

Safe Sanctuary

First Mennonite Church

Bluffton, Ohio

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PURPOSE AND SCOPE

First Mennonite Church- Bluffton, Ohio
“Safe Sanctuary”

Vision: Healing and Hope

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as a community of grace, joy and peace, so that God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world. (Vision Statement for First Mennonite Church)

Living out our belief and calling of creating a community of healing and hope through our church community and into our world is presented with unique challenges of responding to the prevalence of physical, emotional verbal and sexual abuse in our society. Nationally, one out of every four females will or has experienced some form of sexual abuse in their lifetime as well as one out of every six males. The most vulnerable population to this type of abuse is children and youth.

In response to the reality of this devastating social issue, First Mennonite Church seeks to create a faithful response through the implementation of *Safe Sanctuary*. Our faith tradition is a source of strength and healing in difficult times. We profess that each person in the midst of our church community should have the assurance that our church is a safe place, without fear or threat of violence. We are committed to providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all children and youth who enter our doors.

Abuse of a child or youth brings suffering, erodes self-esteem, destroys relationships, splits families, and violates human integrity. Any type of abuse is an abuse of power and a betrayal of trust. First Mennonite Church will not allow, condone, or tolerate the abuse of any person. Recognizing that there is potential for abuse to occur in any congregation, FMC is taking preventive steps in developing the *Safe Sanctuary* policy.

As part of this process, congregational members will become informed about child abuse/neglect and the need for creating a safe environment for all.

All children and youth workers including FMC staff and volunteers:

- will complete the online training related to the issues in this policy.
- will complete a “Memo of Understanding and Intent” to qualify for working with children and youth. All new staff persons as well as youth sponsors and mentors will have a background check. All other volunteers may be requested to complete a background check.

We will continue to seek the Spirit as we strive to create and sustain a community of safety for all at FMC.

DEFINITIONS UTILIZED

First Mennonite Church – Bluffton, Ohio
“Safe Sanctuary”

General Definitions

- ACCSB: Allen County Children’s Service Board 419 227-8590
- Adult: Any person eighteen (18) years of age or older
- Appropriate Touch: respectful physical contact that evokes comfort, support, or reassurance. Appropriate touch relies on communication with the receiver to ensure consent and implies that the touch is reasonable and comes with no improper motives or power over another individual
- Background Check: A procedure used by the State of Ohio to perform a Criminal Information Request (with fingerprints) or any other procedure used to check a person’s background for criminal activity.
- Child: A person under the age of twelve (12)
- FMC: First Mennonite Church
- Minor: A person under the age of eighteen (18) or developmentally disabled child under twenty-one (21) years of age
- Nursery Children: Children from birth through three (3) years of age
- Pastoral Team: The pastors at FMC.
- Preschoolers: Children from age 3-5 years
- Response Team: The Response Team will be composed of 2 persons from leadership circle and 2 persons who are familiar with issues and policies related to child welfare. The Response team is selected by the leadership circle in preparation for the possibility of hearing and acting on complaints covered by the Safe Sanctuary Policy
- Staff: Pastors, music director, administrative assistant, custodian, and any other employees of FMC
- Volunteer: Persons providing services at FMC, on behalf of FMC, but are not employed by FMC for those services
- Worker: Any employee or volunteer assigned tasks related to children and youth of all ages at FMC

Youth: A person from the age of twelve (12) years to the age of eighteen (18)

Definitions of Abuse

Abuse: Any willful behavior that endangers one's development, security, or health. Abuse may be perpetrated on a child or youth by an adult or another child or youth.

Bullying/intimidation: Behavior that results in a person feeling threatened, fearful or coerced.

Emotional Abuse: Verbal or unspoken messages (such as gestures) or written language insinuating another person is worthless, bad, unloved or undeserving of love or care. This may include disparaging and derogatory terms.

Neglect: Abuse in which a person endangers a person's health, safety or welfare through negligence. Neglect may include withholding food, clothing, medical care, education, and even affection and/or affirmation of the person's self-worth.

Physical Abuse: Any non-accidental physical injury causing substantial risk or impairment of physical well being inflicted or allowed to be inflicted upon a person by another person.

Sexual Abuse: A specific abuse in which a person of less power is tricked, coerced, bribed or in any way involved in sexual contact. The power imbalance between the perpetrator and victim may result from the perpetrator's greater age, size, role, experience or authority. Examples of sexual abuse may include groping, fondling, intercourse, incest, the exploitation of prostitution, and the exposure and inappropriate use of internet access to view pornographic sites.

GUIDELINES FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

First Mennonite Church – Bluffton, Ohio

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In order to provide a safe and nurturing environment for people who participate in the programs of First Mennonite Church, the following guidelines have been established for those who desire a position involving the supervision or custody of minors. The pastoral team and Christian Education director will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the *Safe Sanctuary* policy with all church employees and/or volunteers.

1. All individuals who seek to volunteer with children and/or youth will submit an application and sign a Memorandum of Agreement. An application and Memorandum of Agreement will be submitted every two years. Completed forms will be kept in a locked file.
1. Volunteers under the age of 18 will work under adult supervision.
2. Volunteers will have attended FMC regularly for at least six months prior to volunteering for activities involving the supervision of groups of children (Sunday School teachers, nursery workers, substitute teacher) Volunteers will have attended FMC regularly for at least ONE year prior to volunteering for activities involving regular off grounds supervision of groups of youth as a youth sponsor while a TWO year attendance requirement will be in place for youth mentors. In addition to completing the application, Memorandum of Agreement, and Safe Sanctuary training, an Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI&I) criminal records check (by fingerprinting) will be required of anyone serving as youth sponsors or mentors. Anyone who has lived outside the state of Ohio in the past five years will also be required to have an FBI criminal records check (by fingerprinting). Criminal records check results will be reviewed by a pastor or the reporting . All results will be kept in a locked file. Volunteers in these positions must have a background check at least once every five years.
3. All potential employees will submit an application, sign a Memorandum of Agreement, complete Safe Sanctuary, and submit to an Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCI&I) criminal records check (by fingerprinting). Anyone who has lived outside the state of Ohio in the past five years will also be required to have an FBI criminal records check (by fingerprinting). Review of the criminal records check will be completed by a pastor or the Program Coordinator. Criminal records check results will be kept in a locked file. A criminal records check will be required of all employees at least once every five years.
4. Any person who may pose a threat to minors, based on information gathered from the criminal records check or from other sources such as references, will be prohibited from working with any minors.

5. If contract child care providers are utilized they will be subject to a background check.
6. When a guest speaker or guest youth worker participates with the youth group an adult will be present who has completed the training with Safe Sanctuary and is familiar with policies.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

First Mennonite Church - Bluffton, Ohio
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Activities and programs involving children and youth include Christian Education, Nursery, Senior High Youth Fellowship, Mentoring, Junior High Youth Fellowship, and general activities.

- 1) Two adults should be present whenever possible during church activities involving children and youth. Activities shall occur in rooms which have windows for monitoring. In the event that is not possible the door should remain open (e.g. a young child needs help in the bathroom) In the event of one classroom teacher, doors will remain open and one adult who has completed the Safe Sanctuary training will pace the halls. An adult that has not taken training for Safe Sanctuary shall be accompanied by at least one other adult during the activity.
- 2) Persons supervising the activities of minors should be at least five years older than the oldest minor participating in the activity.
- 3) At the conclusion of an activity, children under the age of six should be released only to their parent or guardian, to an adult designated by the parent or guardian, or to an older sibling designated by the parent or guardian.
- 4) Supervision during unstructured events and during transition times is the responsibility of the individual child's parents or guardians, with the understanding that FMC functions as a community to ensure the safety of children and youth.
- 5) Pastor(s) will counsel minors with the doors open and with another adult present in the church office. Pastor(s) will conduct offsite meetings with minors in a public setting, such as a restaurant, and will obtain parental consent before the meeting.
- 6) In regard to discipline and expressions of affection, volunteers and staff are expected to treat all minors in an appropriate fashion, including:
 - a) Respecting physical boundaries. When offering physical affection, all will request consent before offering "appropriate touch." (e.g. Can I give you a hug?) If changing a diaper or helping a child in the bathroom who requires assistance, another adult should be present in the room.
 - b) Physical discipline is not permitted under any circumstances. Verbal redirection may be administered respectfully and compassionately. The child's parent or guardian(s) should be involved if additional intervention is needed.
- 7) Training:
 - a) Pastors, church staff, Sunday School teachers and youth

group leaders along with all other persons who will be registering to volunteer will be asked to participate in an annual training program in which they are educated regarding:

- i. Dynamics of abuse
- ii. The church's policies for the prevention of abuse,
- iii. Procedures to be used in all ministries with children and youth,
- iiiv. Appropriate steps to report suspected child abuse and dynamics of abuse.

This will include worship service volunteers and Sunday School volunteers working in the nursery as well as children's choir leaders.

b) Congregational Educational Opportunities

Family educational opportunities shall be provided in order to learn about the facts of abuse and abuse prevention. A main goal for this training will be to assist parents or guardians and children in the discussion of abuse, and ways of increasing children's safety. Opportunities will also be provided for Junior and Senior High youth. Educational events shall be held for the congregation as a whole in order to share information regarding abuse and this Policy for the prevention of abuse.

- 8) Outside Programs. First Mennonite Church will require each of the outside programs that use the church facility to agree to take responsibility for the care and welfare of their children and youth as well as sign the *Request for Use of Facility and Building* form which includes release of liability.
- 9) The Response Team will be composed of 3 persons who are familiar with issues and policies related to child welfare.
- 10) Copies of the Safe Sanctuary policy will be placed in visible places in each children/youth classroom with appropriate forms for reporting abuse and procedures to follow.

IDENTIFYING AND REPORTING ABUSE

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The church’s responsibility is to be aware and report suspected abuse and/or neglect. The state of Ohio has mandated reporting of abuse or possible risk of abuse (Ohio Revised Code 2151.42.1) which states that: along with other professions such as health care providers and school workers; *“a person rendering spiritual treatment through prayer in accordance with the tenets of well-recognized religion”* must immediately report the knowledge or suspicion of abuse to the appropriate authorities.

Although a volunteer/staff person may not be a mandated reporter, we believe that anyone involved with children and youth who suspects abuse has a moral obligation to report it. When signs or symptoms of abuse arise, or a staff person witnesses abuse or a child makes a disclosure, the volunteer/staff person should immediately notify the response team and/or a member of the pastoral team who will subsequently notify the Response Team. It is important to remember that reporting suspected abuse reflects caring and is not an act of disloyalty.

A sound reporting procedure promotes safety among our children and youth and accountability among church workers. Church workers will be trained in identifying inappropriate behavior with children, and to identify the symptoms of abuse or neglect. Reporting guidelines are designed to guide this difficult process and ensure the safety and confidentiality of all involved parties.

There may be occasions where incidents occur that include bullying or intimidation but do not mandate reporting. Such bullying and intimidation represents a form of violence toward others and First Mennonite Church does not condone such behaviors in its congregational life. If those behaviors are reported, the pastoral team along with church leadership as necessary, will gather information and devise a response plan such that youth and children remain safe within our community.

GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ABUSE AND RESPONSE PLAN

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- Any incident or reasonable suspicion of abuse shall be reported, in writing, using the Abuse Incident Report Form, or orally to a member of the Response Team or the Pastoral Team. An advocate from the Response Team will be available to assist the reporter in processing and reporting the incident.
- A member of the Pastoral Team or the Response Team shall help insure the immediate safety of the victim and will notify the parent or guardians of the victim, unless the parent is the perpetrator involved.
- The accused abuser will be immediately removed from further church involvement with children or youth.
- The reporter will notify the Allen County Sheriff’s Dept. (419 227-3535) and/or Allen County Children Services Board (419 227-8590) as stated in Ohio laws. The Pastoral Team or Response Team can support the reporter in the notifying, if requested.
- A written record shall be kept in a secured place concerning the steps taken in response to the allegations. The Pastors and Response Team will confidentially maintain all information.
- The church will seek guidance from the Central District Conference staff and obtain legal counsel, as deemed necessary.
- The Response Team will be available to provide resources and support if requested. Resolution between the victim and perpetrator will not be sought unless it is requested by the victim.
- An accurate statement will be prepared at the discretion of the Response Team that can be made to inform the congregation in an effort to keep people safe while also not violating any confidentiality concerns.

ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM
First Mennonite Church – Bluffton, Ohio
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Date of report and time _____/_____/_____ :_____

Date Incident Occurred _____/_____/_____ :_____

Location where incident occurred: _____

Incident Reported by: _____

Incident Reported to: _____ Response Team _____ Pastor _____ Other

Injuries Noted: ___Yes ___No

If Yes, Describe: _____

Medical Attention: ___Yes ___No

If Yes, Action Taken: _____

Name of Victim: _____

Name of Person(s) Accused: _____

Name of witness (es) to the incident: _____

Accused Person(s) is:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church Employee | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nursery or Preschool Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Jr. Youth Sponsor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MYF sponsor | <input type="checkbox"/> Mentor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church Member | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify):_____ |

Victim Report: (If able and willing--do not pressure) _____

Witness report:_____

Report to Victim’s Family (Do not report if parent is perpetrator):

Date ___/___/___ Time: _____ spoke to: _____

Conversation Summary/Response: _____

Report Made To: _____ ACCSB (419 227-8590) _____ Police

Date/Time: _____/_____/_____ : _____ a.m. or p.m.

Spoke With: _____

Not Applicable (Reason) _____

Action/Safety Plan: (include both victim and accused)

Victim: _____

Accused: _____

Signature of Reporter _____ Date _____

Give completed form to either The Response Team or Pastoral team at FMC.

ABUSE SYMPTOM(S) REPORT FORM
First Mennonite Church – Bluffton, Ohio
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Person reporting: _____

Date: _____

Name of alleged victim: _____

Describe the symptoms that were observed and the circumstances that led to this observation:

Give completed form to either the Response Team or Pastoral Team at FMC.

SAFE SANCTUARY MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

First Mennonite Church – Bluffton, Ohio
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First Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe, secure, and healthy environment for all children and youth who participate in its ministries and activities.

The Safe Sanctuary policy reflects our congregation’s commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience God’s love, healing, and hope through relationships with others.

This agreement is to be signed by all First Mennonite Church volunteers who work with children and youth and all First Mennonite Church employees.

As a volunteer and/or employee in this congregation:

- I agree to promptly report to the pastoral team or Response Team any incident of abuse, including bullying/intimidation, emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, or sexual abuse.
- I agree to complete an annual Safe Sanctuary training provided by the church.
- If under the age of 18, I agree to work under adult supervision at all times.
- I agree to observe and abide by the Safe Sanctuary Policy and guidelines regarding working with children and youth.

Signature _____

Date _____

PARTICIPATION IN ANNUAL TRAINING

I have participated in the Safe Sanctuary annual training for the year _____

I completed the training on _____ (date).

Signature _____

Date _____