

Protection Policy for Children & Vulnerable Adults Our Savior's Lutheran Church, New Ulm, MN

God loves *everyone* as though *each one* were God's only child. As ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are called to make God's love known - both through our words and our way of life. A child and vulnerable adult protection policy helps us to follow this calling by supporting our efforts to:

- 1. Protect children, vulnerable adults and their families from abuse or other misconduct.**
- 2. Protect the ministry and resources of this congregation and the wider church from the harm caused by abuse and the loss of trust that abuse causes**
- 3. Protect our volunteers and staff from false accusations of abuse or misconduct and equip them to serve the mission of this congregation in safe and healthy ways.**

As you read this policy, please keep in mind the following passages:

“Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 NRSV

Trust is the heart of ministry. Trust makes it possible for people assembled for worship to hear God's promises come from human mouths. Trust makes it possible for children to learn the story of the God who loves them from their Sunday School teachers and Confirmation leaders. Trust makes it possible for sick or homebound adults to feel the presence of God when a visitor comes to see them. As servants of Christ, if we prove ourselves unworthy of trust by allowing, ignoring or not working to prevent abuse, we damage or lose people's trust and make it harder for this and other congregations to do God's work.

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Matthew 25:40 NRSV

God has created and loves all people equally, but not all people are equally able to protect themselves from harm and abuse. We believe that “least” in this passage does not mean “least important” or “least loved,” but “least able to protect or care for oneself.” Children and people living with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to abuse because they may not have the physical strength, communication skills, understanding or resources to prevent, escape or ask for help escaping from abuse. As servants of Christ, we have a duty to protect these ‘least,’ who are all members of God's family.

Acknowledgements

This document draws from the second edition of the **Safe Haven Guidelines** of the Southwestern MN Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the **Child/Youth Protection Policies** of University Lutheran Church of Hope (Mpls, MN) and Prairie Lutheran (Eden Prairie, MN), and **MN Statute § 626.557**.

Definitions

A **child** is anyone under the age of 12 years old.

A **youth** is anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in high school.

A **vulnerable adult** is anyone over the age of 18 who, because of physical or mental disability or dependency on institutional services, is particularly vulnerable to maltreatment.

A **ministry worker** is any person, volunteer or staff, youth or adult, who participates in the ministry of this congregation. Recognizing that not all ministry workers perform the same tasks in the same situations, this policy recognizes two (2) categories of ministry worker.

Category 1 Ministry Workers are volunteers and paid staff who:

Have regular contact with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults.

Develop one-to-one relationships with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults (examples:

Confirmation mentors, Stephens Ministers, lay visitation ministers)

Regularly teach children or youth with no other ministry worker present

Stay overnight at events with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults

Transport children, youth and/or vulnerable adults to and from ministry events*

Category 2 Ministry Workers are volunteers and paid staff who:

Have occasional contact with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults

Teach classes of children or youth with one or more other adult or youth present

Have keys and access to the building, but whose job descriptions do not include regular contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults

Individuals or groups invited to Our Savior's from other ministry organizations shall not have contact with children, youth or vulnerable adults except in the company of at least one other adult who is a properly screened and trained Category 1 or 2 ministry worker.

*Does not include those persons who have been asked by the parent or legal guardian of a child, youth or vulnerable adult to transport the same home from church.

Screening

All volunteer ministry workers will complete a standard volunteer information form. If a volunteer has been a member of OSLC for less than one(1) year, she or he will also provide 2 references who are not family members. Staff ministry workers will be screened according to the Personnel Handbook. OSLC Staff will review volunteer information forms and references and background check reports (if applicable) and store them securely.

Category 1 Ministry Workers will undergo a background check every 5 years (or as indicated by the Personnel Handbook). Category 1 Ministry Workers who drive children, youth or vulnerable adults to and from ministry events will also undergo a DMV check.

Category 2 Ministry Workers do not require a background check unless they have been members of OSLC for less than one(1) year.

OSLC *will accept* a background check completed for a ministry worker's employer or other volunteerism if: **a)** the background check is less than one year (12 months) old and **b)** OSLC receives a complete copy of the background check directly from the employer or other volunteer organization.

A member of OSLC's staff or executive committee may collect a background check report directly from an employer or other volunteer organization. OSLC will accept a background check report sent directly from the employer or volunteer organization via US Mail, UPS, etc. *OSLC will not accept a background check report delivered by the ministry worker who is the subject of the report.*

Training Requirements

All ministry workers will receive training in child/youth/vulnerable adult protection. Staff ministry worker training will follow the Personnel Handbook. Volunteer ministry workers will receive training before beginning ministry and every 3 years thereafter. Volunteer ministry workers have two(2) options to receive this training:

Option 1 (preferred): OSLC staff will lead two(2) training events each year, in the spring and late summer, including a video, presentation and time to discuss Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Ministry Policies, best practices and Desirable/Undesirable Behaviors.

Option 2: New ministry workers may check out the Child Protection Training DVD from the Library/Resource Room to watch independently or with a group. After watching the DVD and reading the Child, Youth and Vulnerable Adult Ministry Policies, best practices and Desirable/Undesirable Behaviors publications, new ministry workers will meet with a staff member or other previously authorized ministry worker to discuss the training materials, answer any questions and confirm that the new ministry worker has mastered the material.

Supervision

Open door policy: Parents, volunteers, or staff of the Church may visit and observe child or youth programs at any time. In order to keep classrooms safe and orderly, we ask that parents or other visitors check-in with the Youth Director (currently Zach Hansen) or Sunday School Director (currently Becky Eikanger) before entering any room.

Check-in/Check-out & Drop-off/Pick-up Procedures: It is strongly preferred in all instances that parents or assigned guardians drop off and pick up children younger than 4th grade at Sunday School or other events. If parents wish for their older children (5th grade or older) to collect younger children from Sunday School, they *must sign a permission form each year*, to be kept on file. Although it is not required at all events, ministry workers may elect to require more formal check-in/check-out and drop-off/pick-up procedures at individual events based on the location, size and type of event.

The exceptions to these general rules and preferences are as follows:

- **Preschool children** shall not be allowed to leave their classroom unaccompanied by an adult or authorized older child.
- **Vacation Bible School** students must be dropped off and checked in at the beginning of each day and picked up by an adult or authorized older child at the end of each day.
- **Jammin' Juniors (Grades 4-6)** must check in to events and may only leave events unaccompanied with a signed note from a parent/guardian.
- **Overnight** events will have a check in for all age groups.

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 ministry worker (adult preferred) 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 6th grade, it is preferred two ministry workers 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 ministry workers and one child/youth OR one ministry worker & two children/youth).

On occasion, a ministry worker needs to have a one-to-one conversation with a child, youth or vulnerable adult (e.g. as part of a confirmation mentoring relationship). These conversations should take place in an area with other adults/youth/children nearby. If the conversation requires privacy, then the *preference* is to leave the door open to allow easy viewing. *No private conversation* may take place at the church or on a retreat between a ministry worker and a child, youth or vulnerable adult *behind a closed door that does not have a window*.

Parental Permission Rule: Children and youth must have completed an 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 and/or from a church sponsored event:

- 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 have consumed or appears to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs* before, during or following a church activity.
- 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.
- If there is only one child or youth in the car with the driver and they are not related by blood, *in no case* will the driver and child/youth be of the opposite sex.
- Driver must have read and signed an acknowledgment form indicating that the Child Protection Policy has been read and will be followed.
- Driver will not leave the Church building until the last child/youth has been collected by the person bringing her/him home.

A copy of the valid driver's license and insurance card must be filed with the Business Administrator before a driver is approved to drive on church sponsored activities. All drivers should be advised that in the event of an accident (by insurance rules) his/her insurance company is primary and the Church's insurance company is secondary.

Procedure for Reporting and Responding to Abuse

If a ministry worker witnesses, knows of or suspects* abuse and/or neglect at church or in the community, she or he shall promptly notify both Brown County Family Services (507-359-6500) and the Senior Pastor.** Any staff (volunteer or paid) who are **mandated reporters under Minnesota law** are requested to provide the Church with documentation confirming that she or he has filed a report as mandated by state law. Please remember that notifying the Church *does not satisfy* Minnesota's legal requirement for mandated reporters.

After the report is made, 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, youth or vulnerable adult until her or his guardian(s) arrive. It is important to emphasize that the *proper authorities must be notified* even if the guardian(s) do not wish the incident to be recorded. If one or both guardian is the alleged abuser, contact the proper authorities and follow their advice about notifying guardians.

If a staff member (volunteer or paid) is alleged to be the abuser, the Senior Pastor will follow the procedure outlined in the Personnel Handbook. The Senior Pastor will consult the Personnel Committee: concerning whether to maintain or suspend the alleged abuser's salary until the allegations are cleared or substantiated; during any investigation of an incident reported under this policy; and at the conclusion of any investigation regarding the status of the alleged abuser as a volunteer or paid staff member.

Any contact with the media on behalf of the Church 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 Business Administrator will notify the Church's insurance company. 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.

*If you have heard rumor, second-hand report, or simply seen evidence of possible abuse or neglect (for example: a young adult tells you that her friend admitted to her that she had been sexually assaulted or you see bruises on a child that the child cannot explain or cannot explain to your satisfaction), this is a good enough reason to make a report to Brown County Family Services and the Senior Pastor.

**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.

Appendices:
Undesirable Behaviors
Types of Abuse
Counseling, Suicide & Social Media