

Risk Reduction Proposed Policy  
First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana  
Approved by the Administrative Council  
January 26, 2009

We the congregation of First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, recognize that there is no human being that falls outside the Psalmist's claim that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" by God; "knit together in [our] mother's womb"<sup>1</sup> by the Creator of the universe. Further, we cannot deny that humankind has been deemed "very good"<sup>2</sup> by this very same Creator. This inherent value which we possess, coupled with the Scriptures' admonition to avoid "anything that makes your brother or sister stumble,"<sup>3</sup> particularly the "little ones,"<sup>4</sup> calls us to also recognize the grievous harm present in all instances of abuse. Such incidents, whether sexual, physical, emotional or harassing in nature, are devastating to all who are involved. God calls us to make First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, a safe place, doing all we can to protect children, teens and other vulnerable persons from the devastating affects of abuse. Thus, in covenant with one another, we adopt this policy for the prevention of abuse in our church.

**Purpose**

Our congregation's purpose for establishing this Risk Reduction Policy and accompanying procedures is to demonstrate our absolute and unwavering commitment to the physical safety and spiritual growth of all who come under our care.

**Statement of Covenant**

Therefore, as a Christian community of faith and a United Methodist congregation, we pledge to conduct the ministry of the gospel in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of all of who come under our care. We will follow reasonable safety measures in the selection and recruitment of both staff persons and volunteers; we will implement prudent operational procedures in all programs, ministries and events; we will provide broad education regarding our policies, as well as recognizing the signs of abuse; we will have a clearly defined procedure for reporting a suspected incident of abuse that conforms to the requirements of state law; and we will respond immediately and compassionately to any reported or suspected abuse, again following the requirements of state law and the policies of The Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church. The procedures for fulfilling this covenant can be found in the accompanying document called The Risk Reduction Policy of First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana.

**Conclusion**

In all of our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that every child of God will be "...surrounded by steadfast love, ...established in the faith, and confirmed and strengthened in the way that leads to life eternal" (Baptismal Covenant II," *United Methodist Hymnal*, p. 44).

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<sup>1</sup>From Psalm 139:13-15 NRSV

<sup>2</sup>From Genesis 1:31 NRSV

<sup>3</sup>From Romans 14:21 NRSV ,

<sup>4</sup>See Matt 18:6-9 or 19:13-15 or Mark 10:16-15 or Luke 18:15-17

# **The Risk Reduction Policy Manual of First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana**

## PROLOGUE:

### Purpose and Implementation:

Sexual misconduct and abuse of any nature (physical, emotional, neglect, sexual, or ritual) is incompatible with biblical teachings of hospitality, justice and healing. Thus, it is the policy of the Louisiana Annual Conference, United Methodist Church to conduct our ministry in ways that assure the safety and spiritual growth of everyone—adults, youth and children—and to expect the same of every congregation and ministry serving within our purview.

As a local congregation within the bounds of the Louisiana Annual Conference we have prepared, officially adopted (by charge conference/governing board action) and implemented a policy to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct or abuse. This policy includes procedures to protect adults, youth and children.

All persons who work with children/teens through the ministries/activities of First United Methodist Church of Many shall fall into one of the following categories.

- I. All paid staff persons and volunteers who regularly supervise children and youth shall be at the Level 1 or 2 Category.
  - A. Level 1 personnel—Level I personnel at First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, includes all paid employees.
    - Persons at this level are required to:
      - Attend, at least annually, risk reduction policy training
      - Undergo a criminal background and reference check. That is inline with First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana's, Guide one Insurance Liability Policy. The Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee will conduct this three level check that includes The Federal Sex Offenders Registry, A County by County, Parish By Parish. Criminal Background Check and a Louisiana Driver's Background Check in a confidential and timely manner.
      - If a volunteer, must have been actively involved in the congregation or ministry for a minimum of six months.
  - B. Level 2 personnel—Level 2 personnel at First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, includes all regular volunteers who work with children and youth.
    - Persons at this level are required to:
      - Attend, at least annually, risk reduction policy training
      - Undergo a criminal background. Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee, will conduct this check in a confidential and timely manner.
      - If a volunteer, must have been actively involved in the congregation or ministry for a minimum of six months.

- C. Level 3 personnel—Level 3 personnel are volunteers who are used only in emergency or occasional situations. Level 3 personnel have been made aware of the risk reduction policy; agree in writing to abide by the policy and to "work" only when level I personnel are present and supervising. Additionally level 3 personnel must be known to, and recommended by, a level 1 person.

II. All Ministries/activities sponsored by First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, shall provide for adequate responsible adult supervision of teens and children.

- A. All classes, studies, workshops, fellowship/recreation opportunities, one-on-one counseling sessions, private meetings or mentoring, etc., with youth or children shall be conducted in a public space or in a space easily observable by others at all times. Thus:

1. A minimum of two unrelated adults must be present as long as a child or teen is in a church facility or on a church sponsored activity.
2. The presence of both male and female adult leadership (unrelated) for coed overnight activities is required.

B. Transportation guidelines.

1. Medical information/release forms & permission slips are required for any activity where children and youth are away from First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana's, main facilities.
2. Only Level I and 2 personnel are allowed to transport children & youth while on a First United. Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, sponsored activity. All drivers shall have:
  - a. Possession of a current, valid driver's license.
  - b. Proof of insurance at the State minimum limits.
  - c. Not be otherwise disqualified from driving (i.e., under medication, extremely tired, under the influence of mind-altering substances, etc.)
3. Every child/teen being transported on a First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, sponsored activity must be securely fastened in a seatbelt, whether a church or personal vehicle is being used. At no time shall the number of passengers exceed the number of useable seatbelts.
4. Safe driving is expected. Including:
  - a. Obeying traffic laws.
  - b. No horseplay in vehicles
  - c. A mechanically sound and inspected vehicle
5. All drivers of vehicles for church or other sponsored events shall be at least five years older than the oldest youth (United Methodist definition of youth is people age 12 to 18) in the vehicles.

- C. Check In and Out Procedure for Young Children
  - 1. All children will be checked in and out of the Church Nursery and Preschool using a sign in and sign out sheet. Every child will have a form on file that lists for the Nursery Workers and Sunday School Teachers who have permission to pick up a child. In the case of children visiting our church, the adult dropping off the child will be asked who will pick up the child at the conclusion of the event.
  - 2. It is the policy of First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, that all children under five years of age must be dropped off and picked up by a legal adult.
- D. A ratio of no less than 1 adult to every 10 children/youth will be maintained at all First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, activities involving children or teens. However, the 2 unrelated adult rule always applies, even when less than 10 children/youth are present.
- E. It is the policy of First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, that church staff members and/or trained volunteer observers will make unannounced visits to classes, nurseries, events and gatherings held both on and off campus for the purpose of monitoring compliance with our policies. Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee will be responsible for organizing, implementing and keeping a record of such visits.
- F. In addition to the above guidelines, we require at least a five-year age difference between the primary on-site supervisor and the age of those being supervised at any activity involving children or teens. The five-year difference in ages shall apply between the on-site adult in charge and the age of the oldest person supervised.
- G. Twice a year First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, will have class to inform the parents and new volunteers of these policies and how our congregation implements them.

III. Ministries involving adults—while there is ample concern and precedent to be concerned about the welfare of children and youth, we also need to be concerned about the adults involved in our ministries, congregations and care. Paid staff, clergy and lay, full and part time, should take precautions to ensure that they do not create situations which place themselves or constituents at risk. Thus policies shall include the following:

- A. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, co-worker or volunteer. Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of the ministerial role and exploitation of those who are vulnerable. Similarly, sexual and gender harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than as an exclusively sexual or gender issue. Such exploitation/abuse is strictly prohibited

- B. Unlawful harassment is a form of discrimination that violates Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal authority. Unwelcome verbal or physical conduct based on race, color, religion, sex (whether or not of a sexual nature and including same-gender harassment and gender identity harassment), national origin, age (40 and over), disability (mental or physical), sexual orientation, or retaliation (sometimes collectively referred to as "legally protected characteristics") constitutes harassment when:
  - 1. The conduct is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create a hostile work environment; or
  - 2. A supervisor's harassing conduct results in a tangible change in an employee's employment status or benefits (for example, demotion, termination, failure to promote, etc.).
  
- C. Sexual/Gender Harassment is prohibited.
  - 1. Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical, that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to:
    - a. The creation of a hostile or abusive working environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender (Book of Discipline, par. 1611).
    - b. Intimidating or coercive behavior that threatens or results in a tangible employment action.
  
  - 2. Gender harassment is behavior that is harassing in nature against a woman because she is a woman or against a man because he is a man.

#### IV. Reporting

- A. When the pastor is involved—If you have experienced or suspect misconduct by the pastor, call the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee chair and the District Superintendent immediately.
  
- B. When a staff member is involved—If you have experienced or suspect misconduct by a member of the church staff, call the Pastor and Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee chair immediately.
  
- C. When a Level 2 volunteer is involved—If you have experienced or suspect misconduct by a volunteer of the First United Methodist Church of Many, Louisiana, call the Pastor and Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee chair immediately.
  
- D. If the allegations are criminal and/or involves a child or youth, then it should be reported to the local legal authorities immediately by the pastor, any employee of the church or the Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee Chair.