

UNIVERSITY LUTHERAN CHURCH OF HOPE CHILD/YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY

Christ has charged us "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14 Jesus' instruction is two-fold: that we let the children come to Him and that we not hinder them.

PURPOSE

- To protect our children and their families from child abuse and/or sexual misconduct.
- To protect our teachers and staff from false accusations of child abuse and/or sexual misconduct.
- To safeguard the ministry of the church and to spare it from the devastation that can result from litigation.

TYPES OF ABUSE OR MISCONDUCT

1. **Physical Abuse** is non-accidental physical injury which is intentionally inflicted upon child or youth.
2. **Sexual Abuse** is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and an adult or between children or youth depending on ages, whether or not there is apparent consent from the individual.
3. **Sexual Harassment** is a situation, contact or activity where there is an employment, mentor or colleague relationship between the person involved, including, but not limited to, sexually-oriented humor or language; questions or comments about sexual behavior or preference unrelated to employment qualification; undesired physical contact; inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance; or repeated unwelcome requests for social engagements.
4. **Sexual Exploitation** includes but is not limited to the development of or the attempt to develop a sexual or romantic relationship between a cleric or lay employee or volunteer and a person with whom he/she has a Pastoral Relationship, whether or not there is apparent consent from the individual.
5. **Emotional Abuse** is mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that could reasonably be determined to result in a material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.
6. **Neglect** is the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.
7. **Economic Exploitation** is the deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of a child or youth's or vulnerable adult's belongings or money.

PRECAUTIONS AND DUE DILIGENCE

This policy is intended to help our congregation make University Lutheran Church of Hope a safe and caring place.

Although our Christian concern for children/youth makes us sad when any form of child abuse takes place anywhere, our major policy focus is to be certain that abuse does not occur within the framework of any of University Lutheran Church of Hope's programs or ministries to children/youth.

In an effort to create a safe environment within our church, all church staff persons and any volunteer who works with children/youth both regularly and occasionally, on or beyond the Church grounds, will be screened and trained on child protection issues and practices.

One-year Rule: No person will be permitted to serve as volunteer staff unless he or she has been a member of the Church for at least one year OR is recommended by two church members who have been members for at least one year, OR is currently a student at Luther Seminary or the applicant provides two verified references who are rostered church leaders.

SCREENING

Paid and volunteer staff that regularly has contact with children under the age of 18 at University Lutheran Church of Hope will be asked to complete a screening application to be given to the Church administrator to request the background check using ChoicePoint, which is a screening service recommended by the ELCA. The information provided will be available only to those authorized to participate in the screening process and will be used exclusively for that purpose. The completed forms will be kept in a secure place.

Acceptable candidates will be notified when they are approved to work with children and youth at University Lutheran Church of Hope and will be required to sign a statement that they have read, understood, and agree to abide by University Lutheran Church of Hope's Child/Youth Protection Policy.

SUPERVISION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Open door policy: Parents, volunteers, or staff of the Church may visit and observe child or youth programs at any time.

Sign-in/Sign-out Procedure: Parents or other persons responsible for children, from infant through 2nd grade, will record via a sign-in procedure on the Sunday School registration form with the staff/volunteer on duty as to whom the child may be released. If the person picking up the child is unknown to the staff/volunteer person, a picture ID will be requested to verify the release person's identity. A child will not be released to a person not previously authorized via the sign-in procedure which will be on the registration form. The sign-in procedure will require an emergency contact number of the parents.

Bathroom Procedure for Preschool Children: If at all possible, the assistant or helper should accompany children, and the teacher or other helper will stay in the classroom. The adult may enter the bathroom, if the child needs assistance or supervision, but will not enter the stall with a child unless there is an emergency.

If the child needs assistance or there is an emergency with any child, the stall door is to be left open. When taking a group to the bathroom and the adult is in the bathroom, have all the children remain inside until everyone has used the facilities, and then leave as a group.

Two-person preference: For classes through eighth grade, it is preferred two staff/volunteers be present in any classroom at all times.

Rule of three: When there are children and adults present in the same room, it is preferred that there be a minimum of three persons present (two adults and one child/youth OR one adult & two children/youth).

A corollary of this rule is that at any time that an adult is having a private conversation with a youth/child (e.g. during a confirmation retreat where a pastor is discussing one's spiritual journey), it should only take place in an area with other adults/youth/children nearby.

If this is not feasible, then the door to the room should remain open to allow easy viewing.

Parental Permission Rule: Children and youth must have completed a information and consent form for involvement in church-sponsored programs and activities away from the Church location. These forms are good for one year. The person in charge of each trip and /or retreat shall carry completed medical release forms, including permission for emergency medical care and information on how to reach a parent or guardian in an emergency.

Trips and Retreats: There shall be at least two adults present for all trips, retreats, and other times that children or youth gather at or away from the Church building. (At least three adults are preferable so that in the event of an emergency there will be adequate supervision.)

There shall be at least one adult of each gender present at co-ed overnight events. At single gender overnight events, at least one of the adults present will be of the same gender as the children or youth. Parents will be made aware of housing accommodations. If there are two adults it is preferred they not be related, by marriage or blood.

Transportation: The following rules apply when transportation by volunteers is being provided for children or youth for designated church activities from the Church to a church sponsored event and back:

- The designated leader of the event must know the driver.
- The designated leader of the event will not permit any adult to drive who appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Driver must be at least 21 years of age.
- Driver must have a valid state driver's license for the vehicle being operated.
- Driver must have proof of insurance.
- It is preferred that the driver be accompanied by at least two children or youth in the vehicle.
- Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.

A copy of the valid driver's license and insurance card must be filed with the Church Administrator, before a driver is approved to drive on church sponsored activities.

All drivers should be advised that in the event of an accident that (by insurance rules) his/her insurance company is primary and the Church's insurance company is secondary.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The Church shall provide regularly scheduled training focused on these policies and practices and other current issues related to child protection for those working with children and youth. Attendance at these sessions is required for those who have direct contact with children or youth in the Church's ministry. Each person will take the training every three years.

PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND/OR YOUTH

The care and safety of the victim and family is our first priority. We are also concerned about any perpetrator being held responsible for his/her actions. The Church will not attempt to do a detailed investigation of any alleged incident on its own, but will cooperate fully with all legal authorities.

If there is a strong suspicion of abuse/neglect, it will be reported to the Senior Pastor or Business Administrator.*

A report of the facts known will be made promptly to Hennepin County Child Protection by telephone to 612-348-3553 or by fax, using the Hennepin County Child Maltreatment Reporting Form (see attached).

Any staff (volunteer or paid) who are “mandated reporters” under Minnesota law are requested to notify the Senior Pastor or Business Administrator before making a report on any incident or suspicion in which the Church is implicated and to provide the Church with a copy of their report.

The parent(s) or legal guardian of the victim will be notified by a staff member and steps taken to assure the safety of the child or youth until the parent(s) arrive. **It is important to emphasize that the proper authorities must be notified even if the parent(s) do not wish the incident to be recorded.** If one or both of the parents is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities and follow their advice about notification of the parents.

If a staff member (volunteer or paid) is alleged to be the abuser, the Senior Pastor will tell the accused that a report has been made. That volunteer or paid staff member will be temporarily relieved of his or her duties, pending investigation of the allegations. If a paid staff member, the Senior Pastor will consult with the Personnel Committee concerning whether to maintain or suspend his or her salary until the allegations are cleared or substantiated.

The Senior Pastor will consult with the Personnel Committee as any investigation of an incident reported under this policy proceeds or is concluded regarding the status of the alleged abuser as a volunteer or paid staff member.

Any contact with the media should be handled by a pre-determined spokesperson. Care will be taken to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of all involved. The spokesperson should generally convey that the matter is under investigation and any comments made prior to the investigation would be premature.

The Church’s insurance company will be notified by the Business Administrator.

The Senior Pastor and the Business Administrator will be responsible to collect all materials relating to any alleged incident of abuse and preserve that information in the Church’s confidential files.

*In the event that the alleged abuser is a person who is named in this document as a person to whom a report will be made or a person with another duty under this policy, the current President of the Congregation shall be consulted to identify a substitute person to receive the report or carry out the duty.

Policy Administration

The administration of this policy rests with the Senior Pastor, in consultation with the Personnel Committee.

Appendices:

Application

Driving Statement

Medical Release Form