

SAFEGUARDING POLICY

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS

First United Methodist Church of Rice Lake is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for children, youth and vulnerable adults. As members of this church, we understand we must seek to ensure those who participate in any program offered through our church may do so without fear of abuse. We will therefore strive to prevent the physical, emotional or sexual abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults.

INTRODUCTION

Children, youth and vulnerable adults are vulnerable to the abuse of power and position. We recognize that these conditions may exist within the context of church ministries, and that no organization or church is immune.

Our church has a responsibility to protect the children, youth and vulnerable adults to whom it ministers by providing a safe and healthy environment. Abuse prevention not only protects our children, youth, and vulnerable persons, but it also protects our volunteers and staff working with them.

Jesus taught, “whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.” (Mark 9:37) and “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)

Being accountable for our own behavior is an important way of showing our Christian love. Therefore, **guidelines and procedures** for volunteers, staff, parents, children and youth have been established.

VOLUNTEER/STAFF SELECTION POLICIES

All volunteer and paid staff who work with children, youth, and other vulnerable people at First United Methodist Church of Rice Lake will be:

- At least 21 years old. Exceptions apply for approved youth helpers.
- At least 5 years older than the oldest child/youth they will be supervising.
- In regular attendance at First United Methodist Church in Rice Lake for at least six months. (*Rare exceptions may be made in consultation with the pastor in charge for special situations.*)

All volunteer and paid staff (including clergy) who work with children, youth and other vulnerable people at First United Methodist Church will:

- Complete and sign an application and the related waivers giving permission to check references and background information.
- Provide the names and contact information of three personal references.
- Undergo a criminal background check if they will have responsibility for children/youth/other vulnerable people.

Individuals who have been convicted of physical or sexual abuse or neglect may not work in any church-sponsored activities or programs for preschoolers, children, or other vulnerable people.

All applicants must be interviewed for suitability for the work they desire to do. Interviews will be conducted by the leader of the program in which the applicant will work. Church policy and guidelines should be discussed during the interview.

TRAINING

Prior to working in the youth's or children's ministries (or any area including other vulnerable people), workers must undergo child protection safety training. Comprehensive training on issues of child sexual abuse in church setting shall be required for all clergy, paid staff, youth group leaders and volunteers who regularly supervise activities for children, youth and other vulnerable people. This training should be offered and **renewed** at least annually.

First United Methodist Church volunteer and paid staff, including clergy, will be given the opportunity for training about Safe Sanctuaries policies, procedures, and child abuse issues on a regular basis. They will be re-screened every three years.

MINISTRY SUPERVISION GUIDELINES

Whenever supervising activities involving children, youth or other vulnerable people at First United Methodist Church of Rice Lake:

- At least two non-related adults (including at least one screened adult) will always be present.
- Children, youth and other vulnerable people will be checked into and out of a church-sponsored activity by their parent, legal guardian, or those authorized by the parent/legal guardian.
- Participants will have access to a telephone or cell phone when groups are at or away from the church facility.
- One-on-one interactions with children and youth will be with an open door and visible to all.
- Activities with children, youth and other vulnerable people should be publicly accessible. Anyone has the right to visit and observe the children's/youth's/other vulnerable person's activity, classroom, or church-sponsored program at any time, unannounced as long as the two-adult rule is being followed. Exceptions to this right may be issued at the discretion of church leadership.
- All classroom and office doors will have a window or be visible from the hallway, or doors should remain open while the room is occupied.
- Windows will be kept free from adornment.
- If the two-adult rule cannot be observed, a screened, designated roamer will regularly check on groups with only one adult.
- For overnight events at the church and church-sponsored off-premise activities, two or more screened adults must be present. This arrangement must include at least one male and one female if the group is mixed gender.
- Whenever First United Methodist Church hosts an activity involving children, youth, or other vulnerable people from another church or community organization, the groups using the church facility will follow First United Methodist's Child, Youth, and Vulnerable People Protection Policies and procedures.

TRANSPORTING GUIDELINES

- No youth should drive to/from events.
- An adult should never transport a child/youth/other vulnerable person alone.
- Drivers of church vehicles should be approved and covered by the church's insurance company.
- Drivers should go through the same screening process as all other paid/volunteer staff.

ELECTRONICS OR MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS GUIDELINES

The use of electronics or media communications may be useful tools in supporting ministries with children, youth, and other vulnerable people. However, in such circumstances, the following requirements shall be met:

- The volunteer or staff person shall never initiate a connection (friending, following, etc.) on social media.
- If a student initiates a connection, the child, youth, or vulnerable person's parent or guardian as well as the pastor in charge shall be notified.
- If an adult leader receives a text from a child, youth, or vulnerable person that seems to be questionable, the adult leader should immediately end the conversation in the virtual space and offer opportunities to have the conversation in person and in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations. The ministry supervisor and/or parent/guardian should be made aware of the incident immediately.

Note: If an in-person meeting is not possible, those involved will determine the most reasonable alternative in compliance with the earlier guidelines for one-on-one conversations.

- Adult leaders should post photos on social network sites **only** with prior written permission granted by a parent/guardian. When posted, **PHOTOS MUST NOT BE TAGGED** with names or location indicators. All photos must be appropriate and in keeping with the spirit of the ministry event.
- All in-person protection policies apply to online platform meetings like Zoom, Skype, Messenger, and so on. *(For example, two unrelated adults should be present in the virtual room just as they would be in a physical room.)*
- An official church account should be established and used for online activities, not a personal account.
- Communication about online meetings should be shared with parents/guardians as well as with children, youth and other vulnerable people.
- Adult leaders and participants should use their real names as usernames.
- Attendance of online meeting should be documented.

REPORTING ABUSE

If a suspected incident of child abuse or neglect occurs or is revealed to a volunteer/paid staff person at First United Methodist Church sponsored activity, the adult in charge of the activity will:

- Ensure the safety of the child, youth, or vulnerable adult.
- Call the ministry supervisor, pastor in charge, or designed person.
- Call the appropriate county/state hotline.