

# 4001 Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy New Covenant United Methodist Church

## Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all people and special care must be taken for those who cannot protect themselves and this includes vulnerable adults. Children and youth are covered under a separate policy but New Covenant United Methodist Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect the vulnerable adults who participate in the life of this congregation.

We believe implementing a policy and adopting procedures to protect our vulnerable adults recognizes that:

*The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church includes statements about many groups that deserve protection including children and the aging but nothing that addresses vulnerable adults who deserve special protection in the Church and the community. The term ‘vulnerable adults’ may include “the aging” but should also include those who enter adulthood without the capacity to fully protect themselves from abuse, whether physical, emotional, financial or in any other form.*

## **I. Definitions**

### **A. “Vulnerable Adult”**

Vulnerable Adult—a person 18 years of age or older whose ability to perform the normal activities of daily living or to provide for his or her own care or protection is impaired due to a mental, emotional, long-term physical, or developmental disability, or dysfunctioning, or brain damage, or the infirmities of aging. (Florida Statute 415) (Adult Protective Services).

### **B. “Paid Staff Person,” “Adult Volunteer,” and “Screened Adult”**

1. Paid Staff Person is someone paid by the church, overseen by Staff Parish and screened.
2. Adult Volunteer is someone who has not been screened. They can work in a room with a Screened Adult or paid staff person.
3. Screened Adult is a volunteer who has gone through the screening process.

### **C. “Vulnerable Adult Abuse”**

For purposes of this Policy, abuse is defined as any of the following but not limited to:

1. **Physical Abuse:** Violent non-accidental contact which results in injury. This includes, but is not limited to, striking, biting, or shaking. Injuries include bruises, fractures, cuts and bumps.
2. **Sexual Abuse:** Any form of sexual activity with a vulnerable adult, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or even a minor.
3. **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a vulnerable adult’s spirit attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
4. **Financial Abuse:** Any transaction that benefits a third party that is not in the best interest of the victim. No one working with a vulnerable adult should gain financially for themselves.

## **II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers**

- A. Each person applying to work with vulnerable adults shall “authorize” the church to conduct a criminal background check. At a minimum, the background check will be the one offered by the churches contracted service provider. You must get written authorization for this background screening. This screening is good for 5 years, after which time a re-screening will be necessary. (See Appendix II-A– Permission to Obtain a Background Check and Appendix II-B - Rescreening Request Letter).
- B. Before beginning work with vulnerable adults, each paid staff member and volunteer will sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy. (See Participation Covenant Statement at the end of this policy).
- C. After the evaluation and background check have been accomplished, the decision will be made to accept or reject the applicant as a paid staff member or adult volunteer who will work with vulnerable adults.
- D. Where it has been determined that an applicant should not work with vulnerable adults, those persons involved with the decision should handle it in a sensitive manner. The appointed clergy and should inform the applicant in person. The specific reasons for the decision should be given, whenever possible.
- E. It is important that all records be kept in a locked cabinet in the appointed clergy’s office. There should be a system in place that gives those who need these records easy access and a safe place to be stored when they are not needed.
- F. Although not required to personally accomplish the above tasks, the appointed clergy shall be responsible for ensuring compliance with sub-paragraphs (A) through (O) above.

## **III. Supervision of Vulnerable Adults**

### **A. General Rules**

- 1. All activities ministering to vulnerable adults will be supervised by at least one screened adult.
- 2. When reasonably feasible, each room set aside for ministry with vulnerable adults should have a door with a window. (Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions an abuser seeks).

### **B. Open Door Policy**

Family, volunteers or staff of the church will be permitted, as reasonableness dictates, to visit and observe all programs and classrooms at any time.

### **C. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities**

A screened adult will be present for all non-classroom activities ministering to vulnerable adults. Activities held in an individual’s home should be coordinated through the appropriate ministry area.

## **IV. Transportation**

### **A. General Rules**

Transporting vulnerable adults is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. Therefore, certain discretion must be used depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating. This Policy includes both Requirements and Guidelines. When feasible

there should be adherence to the recommendations in the Guidelines. It is expected that the Requirements will always be followed.

## **B. Requirements**

1. All drivers must be on the Church's approved drivers list.
2. When a vulnerable adult is transported in a church owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age and adhere to all requirements in the Church's Vehicle Use Policy; and for whom a motor vehicle record search has been made and the record has been found by the Florida Annual Conference-to be satisfactory. Applications to become an approved driver must be made with the Director of Ministry Support.
3. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license with a 'P' endorsement is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
4. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.

## **C. Guidelines**

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult when feasible.

## **V. Trip and Retreat Supervision**

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different vulnerable adult protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are Requirements and Guidelines and this Policy. The Requirements should always be implemented. Depending on the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc., some or all of the Guidelines should be implemented. Those in charge of the trip or retreat should be mindful of both Requirements and Guidelines, in addition to applying their own wisdom to the needs of a given occasion.

### **A. Requirements**

1. There will be at least two screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the vulnerable adult gather overnight at, or away from the church campus.
2. There will be at least one screened adult for each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the two screened adults present shall be of the same gender as a vulnerable adult.
3. For overnight trips and or retreats emergency medical release forms may be required.

### **B. Guidelines**

In a hotel-type setting, rooms should be assigned as follows:

1. Separate rooms for adults should be assigned with at least one vulnerable adult per room.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between rooms with vulnerable adults.
3. Adults should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night by adults of the same gender as those being checked.
4. A hotel should be selected where the rooms open to the interior of the building (i.e., do not open to the outside).

## VII. Responding to Allegations of Abuse

- A. Everyone in the church has a moral responsibility and a legal duty to report suspected abuse whenever it comes to their attention, regardless of where that abuse takes place. Reporting abuse is a form of ministering to the needs of those crying out for help. Therefore, **immediately** notify the proper authorities (i.e., the local law enforcement agency in the jurisdiction in which the vulnerable adult resides or in which the suspected abuse occurred and/or the appropriate Department of Children and Families). **This is a requirement of the Florida “MANDATED REPORTER” law.**
1. Pastors, staff members and volunteers working with vulnerable adults are by law **mandated reporters**. This means that when a vulnerable adult discloses an abuse to a pastor, staff member, or volunteers that takes place in any setting or by any individual it must be reported to the Florida Abuse Hotline – 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873). Further information can be found at [www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/](http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/). Mandated reporters are also required to report suspected abuse. These actions do not require notifying the Office Ministry Protection except as a resource. Examples could be suspicious bruising on a vulnerable adult or verbal report by a vulnerable adult of physical or sexual abuse by anyone.
  2. When abuse of a vulnerable adult by another vulnerable adult is observed, reported or suspected, whether related to church activities or not, call the Florida Abuse Hotline - 1-800- 96-ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).
  3. When abuse of a vulnerable adult by an adult volunteer or paid staff person is reported, observed or suspected within the church or at church-related activities, follow this process:
    - a. Call Florida Hotline - 1-800-96-ABUSE (1-800-962-273)
    - b. Inform ministry supervisor and the clergy.
    - c. Call the District Superintendent (leave a message if he or she cannot be contacted)
    - d. Call Mark Thomas at the Office of Ministry Protection - 1-800-282-8011, x 13 7
    - e. The Pastor oversees the process of action and follow-through unless the pastor is the alleged perpetrator. If the pastor is the alleged perpetrator the District Superintendent oversees the process in response to a call from a church representative.
- B. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with vulnerable adults. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the vulnerable adult is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons should inform the accused that abuse has been reported.
- C. Notify the family of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the vulnerable adult until the family arrives. **NOTE:** If the spouse is the alleged abuser, follow the advice of the authorities concerning notification of others.
- D. Take all allegations seriously and reach out to the victim and the victim’s family. Show care and support to help prevent further hurt. Extend whatever pastoral resources are needed. Remember that the care and safety of the victim is the **first** priority. Respond in a positive and supportive manner to the victim’s family.
- E. The church should provide a supportive atmosphere to all those who are affected, offering both objectivity and empathy as it seeks to create a climate in which healing can take place.
- F. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. The report should be brief and contain only factual information relevant to the situation. It should be kept in a secure place. It should be written in ink or typed to prevent it from being changed. (See Appendix VI — Child/Youth Protection Abuse Report).

G. Any contact with the media should be handled by a predetermined spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy. **NOTE:** The Conference Communications Department is a good source of help when media questions arise. The church spokesperson should generally convey a spirit of concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional wellbeing of all who are affected, and that the matter is being diligently and appropriately handled.

**VIII. Implementation**

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Team to implement this Policy, to design and conduct future training, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this policy.

**IX. Application**

All persons involved in ministry at or on behalf of New Covenant United Methodist Church are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

**Participation Covenant Statement**

I have read and understood the Vulnerable Adult Protection Policy. I agree that as a staff member or a volunteer of this church working with vulnerable adults, I am expected to abide by all provisions of this policy.

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Signature

Date

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Printed Name

This policy was revised on August 27, 2013



Signature

August 27, 2013

Date