

FLORIDA CONFERENCE

CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

ST JAMES UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
TAMPA PALMS, FL



“But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.’ Matthew 19:14

November 2018

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	3
I. Definitions	4
II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers	5
III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work With Children and Youth	6
IV. Supervision of Children and Youth	7
V. Transportation.....	9
VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision.....	10
VII. Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups.....	11
VIII. On-Line Safety	11
IX. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse.....	12
X. Implementation.....	13
XI. Application	13
APPENDIX I	
CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION WORKER APPLICATION	14
APPENDIX II	
INTERVIEW GUIDELINES	16
APPENDIX III	
REFERENCE CHECK	18
APPENDIX IV	
AUTHORIZATION AND REQUEST FOR CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK	19
APPENDIX V	
PARTICIPATION COVENANT STATEMENT	20
APPENDIX VI	
PARENTAL CONSENT AND MEDICAL AUTHORIZATION	21
APPENDIX VII	
CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION INCIDENT REPORT FORM.....	22
APPENDIX VIII	
EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION.....	23
APPENDIX IX.....	
PHOTO PERMISSION.....	24
APPENDIX X.....	
CONSENT FORM FOR ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS.....	25
APPENDIX XI.....	
DISQUALIFYING CONVICTIONS/ARRESTS.....	26

Child and Youth Protection Policy

St James United Methodist Church

Tampa Palms, Florida

Introduction

A central tenet of the Christian faith is the inherent value and worth of all children, youth, and adults. Children and youth are least able to protect themselves in our society and are particularly vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The St James United Methodist Church is desirous of doing what it can to protect the youth and children who participate in the life of this congregation.

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

Our Christian faith calls us to offer both hospitality and protection to the little ones, the Children. The Social Principles of the United Methodist Church states that ". . . children must be protected from economic, physical and sexual exploitation and abuse." Tragically, Churches have not always been safe places for children. Child sexual abuse, and exploitation. . . occur in Churches, both, large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. . . . God calls us to make our Churches safe places, protecting children and other vulnerable persons from abuse. (Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth).

Since 1996, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church has mandated that each local congregation have a child/youth protection policy ("CYPP").

Coverage under the Conference Insurance Program requires that churches have a CYPP in place. All employees of a local church are required to review and acknowledge their church's CYPP on an annual basis.

Accordingly, St James United Methodist Church adopts the following policies for the protection and safety of the children and youth participating in the life of the church.

The policies set forth below apply to all persons who provide supervision over or have care and custody of children/youth or who come into contact with children/youth in church facilities or church-sponsored activities. Please note that all persons who are employed in, or volunteer for 10 or more hours per month, at any church preschool, daycare, or other childcare program, charter school, VPK, other government-licensed program, or summer camp are subject to additional requirements under Florida statutes or DCF regulations, including Level II background screening, mandatory adult:child ratios, educational certification requirements, and, in some cases, mandatory reporting requirements which are not addressed in this policy.

I. Definitions

A. “Child” and “Youth” and “Adult”

Following the model of the public school system, a “**child**” is under the age of 12 years. A “**youth**” is anyone at least 12 years of age but not yet 18 years old or anyone 18 years old or older who is still attending high school. An “**adult**” is anyone 18 years of age or older who has finished high school.

B. Church Personnel

For purposes of this CYPP, “**Church Personnel**” are defined to include the following:

- “**Paid Staff Person**” is anyone employed by the church, including all appointed or supply clergy and all other staff on the payroll of the church.
- “**Adult Volunteer**” is any adult not paid by the church who serves in any position involving the supervision or custody of minors, including volunteers in the nursery, daycare, schools, Sunday School, VBS, drivers, and chaperones. Adult volunteers who are not screened must be supervised by a screened adult or screened adult paid staff person.
- “**Screened Adult**” is a volunteer or paid staff person who has undergone the church’s screening process. A screened adult does not need to be a church member but must have been a regular attendee and active participant in church activities for at least six (6) months prior to undergoing the screening process. Exceptions to the 6-month rule: the spouse of a newly-appointed clergy or a transferee from a FL UMC congregation, upon verification of screening and participation from the prior church.
- Not included in the definition of “**Church Personnel**” are “**Youth Helpers**” or “**Youth Staff.**” Youth helpers (below the age of 18 or 18 or older and still in high school) may assist in activities involving children/youth but must be supervised by at least one screened adult at all times. Youth staff must also be supervised by at least one screened adult if assisting in any child/youth activity.

C. “Regularly Work With or Around Children/Youth”

For purposes of this Policy, the following are included in the definition of church personnel who “**Regularly Work With or Around Children/Youth:**”

1. All clergy whether appointed or otherwise who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. All paid staff persons, except those whose duties are performed entirely when children/youth are not present.
3. All paid staff persons whose living quarters are on the grounds of the church or related entity.
4. Adult volunteers whose service regularly takes them throughout the church facility or grounds or who have keys to church buildings.
5. Adult volunteers who supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs, or activities more than 3 times per year.
6. Adult volunteers who transport children/youth without other adults in the vehicle more than 3 times per year.
7. Adult volunteers who participate in overnight activities with children/youth more than 2 times per year.
8. Adult volunteers who assist in the nursery more than 4 times per year.

D. “Child/Youth Abuse”

For purposes of this Policy, **child/youth abuse** includes any of the following:

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 burns.
2. **Sexual Abuse:**
Any form of sexual activity with a child/youth, whether at the Church, at home, or any other setting. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another minor.
3. **Emotional Abuse:**
A pattern of intentional conduct which crushes a child’s/youth’s spirit or attacks his/her self-worth through rejection, threats, terrorizing, isolating, or belittling.
4. **Neglect;**
Failure to provide for a child’s/youth’s basic needs or failure to protect a child/youth from Harm.

II. Screening and Selection of Church Staff and Adult Volunteers

The Pastor and the Staff Parish Relations Committee are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising of non-appointive church staff. (2016 Book of Discipline, ¶ 258.12). The Pastor and the Paid Staff Person(s) or Screened Volunteer(s) in charge of Children’s/Youth ministries at the church are charged with the responsibility of developing, implementing and evaluating the process for recruiting, screening, selecting, training and supervising adult volunteers.

- A. All church personnel who regularly work with the children/youth shall comply with the following **Screening and Selection Requirements** prior to beginning their regular involvement with children/youth:
 - a. Complete an application form with 3 reference checks (See Appendices I and III);
 - b. Complete a background check consent form (See Appendix IV);
 - c. Receive appropriate clearances from all reference checks and Florida or national background check, as appropriate;
 - d. Undergo personal interview (See possible questions for interviews in Appendix II);
 - e. Attend training on current issues of child protection and the church’s child/youth protection policies at least once per year;
 - f. Sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by this Child/Youth Protection Policy (See Appendix V—Participation Covenant);
 - g. Undergo a Driving or Motor Vehicle records check if the person will be transporting children/youth; and
 - h. Undergo a renewed background check every **3** years.
- B. Related Screening and Selection Procedures for the Church:
 - a. A designated Paid Staff Member or Member of the SPRC shall interview an applicant and contact the applicant's references.
 - b. A designated Paid Staff Member or Member of the SPRC shall ensure that an applicant submits a background check consent and that an appropriate background check is performed. At a minimum, the background check will include the one offered by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement. (This may be done online at <http://www.FDLE.state.fl.us/CriminalHistory>) and a national criminal background screening. The Conference Department of Ministry Protection offers a criminal

background screening program (www.flumc.org/MinistryProtection).

- c. The application, background check consent, documentation of reference checks, interview notes, background check reports, interview notes, motor vehicle screening (if applicable), and signed participation covenant shall be maintained as **confidential** files in a locked cabinet where other church records are kept. Access to such files shall be limited to those charged or involved with supervising Church Personnel or involved in determining whether an applicant should be approved to work regularly with children/youth.
- d. Information gathered about an applicant will be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination, in consultation with the Pastor, SPRC, or Director of Children and/or Youth ministries, as appropriate.
- e. Anyone whose background check indicates a conviction or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere* for any offense listed in Appendix XI shall not be approved for working with children/youth. Anyone whose background check indicates a pending arrest for any offense listed in Appendix XI shall not be approved to work with children/youth unless and until the arrest has been resolved in such a way that does not result in a conviction or plea of guilty or *nolo contendere*.

III. Ongoing Education of Persons Who Work Regularly or Occasionally With Children and Youth

The Pastor and Staff Parish Relations Committee shall ensure that regularly scheduled (i.e., at least annually) training focused on current issues of child protection is available to and received by those working with children and youth. Attendance at this training shall be required of all paid staff persons, screened adult volunteers, and non-screened adult volunteers who work with children and/or youth.

The training should include at a minimum:

- A. The definition and recognition of child abuse.
- B. Current child protection issues.
- C. The Church's policy and procedures on child abuse and the reasons for having them.
- D. The need to maintain a positive classroom environment, including appropriate discipline and age-level characteristics.
- E. The appropriate behavior for teachers and leaders of child/youth events.
- F. Abuse reporting responsibilities and procedures.
- G. Definition of appropriate interpersonal boundaries.

A couple of the many sites that provide training resources include:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/safe-sanctuaries>

<https://safegatherings.com>

IV. Supervision of Children and Youth

A. General Rules

1. Two Adult Rule: Two non-related adults must be present at all non-classroom programs or activities involving children/youth, one of whom must be a screened adult.
2. All activities involving children/youth must be supervised by at least one screened adult.
3. Three Year Rule: All screened adults supervising children/youth must be at least 3 years older than the age group they are supervising. Adults who do not meet this criteria must be under the direction of a screened adult who is at least 3 years older than the age group.
4. Six Month Rule: Adult Volunteers working with children/youth must be a member or regular attendee at church for at least 6 months prior to working with children/youth. Exceptions to the 6-month rule: the spouse of a newly-appointed clergy or a transferee from a FL UMC congregation, upon verification of screening and participation from the prior church.
5. Windows/Open Doors: Each room set aside for children/youth must have a door or wall with a window, half doors, or open doors. Windows in doors tend to remove the opportunities for secrecy and isolation, conditions every child abuser seeks. Half doors should be considered for Toddler to Second Grade children to keep them from wandering outside the classroom.

B. Supervision of Classroom Activities

1. Crib/Toddler to Second Grade

Two Adults must be present for all classroom activities involving infants, toddlers, and children in grades K-2, one of whom must be a screened adult. When feasible, there should be two screened adults present, and where the two adults are related, it is preferable that a third adult be present. In addition, a designated floating adult should periodically check all classrooms. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person. Whenever two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors must remain open.

2. Grades 3-5

At least one screened adult must be present for all classroom activities. Two screened adults are preferred. In addition, a designated floating adult should periodically check all classrooms. Children should be escorted to and from bathroom facilities or when otherwise leaving the room by either one of the supervising adults or by a designated floating person who checks on all classrooms. Whenever two adults are not available to supervise, the classroom doors must remain open.

3. Grades 6-12

At least one screened adult must be present for all classroom activities. A designated floating Adult should periodically check all classrooms.

C. Open Door Policy

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

D. .Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure

Programs for infants, toddlers, and children in Grades K-2 must have procedures to ensure that

children are released only to their parents or guardians or those designated by them. Adults responsible for children who are infant through toddler should sign-in their child and indicate the names of the authorized person(s) to whom the child may be signed-out. Adults responsible for children age 2 through Grade 2 should sign their child in and out of Sunday School and other children's activities. Picking-up children by unauthorized adults is forbidden.

E. Supervision of Non-Classroom Activities

At least two unrelated, screened adults must be present for all non-classroom activities involving children and/or youth. Permission from the child's/youth's parent or guardian must be obtained prior to a child's/youth's attendance at a meeting held in an individual's home.

F. Mentoring Programs

Although mentoring programs inherently promote the development of a one-to-one relationship between an adult mentor and a child/youth, such programs should be conducted in a group setting in compliance with the other requirements of this policy, including that at least two adults be present at all times, one of whom must be a screened adult, screening of all mentors who serve on a regular basis, and that the open door policy is observed. Mentors may not give gifts to individual children/youth without the knowledge of their parent/guardian. Gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only (such as birthday, Christmas, confirmation, graduation). Gifts should be modest and appropriate for the occasion. Mentors must never serve as a financial resource. The general prohibition on one-to-one communications between church personnel and children/youth is relaxed in the context of mentoring relationships; however, mentors must obtain permission from the parent/guardian regarding the forms of communication a mentor may use in communicating with a mentee. (See Appendix X).

G. Counseling of Youth and Children

In instances where circumstances dictate that counseling of a child/youth would be most effective on a one-on-one basis, an appropriate Screened Adult may meet individually with a child/youth with the knowledge of at least one Paid Staff Member. At any counseling session with children or youth, the door of the room used should remain open for the entire session, unless there is glass in the door or wall which gives a clear view into the room. If another adult is not in the building when the counseling occurs, the session should be moved to a public place, such as a restaurant or outside where other people are present.

NOTE 1: At the initial meeting, the counselor should first determine if they are qualified to address the child's/youth's needs effectively. Counseling should be limited to no more than three sessions. Referral to another more qualified counselor should be considered.

NOTE 2: This policy is not intended to govern a licensed professional counselor in a paid counseling relationship with a child or youth.

H. Time Following Group Events

Following child/youth group events, it is inevitable that occasionally a child's/youth's

transportation arrives after all other participants have departed. In those circumstances, a child/youth may be supervised by one screened adult. Under those circumstances, the general rule requiring the presence of two screened adults is suspended, and the screened adult is responsible for exercising his/her best judgment for the participant's well-being. In an emergency, and only with the express permission of the parent/guardian, a screened adult may transport a child/youth home, provided that the transportation complies with the requirements set forth below.

V. Transportation

A. General Rules

Transporting children and youth is an important concern. Their safety can be at risk in a variety of ways. This Policy includes both Requirements that must be followed and recommended Guidelines. Whenever feasible the recommended Guidelines should be followed, allowing for the use of discretion and good judgment depending upon the event attended, the locale of the event, and the age group participating.

B. Requirements

1. Drivers must be known to the designated adult leader of the event.
2. When a child/youth is transported in any vehicle, the driver must be either the child's/youth's parent/guardian, or a screened adult or an adult paid staff person who is at least 18 years old, or a professional, licensed transportation company or charter service. If a taxi or ride-sharing company is used, the provision in V.B.3 and IV.A.1 must be followed.
3. At least two children/youth must be in any vehicle driven from church to an offsite church activity.
4. When a child/youth is transported in a church-owned vehicle, the driver must be at least 21 years of age who has undergone a motor vehicle record search has and has been found by the appointed clergy, designated supply pastor, or his/her designee to be satisfactory.
5. Drivers must have a valid driver's license for the vehicle being operated. For example, if driving a church bus, a commercial license is required. A copy of the driver's license should be on file at the church.
6. Drivers must require that seat belts be used at all times and the number of passengers must not exceed the number of seat belts.
7. Drivers should be advised of a designated route and should not deviate from it except in cases of emergency or road detours.
8. Drivers are not permitted to use cell phones or mobile devices unless required for communication with other drivers and are not permitted to text message while driving. Hands-free GPS (Global Positioning System) may be used.
9. Youth drivers are not permitted to drive from church to an off-site church activity. Youth drivers may either meet the group at the location of the church activity or must be transported from church by adult drivers otherwise in compliance with this policy.
10. When a trip is planned and the destination is expected to be 100 miles or more from the point of departure, drivers are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office. If the trip will exceed 500 miles roundtrip, a Church Trip Form must be completed and submitted to the Office of Ministry Protection.
11. Persons who regularly drive church owned vehicles are to be listed on an "approved driver list" maintained in the church office.
12. In order to be listed on the "approved driver list" of drivers, a Motor Vehicle Record search

must be conducted by the Conference office of Ministry Protection . Call (800) 282-8011, ext. 126).

13. Approved Drivers must read and sign an acknowledgement form indicating that the Child/Youth Protection Policy has been read and will be followed (See Appendix IV).
14. These Requirements apply to each driver of each vehicle used to transport children/youth to an offsite church activity, including when multiple vehicles are traveling to the same location in a caravan.
15. Drivers should receive training for the church owned vehicle being operated.

C. Recommended Guidelines

1. Drivers should be accompanied by at least one other adult.
2. Youth who drive their own vehicles should be reminded regularly of the importance of vehicle safety and comply with D.9. above.

VI. Trip and Retreat Supervision

Trip and Retreat settings can call for different child/youth protection requirements depending on the circumstances. What follows are Requirements that must be followed and recommended Guidelines. Whenever feasible the recommended Guidelines should also be followed, allowing for the use of discretion and good judgment depending upon the circumstances of the setting, who is in attendance, etc. 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 must be at least two unrelated, screened adults present for all trips, retreats and other events where the children and/or youth gather overnight at, or away from, the church campus.
2. There must 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 must be of the same gender as the child/youth.
3. Church personnel are prohibited from sleeping in the same bed, sleeping bag, tent, or room with children or youth, unless the child/youth is an immediate family member of the adult.
4. When children/youth are participating in an event held in one open space, such as the church gym or camp lodge, multiple adults may sleep in the same space, provided that at least two screened adult are present at all times.
5. The person in charge of youth/children for each overnight trip and/or retreat must carry parental permission slips, including permission for emergency medical care. (See Appendix VI).
6. When groups are away from the church campus, there must be access to a phone, cell phone, or mobile device.
7. If the outing involves a swimming pool or deep bodies of water, a certified lifeguard should be present onsite or accompany the group. If a certified lifeguard is not available, at least one adult who is certified in CPR must accompany the group.

B. Guidelines

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

1. Separate rooms for adults and child/youth should be assigned with at least two children/youth per room.
2. Assignments should be made so that an adult room is between two children/youth rooms. Whenever not feasible, the adult room should be adjacent to the child/youth rooms.
3. Two Adults of the same gender as those being checked should make random monitoring hall trips and room checks at night.
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. Use of Church Facilities by Outside Groups

All outside groups that use church facilities, with or without a fee, must: agree to operate in compliance with this Child/Youth Protection Policy and to ensure that all of their employees or volunteers have been trained on and agree to comply with this Policy; demonstrate that they enforce screening, safety, and supervision procedures that are consistent with this Policy. Such outside groups must provide documentation agreeing to this requirement. Having an officer of the group sign the Adoption statement of this Policy is acceptable. Church Trustees should monitor compliance in connection with any agreement to allow outside groups to use church space or facilities. Documentation should be maintained with other church records.

VIII. On-Line Safety

It is acknowledged that the use of computers and other electronic means of communications may be useful tools in supporting child and youth ministries. However, it should also be recognized that these forms of communication also potentially pose a unique risk.

- a. Church computers that are set up to permit guests or program participants to access the internet should be in high-traffic areas and be randomly monitored by staff or screened adults. Controls shall be in place to prevent access to inappropriate content.
- b. Church Personnel (as defined in Section I.B above) are prohibited from using the Internet, whether via church computers or personal devices, to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children/youth.
- c. Electronic communications with children/youth should be limited to information about program dates and activities and should be made only by group emails or on the church's official website or the church's public Facebook page, or other social media platforms, of which the parents are aware and have given consent or can access publicly. One-to-one communication with children/youth is generally prohibited. If there are extenuating circumstances that require one-to-one communication with a child/youth, the communication should be made via email or text, on which the parent or legal guardian is copied. (See Consent Form for Electronic Communications with Children/Youth – Appendix X)
- d. Church Personnel should not "friend" or otherwise initiate one-on-one connections with any unrelated youth/child on Facebook, or similar social media site or platform, or "tag" any photograph of a participating child/youth on Facebook.
- e. Church personnel should not post photos of children/youth participating in church activities on their personal social media sites, websites, or other communication platforms, and shall not post any photos of participating children/youth on websites, social media sites, or other communication platforms hosted/owned by the church without obtaining prior written permission from the parent or guardian. (See the Photo Permission Form in Appendix IX)

- f. No personally identifiable information of participating children/youth should be posted on line or on any social media site. Refrain from using names and do not post a last name, address, or phone number when posting photos.

IX. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Florida Statute 39.201, entitled “Mandatory Reports” states that: *“Any person who knows, or has reasonable cause to suspect, that a child is abused, abandoned, or neglected by a parent, legal custodian, caregiver, or other person responsible for the child’s welfare, as defined in this chapter, ... shall report such knowledge or suspicion to the department”*

While the statute is limited to situations involving abuse by a parent, custodian, caregiver or other persons responsible for a child’s welfare, the moral imperative to protect children extends to other situations where abuse is suspected. Suspected abuse within the context of a church day school or pre-school does fall within the description of the Florida Statute and a report is required.

Clearly, when child abuse is suspected or observed, the moral imperative, and potentially the legal requirement, is to call the Child Abuse Hotline 1-800-96 ABUSE (1-800-962-2873).

- A. Immediately, yet with dignity and respect for the sacred worth of the accused, remove the accused from further involvement with children and/or youth. Once the proper authorities have been contacted and the safety of the child or youth is secured, the appointed clergy or other designated persons may, if appropriate, inform the accused that abuse has been reported. **NOTE:** Follow the advice of the investigating authorities regarding whether the accused may be notified of the allegations.
- B. If abuse is observed by, disclosed to, or suspected by a volunteer and/or paid staff person of the church, the observer shall report the incident immediately to the appointed clergy or supply pastors for immediate report to the authorities as required by state or local law. If the appointed clergy or supply pastors are not available, the matter should be reported to the District Superintendent.
If the accused is the appointed clergy or supply pastor or a member of her/his family, the allegations shall be immediately reported to the District Superintendent and immediately reported to the proper authorities as required by state or local law. The District Superintendent will take responsibility and act according to established rules of *The Book of Discipline* with respect to claims against a pastor. If the District Superintendent is not available, the incident should be reported to the Bishop’s office in Lakeland.
- C. Notify the parents of the victim and take whatever steps are necessary to assure the safety and well being of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **NOTE:** If one or both of the parents 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 and 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. After having reported the suspected abuse to the proper authorities, the appointed clergy or supply pastors should report the incident immediately to the District Superintendent. If the

- District Superintendent is unavailable, the incident should be reported to the Bishop's office.
- G. Keep a written report of the steps taken by the Church in response to the reported abuse. (See Appendix VII). 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.
 - H. Church Personnel are not to undertake an investigation of the incident. In all cases of reported or observed abuse, they should be at the service of the official investigating agency and law enforcement.
 - I. Any contact with the media should be handled by a **pre-determined** spokesperson selected by the appointed clergy and supply pastors. **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.

NOTE: The question that sometimes arises is: What about a "confidential communication" with a clergy person?

Florida law (FS 90.505) provides that some specific communications may be considered confidential if they occurred in the context of "seeking spiritual counsel or advice" from a clergy person. Thus a clergy person may be confronted with the dilemma of discovering or suspecting abuse in the setting of a privileged conversation. While the church has historically placed a high value on clergy keeping such confidences, the 2016 *Book of Discipline*, ¶ 341.5, provides an exception in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect.

In the process of implementing or interpreting this CYPP, err at all times on the side of protecting children/youth. The moral imperative is to do that which will best protect children/youth.

X. Implementation

Unless otherwise specifically stated, it shall be the responsibility of the Staff Parish Relations Committee to implement this Policy, to ensure that training pursuant to this policy is conducted at least annually, and to ensure the ongoing effectiveness of this Policy.

XI. Application

All of those who participate in the life of this congregation and use its facilities – individuals, organizations, and groups within and outside this congregation -- are expected to respect, implement, and adhere to these provisions as a minimum.

Adoption

This Child and Youth Protection Policy is adopted by action of the Church Council of the St James United Methodist Church this 31 day of March, 2023.

Appointed clergy and supply pastors

Chair, Staff Parish Relations Committee