vulnerable adults in our church. It is the policy of Canton First United Methodist Church that all employees, volunteers, visitors, members, children, youth, and vulnerable adults be treated with respect, in an environment free from abuse, intimidation, humiliation, or insult. This policy's purpose is to demonstrate Canton First United Methodist Church's absolute commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all the children, youth, and adults of the church.

II. Definitions

- A. Child – Any person from birth through 5th grade.
- B. Youth – Any person from 6th through 12th grade.
- C. Vulnerable Adult – Vulnerable adults are persons who are over 18 and are mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged and unable to make responsible legal decisions about his/her own welfare. Vulnerable adults are also individuals who are elderly, defined as those over the age of 65.
- D. Volunteer Coordinator/Worker (working in a Supervisory Capacity)– Someone who is not paid staff for the church but serves as a coordinator/worker and has potential to be alone with a child/youth/vulnerable adult.
- E. Volunteer Helper (working in a Helping Capacity)– Someone who is supervised by a volunteer coordinator/worker and will not be alone with a child. This person may be an older youth who is helping volunteer with children.
- F. Staff – Staff includes Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Director of Youth Ministry, Youth Ministry Staff, Director of Children's Ministry, Director of Preschool Ministry, Music Director, Minister of Congregational Care, Director of Administration, Administrative Staff, Facilities, Worship, and Support Staff.
- G. Physical Abuse – This is abuse in which a person deliberately and intentionally causes bodily harm to a child/youth/vulnerable adult. Examples may include violent battery with a weapon (such as a knife or belt), burning, choking, fracturing bones, and other non-accidental injuries.
- H. Emotional Abuse – This is abuse in which a person exposes a youth or younger child to spoken and/or unspoken violence or emotional cruelty. Emotional abuse sends a message to the child/youth/vulnerable adult that he or she is worthless, bad, unloved, and undeserving of love and care. Youth or children exposed to emotional abuse may have experienced being deprived of all parental affection, being locked in closets or other confining spaces, being incessantly told they are bad, being threatened verbally, the use of profanity, the use of belittling remarks to a child/youth/vulnerable adult or their family, or being forced to abuse alcohol or illegal drugs. This type of abuse is difficult to prove and is devastating to the victim.

- I. Neglect and Abandonment – This is abuse in which a person endangers the health, welfare, and safety of a child/youth/vulnerable adult through negligence. It may include withholding food, medical care, affection, and even education to destroy the youth’s or child’s sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Neglect may well be the most common form of abuse. Although it is often difficult to prove, reports of neglect from children/youth/vulnerable adults should not be ignored. Abandonment is the desertion of a child/youth/vulnerable adult by one who has assumed responsibility for care or custody of that person.
- J. Sexual Abuse – This type of abuse occurs when sexual contact between a child/youth/vulnerable adult and an adult (or older, more powerful youth) happens. The child/youth/vulnerable adult victim is not capable of consenting to such contact or resisting such sexual acts. Often, the child/youth/vulnerable adult victim is physically dependent on the perpetrator (for example, a parent). Additionally, the child/youth/vulnerable adult victim is often psychologically dependent on the perpetrator (for example, a teacher or a youth minister). Examples of sexual abuse include fondling, intercourse, incest, and the exploitation of and exposure to pornography and/or prostitution.
- K. Ritual Abuse – This is abuse in which physical, sexual, or psychological violence is inflicted on a child/youth/vulnerable adult, intentionally and in a stylized way, by someone (or multiple persons) with responsibility for the victim’s welfare. Typically, the perpetrator appeals to some higher authority or power to justify his or her abuses. Examples of ritual abuse may include cruel treatment of animals or repetitious threats of sexual or physical violence to the youth/child victim or to people related to the victim. When reports of ritual abuse are made, they are often extremely horrifying. Such reports may even seem too gruesome to be true. Never ignore a child/youth/vulnerable adult who makes a report of this type of abuse.
- L. Financial Abuse or Exploitation – The unauthorized or misuse of funds or properties or assets belonging to a vulnerable adult by force, misrepresentation, or illegal means. Possible indicators include home furnishing disappears, little or no food in the house, complaints about things disappearing, not being able to find money, valuables or important items, and a missing or non-balancing checkbook.
- M. Social Media – Social media is always evolving and changing and refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to advance interactive communication – both public and private uses – and includes instant messaging, texting, emailing, and video chatting.

III. Application and Screening Procedures

The following application and screening requirements have been developed and implemented to ensure the safety of all children, youth, vulnerable adults, workers, teachers, volunteers, church members, and other individuals.

If an individual is interested in working with children/youth/vulnerable adults at Canton First United Methodist Church, as staff or a volunteer, they shall complete an application and screening procedure:

- A. Complete and submit a Canton First United Methodist Church Volunteer or Employment Application.
- B. Be an active participant at Canton First United Methodist Church for at least six months.
- C. Complete an interview with the Director of the Ministry or Program in which they are interested in serving.
- D. Submit to a national criminal background check. This background check must be completed when an individual initially sign-ups to volunteer or applies for a paid position and must be completed again every two years while the individual continues to serve.
- E. Submit three personal character references from non-family related persons that will be contacted by the Director of the Ministry or Program in which they are interested in serving.
- F. Complete Safe Sanctuaries Training requirements. Requirements must be completed before an individual is able to serve, and the individual must also attend the yearly orientation regarding Safe Sanctuary Policy and procedures.
- G. All background check information will be held in the church office in a secure location. The Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, Staff-Parish Relations Committee Chair, Director of Administration, and/or staff member directly responsible for the ministry reserve the right to review all background check information and request reevaluations as situations warrant, apart from the new background check every two years.
- H. Individuals applying for a paid position as a staff member may be asked to comply with additional requirements.

IV. Rules and Procedures

- A. Two Adult Rule – There shall be a minimum of two unrelated adults in a room working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults. This will provide safety for all parties. If two related adults are working/teaching together, whenever possible there shall always be a third unrelated adult present. If two unrelated adults cannot be present, the ministry area shall make use of a staff member or Volunteer Coordinator/Worker as a floater to continually move between spaces/rooms.
- B. Windows in All Classroom Doors – All rooms designated for use with children/youth/vulnerable adults shall have a window or be a half-door. If a door does not have a window, nor be a half-door, that door shall remain open for the safety of all parties. Noted exception: The Preschool Emergency Action Plan

incorporates the use of black-out door window coverings in response to the threat of an intruder.

- C. Training – All staff, volunteer coordinators, volunteer workers, and volunteer helpers working with children/youth/vulnerable adults shall attend a yearly orientation and training regarding Canton First United Methodist Church’s Safe Sanctuary Policy. This orientation will also include any revisions to the policy, the steps to take in case of the need to report an issue or abuse, and the details of the state laws regarding abuse and reporting. In addition, it is recommended that all staff and volunteers working with children/youth/vulnerable adults be trained, and remain current, in First Aid and CPR.
- D. Five Years Older Rule – Staff members and volunteers shall be a minimum of five years older than the group that they are working with and have supervision over. This allows for proper boundaries to be maintained for children/youth and for the individual(s) who are supervising them.
- E. Age requirements for individuals working with children/youth/vulnerable adults – All staff and volunteer helpers must be at least 18 years of age. A Volunteer Coordinator/Worker must be at least 21 years of age. It is important that we do not have children being responsible for other children. There may be youth volunteers who are under the age of 18, but they will be under the supervision of two unrelated adults and will abide by the five years older rule.
- F. Diaper Changing – Diapers will be changed in full view of the other adult(s) present. Disposable gloves are to be worn when changing diapers and hands should be washed immediately afterward before returning to the other children, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- G. Rest Rooms – When taking children to the rest room, the teacher/leader shall allow the child to enter alone and she/he should remain outside the restroom. In any instance requiring supervision/assistance in the restroom, the door of the restroom shall remain open, with a second adult at the doorway.
- H. Medication – If medication is to be given to a child/youth/vulnerable adult, the parent or caretaker shall sign and give complete instructions on a required form indicating how the medicine is given, when, etc. Volunteers or staff are not to give or apply any medications without written authorization and instructions for giving medication. No medication shall be left in the nursery/classroom, or with volunteers, or the child/youth/vulnerable adult.
- I. Driving Rules – Any time that a trip is taken off church campus, there should be two unrelated adults in each vehicle. The driver shall be at least 23 years of age, and the second adult shall be at least 18 years of age and out of high school. The driver must have a copy of their license and valid insurance in the church office. In addition, drivers must have no more than one driving violation in the past two years and shall not have had a DUI/DWI within the past ten years. No adult shall be alone in a car with a child/youth/vulnerable adult.

- J. Church Van Use - Only an individual authorized by the church as an approved driver may operate a church vehicle; drivers must be legally licensed drivers of 25 years of age or older or be 21 years of age or older and a full-time staff member.
- K. Open Door Counseling – When a child/youth/vulnerable adult is having a counseling session, the door shall remain open, and it is recommended that other individuals be nearby. Again, this is for the safety of all parties involved. It is also recommended that a second, unrelated adult be present for such conversations, particularly when the one receiving counseling is of a differing gender from the individual giving the counseling/support. If this cannot be accomplished, it is recommended that the child/youth/vulnerable adult meet with the staff member at a public location, and that the staff member does not provide transportation for the child/youth/vulnerable adult.
- L. Advance Notice to Parents/Guardians – Parents/guardians shall be made aware of the events of our ministries with children/youth/vulnerable adults. Ministry should not be conducted in secret, and parents/guardians shall know what is occurring to decide if events are appropriate for their children/youth/vulnerable adult. Parents/guardians shall also be made aware of, and approve, the means in which their children/youth/vulnerable adults shall be contacted (phone calls, emails, text messaging, social media, etc.).
- M. Social Media Guidelines – Parents shall be made aware of the means by which their children/youth/vulnerable adults may be contacted. Parents shall also, with written consent, approve which means their child/youth/vulnerable adult may be contacted.
 - a. Text Messaging – Text messages should be sent, as much as is possible, in a group format. Texts should also be used mainly for informational purposes. Texting is not an appropriate means of offering counseling, and children/youth/vulnerable adults should be encouraged to meet face-to-face for all counseling situations.
 - b. Facebook – Facebook can be a great tool for communication. Any ministry area that wishes to use Facebook shall create a group, and that group shall be a “closed” group, in accordance with the *Social Media Guidelines of the North Georgia Conference*. A closed group is one in which an individual requests access to the group and is granted access by an administrator. Each group must maintain at least two administrators. Each group shall consist of individuals who are currently actively involved with that particular ministry. All other interested parties may be a member of the general church Facebook group. It is also important that if somebody performs a “check-in” on Facebook (or any other social media) that they do not tag any children/youth/vulnerable adults.
 - c. Social Media Requests – All social media requests (Facebook friends, Twitter followers, etc.) shall be made by a congregant/child/youth/vulnerable adult and not from the church staff or volunteers. If a staff member or volunteer

working with children/youth/vulnerable adults decides to open his/her personal social media to some members of the congregation, it is important that they do not pick and choose only certain people and accept requests from all parties.

- d. Photography – No photographs shall be posted online in any form without the written consent of the parent/guardian of any child/youth/vulnerable adult. It is also important that no child/youth/vulnerable adult is identified or tagged in any photographs, unless they are tagged by themselves or by their parent/guardian.
- N. Adult Behavior – We expect that all staff and volunteers demonstrate behaviors that are consistent with a life lived after the example of Jesus Christ.
- a. Being Alone – Staff and volunteers should always avoid being alone with a child/youth/vulnerable adult .
 - b. Touching Policy – Our goal is to always promote an environment of safety and of the love of Jesus. Staff and volunteers should not initiate any touch (hugging, patting, sitting on a lap, etc.) with a child/youth/vulnerable adult, but may reciprocate if the appropriate touch is started by one of those parties. When giving a hug, it should always be from the side, and not directly from the front or the back. Touching should not occur in any situation when a staff member or volunteer is alone with a child/youth/vulnerable adult.
 - c. Example of Christ – Whether an adult staff person or volunteer is leading, teaching, speaking, or posting on social media, they should be mindful of all that they say and do. They are constantly a representative of Jesus Christ and of Canton First United Methodist Church. All behaviors and speech should be appropriate for one being a role model and example for children/youth/vulnerable adults.
- O. Adult/Child/Youth Ratio
- a. Preschool-Kindergarten – We strive to adhere to a ratio of 1 adult to every 6 children.
 - b. 1st Grade/5th Grade – We strive to adhere to a ratio of 1 adult to every 8 children
 - c. Youth Group Events – We strive to adhere to a ratio of 1 adult to every 10 youth, with a recommendation of 2 chaperones beyond church staff members. These extra adults allow the youth ministry to maintain the two-adult rule when things arise that may require a smaller group to leave the bigger group (e.g. a trip to urgent care)
- P. Record Keeping – Records shall be maintained on all individuals who have completed an application to volunteer with children/youth/vulnerable adults at Canton First United Methodist Church. These records will be maintained in a secure location in the church office.

- Q. Revision – This policy shall be examined for revision at least once every two years by a committee of staff members and church laity for recommendations to the Senior Pastor and adoption by Church leadership.

V. Reporting and Intervention Procedures

Church staff and volunteers shall report any of three kinds of actions that they witness: accidents, incidents, and suspected abuse. Accidents are unintentional acts which occur and an individual is hurt (for example: falling on the playground, tooth is knocked out while playing basketball). Incidents are actions that are observed that do not need to be reported to DFCS, but should be addressed by the director of the ministry or a pastor (for example: a Sunday School teacher “loses it” on a class, an adult in charge walks out of the room of children/youth/vulnerable adults they are in charge of to do a task/errand). Canton First UMC regards any form of abuse and/or evidence thereof as unacceptable. Effective July 1, 2012, Georgia law expanded the pool of mandated reporters to include volunteers of organizations that provide care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs or shelter to children, youth, or vulnerable adults. A “mandated reporter” is required to report any suspected child abuse or neglect. The church’s policy also applies to reported allegations not related to church activities or workers.

Should an adult in charge of children, youth, or a vulnerable adult, have reasonable cause to believe an incident of abuse has occurred, the following procedures will be followed:

1. Secure the safety of the child/youth/vulnerable adult if necessary.
2. The adult in charge shall **immediately** notify (in person or by phone) the Director of the ministry area: Children’s, Preschool, Youth, or Congregational Care
3. The director of the ministry involved shall notify the Senior Pastor.
4. The Senior Pastor and the director of the ministry shall work with person reporting the incident regarding the calling of the authorities and the filling out of appropriate paperwork.
5. If the allegation of abuse involves the director of the ministry area, the Senior Pastor shall be notified immediately.
6. If the allegation of abuse involves the Senior Pastor, the SPRC chairman shall be notified immediately.

Allegations may occur in a variety of ways. Since the church cannot predict when and how a report will occur, it is vital these steps will be followed to ensure the allegation is channeled to the appropriate person and the problem is not compounded by an improper response.

If allegations of child abuse are made, our response shall be guided by the following principles:

- All allegations shall be taken seriously.
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality shall be maintained.

- Victims include the abused, the family of the abused, the peers of the abused, the family of the accused, and the congregation.
- The needs of the victims shall be given high priority.
- Full cooperation shall be given to civil authorities.
- The Senior Pastor or another designated individual shall be the church's spokesperson with the media. No other members shall make public statements.
- All records of interviews, copies of reports, and other written materials are to be retained as required as official church records.