

# Decatur First United Methodist Church Decatur, Georgia Safe Sanctuaries Policy

*(Last Revised: March 12, 2018)*

## ***Statement of Covenant***

Decatur First United Methodist Church (Decatur First from henceforth) believes that the spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults is imperative. We must do all that we can to nurture and protect our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. This policy is intended to provide a guide for that protection, as well as the protection of our adult workers and church. This policy is enacted to ensure that all the parents, members, volunteers, and staff of Decatur First have a clear understanding of what the policies and procedures are regarding the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. The leadership of Decatur First requests the cooperation of all in our church, as they must abide by the guidelines of this policy.

Decatur First classifies age groups in the following way:

- Children are defined as 0-fifth grade
- Youth are defined as sixth grade- twelfth grade
- Vulnerable Adults may be defined as persons age 18 or older who are mentally, physically, or psychologically challenged and are unable to make responsible legal decisions about his or her own welfare. These persons may also be elderly people defined as age 65 or older.

## ***Policy Standards and General Christian Moral Standard***

Staff and volunteers that work in any area of children and youth ministries or with vulnerable adults at Decatur First, including but not limited to the children's ministry of Decatur First, Decatur First Weekday Preschool and Kindergarten, Children's Morning Out program, sports programs, scouts, the youth ministry of Decatur First, and the music ministry of Decatur First are required to adhere to these policies and standards as moral Christians.

### ***Supervision of Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adult Workers***

The church staff and volunteers who supervise children and youth and workers with vulnerable adults are charged with enforcing this policy. Any violation of these policies or persistent failure to follow this policy can result in immediate dismissal, disciplinary action or reassignment to another area of work at the discretion of the Administrative Council and/ or Staff Parish Relations Committee. Anyone who suspects this policy is not being enforced should bring it to the attention of the person who is deemed “person in charge” of the specific program or event. This person must take immediate action on this violation. All reports must be brought to the Senior Pastor and/or their designee immediately, within 24 hours.

### ***Vulnerable Adults***

While much of this policy addresses the need to protect children and youth, Decatur First recognizes that abuse of impaired and older adults is a major concern. Many older adults are also subject to financial abuse. We must be vigilant for signs of abuse in our adult membership and report any suspected abuse, following the process outlined above. The local Department of Family and Child Services has a division with responsibility for supervising elder care.

### ***Supervision of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy***

The Senior Pastor will appoint the person or committee (staff or volunteer) with the responsibility of the oversight of the Safe Sanctuaries Policy. These policies govern all activities held by the church that involve children and youth under the age of 18, any adult with a mental age under 18, or any vulnerable adult.

These policies must be reviewed annually and re-approved by the Administrative Council and be presented at the charge conference. These policies may be altered at any time with the approval of the Administrative Council and the Trustees Director.

### ***Classification of Workers***

Decatur First uses the following classifications of its workers:

- 1) **Primary Workers**- All paid staff and volunteers with an assigned responsibility and may include risk shall be classified as primary workers and will be required to meet “primary worker” responsibilities. Primary workers have the primary responsibility for interaction with and greater access to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. A primary worker must be a minimum of 21 years of age. Examples are Sunday school teachers and youth counselors. Anyone in a supervisory role is considered a primary worker.
- 2) **Secondary workers**- Secondary workers are paid staff and volunteers who have occasional contact with children, youth, and vulnerable adults. These persons work under the supervision of a primary worker. A secondary worker must be a minimum of 18 years of age. Examples are parents helping with a class or program such as VBS or helpers in Sunday School.

### ***Guidelines for Volunteers***

All volunteer workers must be at least 18 years of age. All volunteers must be at least five years older than the children or youth with whom they are working. Youth under the age of 18 may volunteer with the Children's Ministries activities but must be under the leadership of a primary worker and in adherence to the Two Worker Rule. Youth are not permitted to be solely in charge of a group.

Any person wishing to work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults must have been a member of the church or have been a steady visitor for a minimum of six months before being allowed to volunteer. The term visitor may be defined as someone who has consistently attended worship or a parent of a child in the preschool or Children's Morning Out program who has volunteered on a regular basis. This policy can be waived only by the Senior Pastor, on a case by case basis, when needed.

### ***Two Worker Rule***

There must be both one **primary worker** and one secondary worker or two **primary workers** in the room when there is a child, youth, or vulnerable adult present. This rule is for the protection of the students as well as the adults. This rule is for onsite and offsite activities and includes but is not limited to activities hosted in homes of youth and youth volunteers.

### ***Floater***

This rule allows for only one **primary worker** to be in a classroom when you have another **primary worker** floating the hall regularly. When using this rule, the classroom door must remain open at all times. This should only be done if two workers are not available.

### ***Background Checks***

Anyone working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults of Decatur First must undergo a national criminal background check. The report must show no serious offenses or they will not be allowed to become a worker. Workers will not be allowed to chaperone an event off of church grounds until the background check has been completed and the report has been cleared by the Senior Pastor and/or his/her designee. A **primary worker** awaiting results may participate in onsite activities as long as they are supervised by another **primary worker**. A new background check shall be done at least every two years.

We understand that youthful indiscretions may appear on a background check. The Senior Pastor and/or his/her designee will be cognizant of this as they review the background checks.

### ***Orientation***

All new workers must attend a Safe Sanctuaries orientation. The church will provide an orientation and refresher course that will provide information on child, youth, and vulnerable adults/elder abuse and explain any changes made to the Safe Sanctuaries policy. This may or may not be held in conjunction with the First Aid and CPR Training. All workers must take a refresher course every two years.

### ***First Aid and CPR***

Since the safety of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults is a top priority, every **primary worker** shall be trained in both First Aid and CPR. All paid nursery workers should be certified in CPR. The church will hold training classes at least once a year and it is the worker's responsibility to sign up for the class.

### ***Standards to be applied to diapering or restroom activity: (Adopted from the Dunwoody UMC Policy)***

Procedure for all workers with children in diapers:

- Make sure another adult is in the room when a diaper is being changed.
- Diapering should occur in a visible area.

Procedure for all workers with preschool children using restrooms:

- If a toilet adjoins the room in use, teachers must supervise and the door must remain open, even if just a little.
- If there has been a potty "accident" and a worker needs to assist a child (changing, clothes, clean up, etc.), two adults must be present and a parent may be notified if further cleaning is necessary.

Procedures for all workers with elementary age children:

- Tell another adult you will be taking children to the restroom
- Check the restroom first before sending children to the restroom.
- Take more than one at a time, allowing children to be as independent as possible.
- It is recommended that a female escort girls and boys and males only escort boys; the best option is for females to escort girls and males to escort boys.
- Inform another adult when you have returned.

### ***Classroom Windows***

All classrooms will have at least one window in the door. The window must **NOT** be covered at any time with decorations, etc. When there is not a window or if the window in the door is frosted or tinted, the door must remain open.

### ***Open Door Counseling***

Any one-on-one counseling session (on or off-site) with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult will be done with the door open or in a room where there is a window in the door. Pending on the age of the child, a half door may be used to prevent the child from leaving the room. If at all possible, it should be done when another adult is nearby but not necessarily within hearing distance.

### ***Transportation***

Transportation to and from activities held at the church is not the church's responsibility. Church approved drivers may provide transportation to and from activities held away from the church. Volunteers must pass a motor vehicle background check to be considered a church-approved driver. Those with numerous traffic violations will not be allowed to transport children, youth, or vulnerable adults. Church approved drivers must have a valid driver's license and an insurance card on file in the church office. Church approved drivers are covered under church insurance only when driving church vehicles (the bus and the van) and vehicles rented for activities (example: youth missions). If there is only one vehicle, there must be two adults present. When there is an offsite trip, there must be at least one adult worker of each gender represented. Exceptions to the gender rule apply when it is a single gender event (example girl's only ice cream trip) but there must still be two adults present. Youth will not be allowed to drive other youth or children or themselves to and from offsite youth activities without expressed written permission from a parent/guardian and prior arrangements made with the youth director.

### ***Sleeping Arrangements***

On church sponsored overnight trips, where motel/hotel type rooms are used, all youth and children should be assigned their own same-gender rooms and adults will be assigned their own same-gender rooms. The adult rooms should be in between the youth/children rooms if at all possible. The adults should check on the youth/ children at random times throughout the night. Any concerns with sleeping arrangements should be brought to the Senior Pastor and/or the Church Administrator.

- When staying in host homes, youth/children should be assigned to a group with same-gender youth/children. People hosting the children/youth should have preferably been through some form of Safe Sanctuaries training or background check.
- When staying at camps and separating youth from adults is not an option, there must be same-gender cabins and 2 leaders of the same gender must be present. No adult should be alone in a cabin with children/youth unless it is extreme circumstances.
- When staying at a church, school, or another facility, youth/children should be divided into same-gender rooms. If possible, adults should stay in same-gender rooms and separate from youth. If not, follow the camp/cabins rule.

### ***Parent and Family Education and Communication***

The approval of this policy will be communicated to the church at large with special emphasis on communicating to all parents of our children and youth. Copies of this policy will be available for all parents and other interested parties. A copy of the policy will be given to all new members. Any revisions to the policy must be communicated to the congregation as soon as possible.

From time to time, educational events will be made available for parents and other interested parties. These events will provide information on the Safe Sanctuaries Policy, child abuse, and any other information that will enhance parenting skills.

Parents will be provided with advance notice of all regularly scheduled youth and children's activities. Written permission will be required for participation in activities that are not on church grounds.

### ***Websites, Photos, and Emails***

Communication is becoming more and more important. Communications from adults sent to youth and children should be limited to information related to children and youth ministries. It should not be used to pass along jokes, etc. Contact information of youth and children should be protected and not given out, except by a staff member in the course of ministry work that is led by staff. Any photos on the church website, social media sites, posted in classrooms, or posted on bulletin boards should not identify individuals. Written permission must be received from parents before any photo of children or youth is posted on a church-sponsored website, social media, in classrooms, or on bulletin boards. The church will include a photo release on its permission forms for events and activities.

### ***Reporting Accidents, Incidents, and Suspected Abuse***

*(Please also refer to Appendix 1, attached to this document for information related to Georgia's Child Abuse Reporting Statute)*

**Accidents** – when an unintentional act occurs and a child is hurt

- When an accident occurs, resulting in an injury, administer first aid, or seek medical attention. Within 24 hours, the observer is to complete an *Accident Report Form*, recording details including, the injured party's name, names of others who witnessed an accident or applied first aid, time and place accident occurred and care given.
- The completed form is to be given to area ministry director, who gives it to the church administrator.

**Incident** – When an action is observed that does not require reporting to Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) but does require attention

- If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed and given to Ministry Directors, Supervisor, Compliance Officer and/or Pastors.
- The staff person over the area where the incident was observed, should contact the one whose behavior was inappropriate, to discuss alternative behaviors, or to offer support or training.
- The staff person should indicate on the bottom of the *Incident Report Form* how the situation was resolved.
- If inappropriate behavior is repeated, further action shall be taken.

**Suspected Abuse** – When one sees, has been told of, or suspects a child has been abused:

The following is a definition of child abuse supplied by The Georgia Department of Family and Child Services:

“What is considered child abuse and neglect? Physical abuse is injury to a child under the age of 18, by a parent or caretaker, which results in bruises, fractures, burns, cuts, or internal injuries. Neglect is the failure of the parent or caretaker to see that the child is adequately supervised, fed, clothed, housed, or provided medical care. Sexual abuse occurs when a parent or other adult uses a child under age 18 for sexual stimulation.”

- **When a Decatur First Staff Member or Volunteer Suspects Child Abuse:**
  - Any Decatur First Paid Staff Worker or volunteer (the Reporter) who suspects child abuse should immediately report suspicions to their Ministry Director or designee.
  - The Reporter should complete a *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse Form*
  - The Ministry Director will contact his/her supervisor to discuss the appropriateness of a referral to Protective Services. The Senior Pastor will be notified.
  - If a referral is to be made, the Senior Pastor will contact the District Superintendent and Insurance Company.
  - The Reporter, with support from Ministry Director or his/her supervisor, will call the appropriate Child Protective Service office to report the suspected abuse. In emergency situations, staff should call 911 for assistance. The report should be made to the child's county of residence:
    - Fulton County                      404-699-4399
    - DeKalb County                      404-370-5066
    - Gwinnett County                      770-995-2122
    - Cobb County                      770-528-5015
  - If staff observes an incident of concern which does not rise to the level of suspected abuse but does warrant further investigation by the Ministry Director, (i.e. Decatur First staff observing parent hitting own child) an *Incident Report Form* should be completed.
  - The family shall receive immediate ministerial support from Decatur First by either the Senior Pastor or an Associate Pastor. Support will also be provided for the abuser and the abuser's family if needed.
  
- **When a member or visitor (The Reporter) suspects child abuse at Decatur First by a paid or volunteer staff:**
  - Immediate action and contact with church staff supervisor is recommended.
  - The paid staff member or volunteer who is contacted by a member/visitor reporter should immediately refer the reporter to the appropriate Ministry Director over the staff member in question. If that Director is not available, the reporter should be directed to that Director's Supervisor or to one of the Pastors. In case of emergency, staff should call 911 for assistance.
  - The Reporter should complete the *Report of Suspected of Child Abuse Form* and if the incident occurred on Decatur First property, an *Incident Report Form* should also be completed.
  - The Senior Minister or Staff Parrish Chairperson should be notified before a call is placed to protective services.
  - With the support of staff, the Reporter will telephone the Protective Service office in the county of the individual's residence to report the suspected abuse.
  - If the incident observed does not rise to the level of suspected abuse, an *Incident Report Form* should be completed. Ministry Directors, Supervisors and/or Pastors should submit a written report describing how the situation was addressed and resolved.

- Any staff member (paid or volunteer) who is implicated on a *Report of Suspected Incident of Child Abuse* or an *Incident Report Form* should be removed from direct involvement with program participant immediately after the report is made until the situation is adequately investigated and resolved.
  - The victim and victim's family shall receive immediate ministry support from Decatur First if needed.
- **Church plan when suspected abuse is reported**
- Information should be shared with other staff persons on a need-to-know basis.
  - Designated person contacts police, if appropriate, the District Superintendent, and the Insurance Company.
  - Only the Senior Pastor or designated spokesperson should speak to media. Statement to the media should be short and simple. (Example: *Our church is doing all we can to cooperate with officials during the time of the investigation.*)

I acknowledge receipt of this policy booklet:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name Printed

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**Appendix 1: Georgia Child Abuse Reporting Statute (Effective July 1, 2012)**



## NEWS YOU NEED!

**To: Our congregations**

**By: Rev. Joy T. Melton**

**Date: June 6, 2012**

Georgia has a new Child Abuse Reporting Statute and it takes effect July 1, 2012. Every church needs to know what our new law includes and how it affects our ministries with children and youth.

The new law is found in the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, Title 19-7-5. There are three key provisions for churches to be fully aware of.

1. The new law defines "Child service organization personnel" as persons employed by or volunteering at a business or an organization, whether public, private, for profit, not for profit, or voluntary, that provides care, treatment, education, training, supervision, coaching, counseling, recreational programs, or shelter to children". Then, the law states that Child service organization personnel, "having reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused shall report or cause reports of that abuse to be made as provided in this Code section." **Therefore, under the new law, our volunteers and staff members in ministries with children and youth are mandatory reporters of child abuse.**
2. The new law requires that reports of child abuse be made "no later than 24 hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused, by telephone or otherwise and followed by a report in writing, if requested, to a child welfare agency providing protective services, as designated by the Department of Human Services, or, in the absence of such agency, to an appropriate police authority or district attorney." **Our ministry leaders must know the DFACS office or the sheriff's office contact information so that the appropriate reports can be made within the law's time limits.**
3. The new law makes it clear that clergy must report child abuse. The only circumstance in which clergy may not report child abuse is the situation where a clergy person's only knowledge of the abuse is a confession by the perpetrator which is "required to be kept confidential under church doctrine or practice." The 2008 Book of Discipline, Paragraph 341.5 states, "All clergy of The United Methodist Church are charged to maintain all confidences inviolate, including confessional confidences, except in the cases of suspected child abuse or neglect or in cases where mandatory reporting is required by civil law." The Book of Discipline makes it clear that our denomination's doctrine does not require clergy to keep knowledge of child abuse confidential. In light of the Book of Discipline's provisions and the Georgia statute, our clergy need to know how and when to report child abuse, just as our staff members and volunteers need to know!

You can find the complete text of the Georgia child abuse reporting statute in House Bill 1176, portions of which are quoted above, posted online at [www.legis.ga.gov](http://www.legis.ga.gov). For additional information on this article, contact Rev. Joy Melton by email: [joy@hindsonmelton.com](mailto:joy@hindsonmelton.com).