

SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY

Clarion First Methodist Church

Adopted June 25, 2025

PART I. Introduction

Clarion First Methodist Church believes that Scripture instructs us to care for the children brought into the church. These children may be regular attenders, or they may be the children of guests, grandchildren of our members, or others. Regardless of how these children come to us, we covenant to commit to their protection, and in doing so to represent God's justice and mercy in the world.

PART II. Definitions

Minor:	Anyone under the age of 18
Employee:	Any individual paid by the church
Volunteer:	Any individual not paid by the church but with leadership responsibilities
Abuse:	The sexual contact, physical or emotional harm or neglect as defined by the relevant statutes of the State of Iowa or other relevant jurisdictions

PART III. Scope

This policy shall apply to all activities sponsored by Clarion First Methodist Church regardless of location. "Sponsored events" are herein defined to include any event where the church commits resources to the event, including promotional resources except where it is clearly established that the event is sponsored by an outside group.

Additionally, outside groups utilizing the church's facilities shall be required to adhere to this policy or adopt equivalent policies according to a procedure determined by the Church Council.

PART IV. Policy

As part of our commitment to care for and protect minors, as well as the vulnerable adults among us, we commit to the policy defined herein.

a) Selection, Screening, and Training of Volunteers and Employees

- 1) Volunteers must have been regular attenders in worship for at least six months prior to serving.
- 2) All volunteers and employees working with minors and vulnerable adults shall complete a background check prior to serving or within 90 days of the adoption of this policy. Background checks shall include, at minimum:
 - County Criminal Search (Last 7 Years) and National Criminal Search
 - Global Watchlist Search
 - Sex Offender Search
 - Social Security Trace
- 3) Background checks shall be valid for not more than 3 years from the date on which the check is completed. Screening records shall be maintained for a minimum of three years.

- 4) Reference checks will be conducted at a minimum of two organizations in which a volunteer or employee has previously worked or volunteered. All volunteers and employees working with minors or vulnerable adults will be given a copy of the Safe Sanctuary Policy and will sign off that they read the policy. Additionally, volunteers and employees working with vulnerable adults shall complete additional training on the unique needs of the group(s) with which they are working.
- 5) Clarion First Methodist Church has a zero-tolerance policy concerning abuse. As such, volunteers and employees working with minors and vulnerable adults will complete training annually on the Safe Sanctuary policy. This training will include policies and procedures on recognizing and reporting potential abuse, the expectation to cooperate with law enforcement and/or child protective services, and material on signs of grooming behavior.

b) Supervision of Minors and Vulnerable Adults

- 1) Volunteers and employees leading groups of minors and vulnerable adults must be at least eighteen (18) years old. Student helpers may be at least twelve (12) years old. Student helpers age fifteen (15) may count towards the leader-to-child ratios only if an adult is present.
- 2) All volunteers and employees, including minor student helpers, must be at least five years older than the oldest minor of the group with which they are working.
- 3) Any single volunteer or employee should be responsible for no more than three minors under the age of 3 years or five minors under the age of 7 years.
- 4) Any single volunteer or employee shall be responsible for no more than ten minors or vulnerable adults at any given time regardless of age.
- 5) If only one adult and one minor student helper are serving together, they shall not be of opposite genders.
- 6) At all times where a group of minors is present there shall be two or more non-related and non-cohabitating adults. For purposes of this policy, a married couple may serve together but shall count as one adult. For events such as Sunday School, Nursery, or Youth Group small groups, it is permissible for one person or a married couple to lead a class, but there must be visual access to the room at all times (e.g. window to hallway, window in door, open door).
- 7) Any electronic communication, including but not limited to social media, between a Leader and a minor or vulnerable adult, whether during church activities/on premises or otherwise, must never contain lewd, suggestive, or grooming content. Such conduct is strictly prohibited and subject to disciplinary action.

c) Transportation and Off-Site Events

- 1) Volunteers and employees driving minors and vulnerable adults to off-site events should be qualified as leaders.
- 2) Chaperones shall be the same gender as the minors or vulnerable adults being supervised when possible.
- 3) Chaperones are discouraged from being alone in a vehicle with one child, other than their own, especially of the opposite gender. If this is necessary, best practices should be followed (e.g. notifying the child's parent).
- 4) Adults shall not share a bed with any minor including their own child.
- 5) Where possible, hotels opening to an interior hallway should be utilized for overnight events.
- 6) For any out-of-town or overnight event, the trip's leader must obtain medical information and liability release

forms for all participants, and provide parents/guardians with a schedule and contact information.

PART V. Response and Reporting

a) Mandatory Reporting

- 1) Employees and volunteers are directed to report any suspicion or allegation of abuse to civil authorities as required under mandated reporting statutes. All involved parties shall be directed to cooperate with any investigation with law enforcement, child protective services, or other civil authorities.

b) Reporting of Observed or Suspected Abuse

- 1) In the event that abuse is observed or suspected, the ministry area leader shall report it to the Pastor, who will assist the ministry leader in reporting it to the Department of Human Resources, local law enforcement, and denominational authorities. A governmental agency may require that the party who originally witnessed or suspected abuse to be the reporting party, in which case the ministry area leader is required to make a report. In the event that an allegation of abuse is made against the Pastor, the report shall be made to a Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations representative.
- 2) Should an allegation of abuse arise, the church shall consult with its insurance carrier regarding the filing of an insurance claim and work to preserve any documents or information regarding the alleged abuse.
- 3) The investigation of sexual abuse of a child or vulnerable individual at the hands of an employee, volunteer, or program participant shall be done by a qualified impartial party such as legal counsel.
- 4) In the event of an allegation, the anonymity of alleged victims shall be guaranteed to the extent possible. The alleged abuser shall immediately be suspended from service and be separated from the alleged victim pending the investigation.
- 5) If an incident should occur, volunteers and leaders will meet following the proper conclusion of the case in order to debrief and consider how to move forward and improve.

c) Media Response

- 1) In the event that an incident receives media attention, the only persons authorized to speak to the media are the Pastor and/or Church Council Chairperson. If approached by the media, all others should endeavor to help the media find the authorized spokesperson(s).

PART VI. Review of Policy

The Church Council shall be responsible to review this policy on an annual basis to determine if any changes are needed.

Adopted this 25th day of June, 2025.

Church Council Chairperson

Church Council Secretary