

**MESSAGE FROM THE DESK OF CHAIR, CHILD PROTECTION POLICY COMMITTEE,
UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS**

At the Synod of 2015 the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands passed a resolution to develop a Child Protection Policy for the whole church. A policy that would not only protect our children but would protect our leaders most of whom are volunteers. For the United Church this is more than just writing a statement or for guidelines, this is a powerful commitment – a totally new strategy of engagement – a church that values its children and young people above rubies.

The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands has taken not only a local view of the situation of our children but a world view looking at policies in Africa, United Kingdom and Australia / Pacific; consulting with other agencies to begin to provide not only a legal statute for within the Polity of the Church but an overall training component that outlines the churches priorities and commitment to child protection, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands is fully aware of the violent attacks on our children in Jamaica and the challenges faced in the Cayman Islands the realities are very clear **our children must be protected at all times**. As a church community we need to ensure and understand how to take appropriate measures to protect our children's rights and promote violence free communities. We have a commitment to work with families to protect children.

Ensuring families understand the causes and consequences of violence against children, adopt positive parenting practices. We want to ensure children contribute to their own protection teaching them how to protect themselves and how they can advocate for participation in child protection initiatives. We want to work with government at all levels to look at legislation, policies and structures and ensuring that institutions have the ability to prevent and respond to violence against children.

In the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands we believe that '**Every Child Counts**' and we want to offer the very best care and protection we can see all our Church School Children, Youth Fellowship, all who are in our care for one (1) hour, one (1) day, one (1) week or whatever. This policy will ensure that your child is and will always be protected within any congregational setting or activities organized by the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

These measures are designed to say to you the parents – the wider community in Jamaica and Cayman when it comes to our children the United Church will protect, will train and advocate for our children.

Children are indeed a gift from God. Psalm 127:5 the Message Bible puts it beautifully "Don't you see that children are God's best gift." As a denomination we seek to respond to all the challenges that this modern age has flooded upon the society, violence and sexual

abuse of children are a scourge on our nations which the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands condemns in all forms. So as the Policy is tabled and approved let us work together to implement every facet of the Child Protection Policy from Negril to Morant Point. From Bodden Town to George Town we are **United in Child Protection**.

Rev Dr. Margaret Fowler
Chair, Child Protection Policy Committee

March 2016

CHILD PROTECTION POLICY

THE UNITED CHURCH IN JAMAICA AND THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

GUIDELINES FOR THE SUPERVISION, CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

FEBRUARY 2016 –RATIFIED APRIL 2 2016 – CMC Meeting

1. Background and Rationale

This policy establishes basic provisions for the protection and safety of children. The word “children” in this document includes infants, children of tender years and young persons under the age of 18 affiliated to the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands takes the issue of Child Safety and Protection seriously. This Child Protection Policy of the United Church therefore takes into account the need for directives surrounding general safety and care-giving of children as well as physical and interpersonal conduct within church compounds, Congregations and church-related activities - such as during Church Services, Sunday School, summer camps and Church excursions.

Informed by increasing reports of cases of human trafficking and various forms of child physical, verbal and sexual exploitation in Jamaica and Cayman, the policy is also designed to be in accordance with Jamaica’s Child Care and Protection Act (2007), the Children Law (2012, Revised) of the Cayman Islands as well as national and regional policies on Child Protection in both jurisdictions. It is also guided by the goals of *Vision 2030 Jamaica: National Development Plan*, which seeks to “secure sustained and broad-based improvement in the quality of life of [Jamaicans, and to] transform Jamaica into a country of choice, to live, work, raise families and do business” (PIOJ, 2005).

The Child Protection Policy provides a core set of ground rules for operation in the United Church in Jamaica. Its terms and conditions raise awareness about the responsibilities, risks and boundaries of working with children to facilitate a safer environment for all. While the policy relates chiefly to protecting the welfare of children, it also applies to the protection of adults, particularly those in supervisory roles involving caring for children and young people and working closely with them.

This policy covers fellowship spaces on all premises and locations owned and managed by the United Church. This includes family events, United Church adult-supervised group meetings intended for children as well as meetings on the premises organized by groups outside of the United Church community.

Observance of this policy is expected of Clergy, Elders, Sunday School Teachers and Superintendents, Youth Leaders, Camp Counselors, Volunteers and all adults within the Church environment interfacing with children on a regular basis. The policy also provides an overview of the training and support mechanisms being put in place to facilitate the sustainability of child welfare and protection in the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.

2. The Child Protection Policy of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

This section provides an overview of the terms of the Child Protection Policy of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. The policy covers the areas of recruitment, administration and monitoring of all activities involving children within United Church premises. The policy contributes to engendering a safe, secure and law-abiding community that effectively manages the safety and protection of its children to enhance social harmony and wellbeing.

In the context of the principles outlined in Section 1 that justify and support the policy, the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands will aim to ensure the following:

1. All children in our care shall be “protected against all forms of neglect, cruelty and exploitation” (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF, 1989). This will include advocating child health, safety and protection embodied in national legislation and partnering with other church communities as well as relevant Ministries Departments and Agencies to protect the rights of children. This role includes promoting and monitoring family welfare within church communities and upholding the observance of child rights in all activities of the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands.
2. All children, and persons working with children shall be treated with dignity and respect in actions, in attitude and in the thoughtful use of language as would be expected in Christian communication.
3. There shall be adult supervision of children during all activities of the United Church, which includes parental supervision and that conducted by caregivers and in the daily operation of United Church auxiliaries such as Children’s Homes. It is also expected that, as much as is feasible, authorized, same-gender adult caregivers be used to accompany children to the bathroom during Church services and other activities.
4. An arbitrator to implement the policy will be appointed/or selected at national and local congregational levels. Performance of persons selected for these roles will be monitored on an ongoing basis. This role will be selected by Ministers within each United Church Congregation.
5. The recruitment process for persons working directly with children, through the work of the Church, will be managed in observance of specific accountability processes. These include the following activities: (i) The collection of personal data on Candidates who have volunteered or expressed an interest in working with children within the United Church; (ii) pre-recruitment background checks, a Police Clearance Certificate; and (iii) references which are to be submitted by Candidates prior to

recruitment to roles involving work with children. These processes are to be overseen by the Minister or his/her delegated authority.

6. A probationary period of three months will be instituted before the worker is confirmed. During this period feedback on performance will be gathered through consultation with various sources (including children and young people, leaders and the Ministerial team).
7. The Minister and the Board of Elders shall review all shortlisted Candidates supervising or working with children and youth, in both paid and voluntary forms, and will oversee the strategic and action plans of sub-ministries and activities involving children and youth.
8. Training will be delivered to the Minister, Elders and other leaders - including Sunday School Teachers, Superintendents, Workers and others involved in leadership with children to ensure there is clear understanding of the legal requirements for the safety and protection of children and the United Church's Child Protection Policy. Training will include principles of safeguarding of children as well as requirements to report suspicions of all forms of abuse – including physical, verbal and sexual abuse, bullying and human trafficking. These training sessions are designed to share knowledge on risk management in all applicable United Church fora. Training shall include procedures to reinforce the monitoring systems of the Synod of the United Church, in its quest to create Child-friendly Congregations.
9. Children will undergo bi-annual training on the principles of safeguarding and on ground rules for operation (i.e. appropriate and inappropriate self, other and group conduct) while engaged in United Church-related activities or on United Church premises. Children shall be informed of the value and importance of communicating with those supervising them to facilitate their health, safety and wellbeing. Children will also be assured of the established procedures for reporting abuse or neglect and of the appropriate handling of private information by those supervising them in cases where sensitive information is shared.
10. Keeping proper records of all children within each Congregation – including collecting health-related data on all children affiliated to United Church Congregations – such as information relating to allergies, ailments and disorders (and unique behavioural characteristics) that may affect the individual child and/or other children. The appropriate procedures to address or treat children with known conditions should also be recorded to guide quick responses in emergency situations (e.g. asthma attacks or epileptic seizures). This information should be included as part of Sunday School registration, and pre-registration requirements for all excursions involving children. Non-members who are parents with children attending Sunday Services regularly will be prompted to share information on their child(ren)'s health to facilitate the establishment of up-to-date records on children within United Church Congregations.

11. First Aid training and kits will be made available in all Churches with a view to the likely First Aid needs of children. Attendance is compulsory for Sunday School Superintendents.
12. Written parental consent will be obtained prior to Church excursions involving children and child attendance during excursions will be taken.
13. Suspicions of abuse or neglect by Parents, Guardians, School Teachers and significant others or other sensitive matters shared by children should be reported to Ministers. Counselling and other appropriate forms of follow-up support will be sourced and provided under the charge of Ministers. In such cases (within reason) confidentiality will be practiced to protect the best interests of the child.
14. In cases where one-to-one meetings between two adults or between an adult and a minor are being held in an enclosed environment, it is recommended that doors with window panes be used or that doors be left open or ajar throughout the meeting.
15. In general, activities involving children are to be organized and implemented to minimize the risk of harm. The appropriate mechanisms for monitoring, sanitation and maintenance of Church premises will be observed to ensure child safety for all ages. This includes securing adequate liability insurance and other legal requirements as well as removing objects in the environment that may be harmful to children at various ages. This might include the risk of slip and trip hazards, heavy objects at heights, sharp objects and cleaning or other harsh chemicals and the supervision of motor vehicle use on Church premises to prevent hazards and accidents involving children.
16. Encouragement will be given to parents through parenting programmes (including After School programmes for working parents where possible), partnering with them in disciplining their children including through reading materials to help them develop an understanding of Christ's love and compassion for all. Parents will also be informed about the Child Protection Policy and will be invited to participate in an annual training workshop on Safeguarding principles as well as other areas in which they can partner with leaders of the United Church in championing the safety and protection of children.
17. A training programme for persons working with children will be designed and delivered twice per annum to serve all United Church Congregations. These training workshops will explore best practice in observing child rights, safety and protection and the role of the church in contemporary Jamaican society. The vulnerabilities of children and potential challenging situations that may emerge in church life will also be used to raise awareness and to discuss possible solutions. This programme will be delivered in both face-to-face and online modalities to facilitate access to invited Members across the entire Church.

3. Leadership and Policy Support Structure

"God intends for all life, freedom from abuse and injustice. God created all human beings in God's image and desires for them mutual respect, care, protection and empowerment"

The aforementioned Synod statement informs the practice of ministry in the United Church and demonstrates the 'duty of care', which we have adopted, to all adults, young people and children with whom we are involved. Achieving and maintaining best practice in the safety and care of children is inextricably tied to this call to "mutual respect, care, protection and empowerment" and **is taken to be the responsibility of the membership at large.**

The Minister (of the Charge/in Charge) officiates the Church. He or she is responsible for the leadership, direction and management of the ministerial services delivered by the Church. He/She also has responsibility to provide authorization for other members of the church participating in formal and informal church leadership at various levels – including, for instance, through teaching Sunday School, leading Praise and Worship, leadership within the Girls and Boys Brigade/Brownie groups. By extension, the Minister will ensure that the policy is accessible to the membership, is understood by all and is being observed within the church.

The Board of Elders is also integral to the implementation and management of this Child Protection Policy. The Board will review and update selection criteria and assist in the appointment of Safety and Protection Officers in each Congregation, who will be tasked with administering interventions that stem from the Child Protection Policy and its implementation.

United Church Members, Elders, Leaders and the Ministerial Team will therefore act in accordance with their roles and will collectively work to minimize risks to children, youth and the adult leaders that interface with them.