

Safe Church Policies and Procedures

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232 Bristol Street
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Approved by First Lutheran Church Council
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Safe Church Policies and Procedures

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A. INTRODUCTION

A.1 PURPOSE

The policy which follows is set forth for the protection, safety and well-being of children and adults involved in the life and ministries of First Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southington (hereafter referred to as "First Lutheran"). This policy is also for the purpose of ensuring that our Baptismal Vow to "respect the dignity of every human being" is honored and practiced by every member of this congregation as we exercise our common life in Jesus Christ. While this policy may be a new necessity in our church, it exists to proclaim that First Lutheran shall be a safe haven and sanctuary for all who come to us seeking the comfort and care of God, the truth of His holy gospel and the faith we proclaim in Christ Jesus.

The Safe Church Policies and Procedures of First Lutheran also protect those who have responsibilities as authorized ministers, employed staff and volunteer leaders and teachers.

A.2 SCOPE OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

The policies and procedures included in this document apply to all activities which take place within the building and properties of First Lutheran, as well as programs, activities, or events scheduled as part of the ministry of this church which take place elsewhere. The policies and procedures apply to all members, friends, volunteers, renters and employees of the church.

A.3 LOCATION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

A Safe Church Policies and Procedures Manual is provided to each new employee. All volunteers who will be regularly working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults will also review the manual. Manuals are located in identifiable binders in the church office, as well as online.

A.4 SAFE CHURCH TEAM DESCRIPTION

The Safe Church team's function is to oversee the implementation of the Safe Church Policies and Procedures.

A.4.1 SAFE CHURCH TEAM COMPOSITION

This team will be comprised of at least five members of First Lutheran. The following groups will provide a representative:

- Christian Education Committee
- Church Council
- Mutual Ministry Committee
- Ministerial Staff
- Youth Group leader or delegate

A.4.2 SAFE CHURCH TEAM FUNCTION

The Safe Church Team will:

- Annually review and update Safe Church Policies and Procedures. If changes are recommended, the changes will be presented to the Church Council for approval.
- Oversee distribution of Safe Church Policies and Procedures to committees.
- Confirm staff and volunteers working with children are trained in Safe Church Policies, including keeping an attendance sheet of those who have received training.
- Oversee the completion of Criminal Background Check Authorization Forms.
- When necessary, serve on a task force to review formal complaints on adult misconduct.
- Maintain strict confidentiality.

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B. SCREENING AND TRAINING

B.1 VOLUNTEER SCREENING

First Lutheran welcomes volunteers to become involved in the programs offered as part of our ministries. For those volunteers who work with youth and children on a regular basis, they must be at least 13 years old, at least five years older than the youth or children they work with, and have been a member of the church for at least six months, subject to the discretion of the clergy.

B.2 CRIMINAL BACKGROUND VERIFICATION FOR VOLUNTEERS AND EMPLOYEES

B.2.1 POLICIES

First Lutheran uses a national criminal background verification service selected by the Safe Church Team. A criminal background report is required for:

- All prospective employees.
- All paid staff members.
- All persons in the congregation engaged in ministries with and to children and youth, vulnerable adults, the elderly, homebound, and sick members of the congregation. This includes youth group adult leaders, Christian Education teachers, infant and young child care (aka nursery) adult volunteers, and all adult volunteers who supervise youth or children overnight.
- All persons with responsibility for financial oversight and/or management of congregation funds.

These background checks will be conducted at the congregation's expense.

B.2.2 PROCEDURES

Ministerial staff will consult the Safe Church Team when there are concerns. All attempts will be made to maintain confidentiality.

Anyone convicted of any felony or a felony default by the court, with child, elder, or vulnerable adult abuse, whether physical, emotional, or sexual, will not be considered, under any circumstances, for a position at First Lutheran.

The Safe Church Team may consult with the church's pastoral staff regarding background check findings and reports. All reports are maintained in a secure/locked location in the Pastor's office at First Lutheran. Background checks are repeated every five years.

B3. TRAINING

In an effort to increase the physical, emotional and spiritual safety of our congregation, specified Safe Church education regarding child abuse and neglect, as well as adult abuse and misconduct in church settings, is required for the following persons every 24 months:

- All Clergy
- All employees of the congregation (secretary, sextons, music director, youth director, and anyone considered an employee for IRS purposes.)
- Anyone who regularly supervises youth activities (paid or volunteer), including youth group advisors, acolyte trainers, youth choir leaders, Vacation Bible School coordinators, etc.
- Sunday School teachers

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- Anyone who sees church members in a private setting on behalf of the congregation (e.g. Stephen ministers, lay Eucharistic ministers, etc.)
- All persons in positions of congregation leadership

All members/employees who have completed training will sign a Participation Covenant that will be kept on file with the church office. Each person will be given a copy of the Safe Church Policies and Procedures and Information for Volunteers to review and given an opportunity to ask questions. Those individuals who have regular, direct contact with youth will also receive education about child abuse awareness and reporting procedures.

The Pastor and the Church Council are responsible for the congregation's compliance with the above requirements for training.

Training procedures:

- Training sessions will be offered at least annually, usually at the beginning of each church school term.
- The Safe Church Team will keep an attendance sheet of those who have received training.
- Training will include a review of the First Lutheran Safe Church Policies and Procedures.
- All staff will review the First Lutheran Safe Church Policies and Procedures prior to starting their position.

C. SUNDAY SCHOOL AND YOUTH MINISTRIES

First Lutheran is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment in which children can learn about and experience God's love. Therefore, we provide supervision for all activities and programs involving children and youth, employing practices that provide for the safety of children and those who care for them, as follows:

1. Only members of First Lutheran Church shall work as volunteers with the children of the congregation.
2. There shall be a six-month waiting period for any new members of the congregation before they work in a leadership capacity with children or youth in the congregation.
3. To the fullest extent possible, two adults shall be present at all times in groups of children or youth.
4. No adult should be alone with a child where they cannot be visually observed by others, such as behind a closed door or in a car. Where children or youth meet, doors are to be left open at all times.
5. Parents of the children or youth served, the pastor, administrative and professional staff shall have access to all meetings of children or youth at random to observe the relevant program.
6. When one-on-one interactions are appropriate and/or necessary, care shall be taken that they are conducted in an environment that provides visibility to others. If at all possible, another adult should have knowledge of the adult person's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.
7. Under no circumstance is any staff member or volunteer to engage in secretive conduct with children or young people, sexual or otherwise.
8. No gifts shall be given by volunteers or staff to children or youth without the prior knowledge of the parents and/or the supervisory staff.

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9. No adult shall take children or youth on an off-campus outing or on an overnight outing without at least one other adult attending who is not a spouse or family member.
10. Parental approval is required for children to be transported off the church grounds on church sponsored events. A signed permission slip for each event is required for all children and youth participating in church sponsored activities that require transportation away from the church grounds.
11. Children with serious disciplinary problems shall be referred to their own parents immediately during Sunday School sessions and youth group events. Where discipline is called for in children and youth ministry settings, it shall be limited to appropriate reprimands (with at least two adults present) and/or quiet time apart from the class or group until parents are next notified. Two adults must be present in all disciplinary situations.
12. No convicted sex offender shall be involved with children in the context of the First Lutheran Sunday School or any of its youth ministries.
13. No one accused of child abuse or neglect should be involved with children while the accusations are still pending. A careful evaluation of an individual's ability to work with children will be conducted by the professional staff after the accusations are resolved.
14. Adults shall NOT:
 - provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs, or pornography
 - Consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs, or misuse legal drugs at any children's or youth event
 - Be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or legal drugs at any children's or youth event
 - Engage in illegal behavior, or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior
 - Engage in sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth
 - Discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or you

Firearms and weapons (including concealed weapons) are prohibited at any church activity. Individual exceptions may be made for off-duty police officers or others that are required to carry a firearm.

D. CHILD ABUSE RESPONSE AND REPORTING

Through our Safe Church Policies and educational programs, we seek to prevent abuse occurring at First Lutheran. Allegations or reasonable suspicions of abuse will be responded to seriously and reported to appropriate church and state authorities. All of the actions and documentation described below must be held in the strictest confidence and, as such, as few people as possible are informed. It is the responsibility of all concerned to maintain confidentiality.

1. Every allegation of child abuse or neglect will be taken seriously. No person who in good faith reports abuse or neglect is subject to any liability for doing so. (How to recognize child abuse and neglect is taught in the above-mentioned training.)
2. When a staff member or volunteer believes abuse or neglect has been or is being committed upon a child, the staff member or volunteer will observe these guidelines:
 - Sensitivity shall be exercised towards the child who has disclosed abuse.
 - Refrain from denying or explaining away the abuse.
 - Assure the child that the abuse is not his/her fault and that he/she deserves to feel safe.

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- Refrain from being judgmental of the abuser since it is often someone for whom the child cares deeply.
 - Do not make promises that you are not certain you can keep.
 - Refrain from agreeing to keep a secret for the child. Assure the child that you will instead keep the information shared confidential. Remind the child that some secrets must be told if they involve someone being hurt. Respect the privacy of the child by not telling any more people than necessary.
3. When abuse or neglect is disclosed or suspected in good faith, volunteers and staff shall make this known directly, in person, to the pastor. In the context of the Sunday School, the Sunday School Superintendent shall also be informed in person. Volunteers should be aware that all clergy are, by state law, mandated reporters in instances of child abuse and/or neglect. Instances of suspected child abuse or neglect will be reported to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families, which is the agency that is responsible for protecting children from child abuse and neglect. No one is prohibited from making a report directly to DCF, and may do so as either an identified or anonymous reporter. Reporters can file anonymously by calling The DCF CARELINE Hotline at 1-800-842-2288. For more information see <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2556&Q=314384>. An oral / telephone report to the Connecticut Department of Children and Families (DCF) (or a law enforcement agency) should be made within 12 hours of suspecting that a child has been abused or neglected. Written reports should be completed within 48 hours as required by Connecticut law. Mandated reporters who fail to report suspected child abuse may be subject to criminal prosecution.

Protection of a child from further abuse or neglect is the first priority, and the reporting procedure outlined above will observe this priority in the most effective way.

E. ADULT MINISTRIES

First Lutheran wishes to create and maintain a community in which members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere free of all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or intimidation.

Adults exercising ministries of visitation in a private setting on behalf of the congregation shall keep the pastor informed regarding:

- Who was visited
- Date and Time
- Reason for visit (e.g. Lay Eucharistic Ministry, lay pastoral visit, etc.)
- Length of visit
- Location of visit

F. SAFE CHURCH POLICIES AND PROCEDURES REVIEW

The Safe Church Policies and Procedures will be reviewed by the Safe Church Team on an annual basis, usually in November. The Team may recommend revisions to be approved by the Church Council. These policies and procedures are subject to amendment by the Church Council at any time.

G. SUMMARY

None of the above policies or procedures are a guarantee that someone has not been employed or recruited who will be abusive to children, young people or adults. It also does not mean that we will

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never have a staff member or volunteer act improperly. However, following this policy and procedure; involving as many congregation members as possible in the training about child sexual abuse and adult sexual misconduct; following up complaints, incidents or disclosures with integrity; pursuing our intuitive hunches; and acting upon the facts when they are before us is the best insurance we can have for protecting the children, youth and adults of our congregation.