

Safe Sanctuary Policy of Fremont United Methodist Church

Adopted by Administrative Council: August, 2025

Introduction and Reasoning for the Policy

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, nurturing environment for all children and youth who participate in its ministries. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe every person is created in the image of God and deserves respect, dignity, and protection. Children and youth are among the most vulnerable members of our community, and it is our sacred responsibility to protect them from harm.

Reports of abuse and misconduct in faith communities have caused immeasurable pain, broken trust, and challenged the Church's witness in the world. We recognize that inappropriate conduct, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, can have lifelong effects on victims, their families, and the congregation at large. To address these concerns, and in obedience to Christ's command to care for "the least of these," the people of Fremont UMC have adopted this comprehensive Safe Sanctuary policy. Our policy is rooted in biblical teachings, denominational directives, and our desire to honor God through faithful stewardship of those entrusted to our care.

The goals of this Safe Sanctuary policy are:

- To prevent abuse and reduce the risk of harm to children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
- To protect workers from false allegations and misunderstandings.
- To demonstrate the Church's commitment to safe, nurturing ministry spaces.
- To comply with legal requirements and uphold the standards of the United Methodist Church.

Definitions

- Child: Any person from birth through 5th Grade.
- Youth: Any person from 6th – 12th Grade.
- Adult: Any person 18 years of age or older.
- Worker: Any adult, paid or volunteer, who works with children or youth in any capacity.
- Abuse: Physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful acts that harm or threaten the well-being of a child or youth.
- Roamer: Any person, whether designated or otherwise, who will be able to access/view any ongoing church activities involving children and youth.

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all ministries, events, and programs of the church, whether occurring on church property or at an off-site location, and governs all interactions involving children and youth.

Screening Procedures

- Volunteers must be active participants in the congregation for at least six months before serving in any capacity with minors. This period allows for observation and relationship-building within the faith community.
- Volunteers who are not members of FUMC – such as members of other UMC's, family members of involved students, or friends of other volunteers, will be partnered with an FUMC safe sanctuary trained volunteer.
- Active and regular volunteers will regularly undergo Safe Sanctuary training and affirm this commitment via the Participation Covenant Agreement. (See Appendix 2)

Training Requirements

All workers must participate in an annual Safe Sanctuary training, which includes:

- Understanding appropriate boundaries and behavior with minors.
- Reviewing reporting procedures and legal obligations.
- Instructions on the use of the Church's facilities and emergency protocols.

Supervision Procedures

- Open Door Policy - Doors to rooms where children or youth are present should remain open, or a window should provide clear visibility into the room.
- Two-Adult Rule - A minimum of two adults should be present at all times during any activity involving children or youth, whether on or off church premises. This applies to classes, youth group meetings, trips, and overnight events. If a second adult is unavailable, a designated safety monitor (a roamer) will be able to observe or access the activity at all times.
- Adult-Child Ratios - Appropriate ratios will be maintained as follows:
 - Nursery (birth–2 years): 1 adult per 4 children
 - Preschool (3–5 years): 1 adult per 6 children
 - Elementary (K – 5th Grade): 1 adult per 8 children
 - Youth (6th Grade – 12th Grade): 1 adult per 10 youth

Bathroom Procedures

- During church events, parents/guardians are encouraged to have their child use the restroom prior to the start of the activity. Volunteers should never be alone with a child in the bathroom where the door is closed. If a child is in need of assistance the door should remain ajar.

Transportation

- When transporting children or youth for church-sponsored events, at least two adults must be present. The church must obtain written permission from a parent or guardian for all off-site events.

Overnight Events

- Male and female sleeping areas must be separate and supervised by adults of the same gender as the participants. Adults are never to share sleeping accommodations with unrelated minors. In instances where hotel-stays are necessary, youth will be assigned rooms according to their genders, with no more than 4 youth occupying a room at a given time. No child will stay in a room with an adult of whom they are not directly related to.

Behavioral Guidelines

- Physical contact should be appropriate and limited to non-threatening, public gestures (e.g., high-fives, brief side hugs).
- Volunteers must never use physical discipline.
- Verbal interactions must be positive and uplifting. Name-calling, threats, or ridicule are strictly prohibited.
- Any form of sexualized behavior, or use of suggestive language is strictly forbidden.
- While social media/electronic communication may be a useful tool in various ministry settings within the life of the church, the following practices should be considered:
 - Volunteers should refrain from initiating personal connections with children/students via social media. Including friending/following and private direct messages.
 - If a volunteer receives a questionable message from a student, the volunteer will immediately end the conversation, and notify either a staff person, or part of the leadership team (i.e., Lay Leader, SPRC Chair, Admin. Council Chair.)
 - Photos should only be shared by volunteers with the express consent of parents/guardians. When posting, photos should not be tagged with names or locations.

- One-on-one interactions should be conducted in public settings, or where other adults are present or nearby.

LGBTQ+ Youth Policy

As an outworking of our baptismal vows, Fremont UMC seeks to be a welcoming and affirming presence for all people. Considering that desire, we wish to make the following commitments in regards to youth/children across the gender/sexuality spectrum:

- All children and youth, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, are to be welcomed, affirmed, and protected within all church programs and activities.
- Discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is strictly prohibited.
- Any concerns or incidents involving LGBTQ youth will be addressed promptly and with sensitivity, in accordance with established safety protocols.

Preschool Specific Policies and Protocols

Hiring Procedures: Fremont Methodist Preschool (FMP) teachers will be required to undergo a background check as a part of the hiring process. Required references will be obtained through the hiring process as well.

Environment and Supervision: Preschool spaces must be designed for age-appropriate safety, learning, and accessibility. Classrooms will maintain appropriate child-to-adult ratios. All staff members will undergo safe sanctuary training pertaining to the FUMC policy.

Health and Hygiene: Daily/Weekly cleaning and sanitization protocols will be followed. Handwashing will be encouraged before meals and after toileting. All snacks and meals provided will accommodate allergies and dietary restrictions.

Emergency Preparedness: Preschool staff and volunteers must be familiar with emergency procedures, including evacuation routes, lockdowns, and first aid. Regular drills will be conducted.

Parental Engagement and Communication: Parents and guardians will be regularly informed of their child's progress and any incidents or concerns. There will be clear procedures for drop-off and pick-up.

Reporting and Response Procedures

- **Mandatory Reporting** - All volunteers are required by law and policy to report any suspicion or disclosure of abuse or neglect to the appropriate civil authorities immediately, as well as to the Pastor, and/or the designated church leadership (i.e., Lay Leader, SPRC Chair, or Admin Council Chair)
- **Confidentiality** - Reports and information regarding suspected abuse will be kept confidential, shared only with those required by law and policy.
- **Documentation** - Written records of all incidents, allegations, and actions taken will be maintained in a secure, confidential location.

Facility Guidelines

- Classrooms and nursery spaces must be designed for visibility and accessibility at all times.
- Playgrounds and outdoor activity areas must be fenced, regularly inspected, and supervised.
- Emergency exits and procedures should be clearly marked and reviewed regularly with staff and volunteers.

Policy Review and Accountability

- This Safe Sanctuary policy is to be reviewed annually by the Church Council or a designated committee, and updated in accordance with changes in United Methodist standards, best practices, or legal requirements.
- All workers must sign an annual participation covenant agreement indicating they have read, understand, and agree to abide by this policy.
- Failure to comply with the policy may result in suspension or termination of service, and, where appropriate, notification of authorities.

Conclusion

As a community of faith, we pledge to uphold this Safe Sanctuary policy as an expression of our baptismal vows and our commitment to the wellbeing of children, youth, and all vulnerable persons. Through diligence, transparency, and compassion, we will strive to be a place of safety, trust, and grace, reflecting the love of Christ in all that we do.

Safe Sanctuary Concern/Incident Report
Fremont United Methodist Church

Report submitted by: _____ Date: _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Event Where Incident Took Place: _____ Date: _____

Leaders Involved: _____

Detailed Summary of the Incident: _____

Others involved or those who are witnessed to the incident (list contact info, if available):

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please submit this completed form in a sealed envelope marked as "Priority – Personal and Confidential" to the director of the event, appropriate church leadership (i.e., Lay Leader, SPRC Chair, or Admin. Council Chair), or the lead Pastor. Reports should not be submitted to the persons of whom the incident pertains.

For Safe Sanctuary Committee use only:

Reviewed by: _____ Date Reviewed: _____

Actions Taken: _____

Fremont UMC Safe Sanctuary Participation Covenant Agreement
Adopted for use by the Admin Council:

The people of Fremont UMC are committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in the ministries and events of the church. The following policy statements reflect our commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who enter. It is our chief desire that the enacting of this covenant enables a deeper opportunity to experience the love of God through healthy relationships and boundaries with others.

1. No persons who have been accused or convicted of child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional) will be allowed to volunteer with children or youth in any church sponsored event.
2. All adult volunteers working with children or youth must be either members of FUMC, or partnered with Safe Sanctuary trained members.
3. Adult volunteers with children and youth must adhere to the following priorities: keeping doors open and visible, and ensuring that all activities are always observable.
4. Adult volunteers with children and youth shall annually attend training and educational events provided by FUMC to remain informed of church policies and procedures, and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult Volunteers shall immediately submit an incident report to the proper channels of any behavior that seems abusive or inappropriate.

Please Answer the Following Questions:

1. Have you thoroughly read FUMC's Safe Sanctuary policy? _____
2. As a volunteer of Fremont UMC do you agree to abide by the guidelines contained in the adopted policy? _____
3. As a volunteer in this congregation do you agree to participate in various and required training and education opportunities regarding Safe Sanctuary best practices? _____
4. As a volunteer of FUMC do you agree to submit an incident report, with haste, should you observe inappropriate behavior? _____
5. As a volunteer of FUMC do you agree to inform the minister if you have ever been accused or convicted of child abuse? _____

I, _____ have read both the Safe Sanctuary policy of FUMC and the Participation Covenant Agreement and agree to abide by the policies and protocols set forth in both documents.

Signature: _____ Date: _____