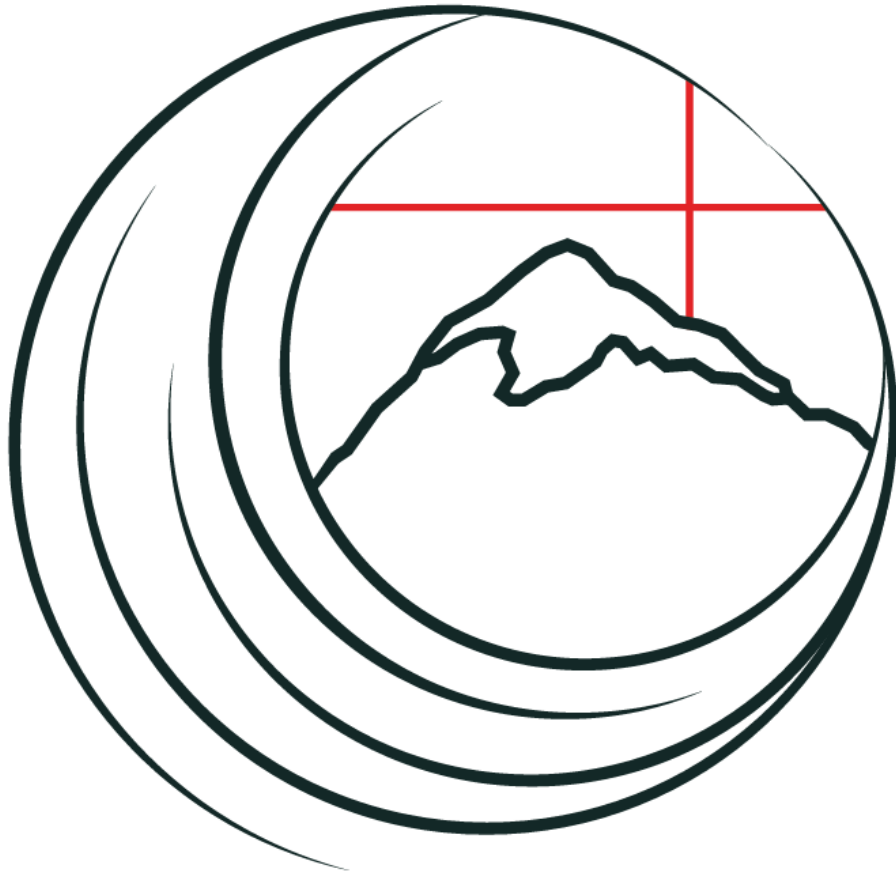


2022 Annual Report



WeAreMtHermon

Mt. Hermon Lutheran Church
3011 Leaphart Road, West Columbia SC 29169

803.794.6430

www.WeAreMtHermon.com

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Policy for Reducing Risk of Abuse

STATEMENT OF INTENT

Mt. Hermon Evangelical Lutheran Church is committed to being a congregation of God's people in Jesus Christ, saved by the undeserved and self-giving love of God, and set free to explore the miraculous possibility of new life in God's grace. Our congregation is a visible sign of the ongoing work of Christ in the world, and it serves both to nurture a family of faith, and to invite others to come and hear the Good News of God in Christ.

Abuse is a sign of a world which is broken by human sinfulness. It undermines both the nurturing spirit that strengthens a family of faith and the invitation to others to "taste and see the goodness of God." The church, because it is by nature an institution of acceptance and forgiveness, and because of its ongoing ministry with children and youth, has been a frequent and vulnerable target for would-be abusers.

It is our goal, as a congregation, to tell our members and our community that Mt. Hermon will be a safe place for **all people, especially** youth and vulnerable adults, to enjoy fellowship, strengthen faith, and claim their identity as God's beloved people. For this purpose, we created this policy to reduce the risk of abuse.

The specific intent of this policy is to:

- provide a safe haven for children and adults from would-be abusers;
- develop and publicize meaningful steps to deter those who would intend to abuse;
- protect our congregation from the threat of litigation and adverse publicity;
- protect those who work within our congregation with children and youth from the possibility of false allegation of abuse;
- implement careful hiring and recruiting policies.

DEFINITIONS

Children/Youth: Individuals seventeen (17) years old or younger involved in activities/programs sponsored by Mt. Hermon.

Vulnerable Adults: Individuals eighteen (18) years or older who live in or receive services from a licensed facility such as a nursing home, hospital, or treatment center for chemical dependency, mental retardation, mental illness, or physical disabilities; or is in a family setting, and would not by him/herself report abuse or neglect to self because of impaired physical or mental function, or emotional status.

Providers: Professional staff, compensated staff, or volunteers for activities/programs sponsored by Mt. Hermon to which children/youth and vulnerable adults are entrusted.

Designee: An individual appointed by the pastor to assist in carrying out the management of the "Policy for Reducing Risk of Abuse" and subsequent action in the event an incident occurs. In the event that Mt. Hermon needs to select a designee during a pastoral vacancy, an individual will be recommended by the Executive Committee and approved by Congregational Council and will maintain the role until the vacancy is filled or another designee is selected. The interim pastor may participate in this process.

Adult Volunteers: Volunteer providers who are eighteen (18) years of age or older.

Constituents: Individuals who are not members of Mt. Hermon but have been actively involved in the congregation's ministry.

Adult Visitors: Individuals who are eighteen (18) years of age or older who are present during activities for children/youth or vulnerable adults but have not completed a background check and training.

Abuse: Physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.

Physical Abuse:

- Any non-accidental physical injury caused or allowed to be caused by any individual.
- May include burning, beating, punching, etc.
- May result from over-disciplining or a punishment which is inappropriate to a person's age or vulnerable adults' limitations.

Emotional Abuse:

- Serious emotional damage created or allowed to be created by provider.
- Provider refuses to provide appropriate resolution and reporting.
- Includes but is not limited to blaming, belittling, or rejecting.

Sexual Abuse:

- Actual or attempted sexual contact with a child/youth, vulnerable adult, or non-consenting adult.
- Permitting, enticing, encouraging, forcing, or otherwise facilitating a person's participation in prostitution or in a live performance or photographic representation of sexual activity or sexually explicit nudity.
- The abuser may be an adult or in unusual circumstances, a child/youth or vulnerable adult.

Volunteer Procedures

for The Screening and Training
of Staff and Volunteer Providers

1. During the interviewing process, all professional and compensated staff of Mt. Hermon shall complete the Screening Form for Reducing the Risk of Abuse and a Request for Criminal Records Check and Authorization, which may include fingerprinting. They shall also attend an orientation on safety issues before working with any children/youth or vulnerable adults.
2. Reference checks for compensated staff shall be conducted.
3. Adult volunteers interested in being providers shall complete the Screening Form for Reducing the Risk of Abuse and a SC Law Enforcement Division Record Check Form, which may include fingerprinting. They shall also participate in an orientation on safety issues before working with any youth or vulnerable adults.
4. Youth, 14 – 17 years of age, who are confirmed members wanting to serve as assistants for any activities/programs for preschoolers or children shall complete a Screening Form for Reducing the Risk of Abuse and attend an orientation on safety issues before volunteering.
5. All providers be at least four (4) years older than the children/youth with which they are working.
6. All volunteer providers are required to be active members or constituents of Mt. Hermon for a minimum of six months or provide a recommendation letter from their pastor.
7. Confidential files for all professional staff, compensated staff, and volunteers shall include the Screening Form for Reducing the Risk of Abuse, SC Law Enforcement Division Record Check Form, and the results of any investigations or inquiries made pursuant to an applicant's responses on this form.
8. Confidentiality of the completed and signed forms utilized to implement this policy shall be maintained by limiting the access to these forms to the pastor and designee.
9. Addition background checks shall be conducted at least every three years.

Disqualifying Actions

Any arrest or conviction for the actions listed below will automatically disqualify a person from participating in the leadership or supervision of any activities/programs for youth and vulnerable adults. As noted, some actions may disqualify an individual from consideration if multiple offenses of the same action were committed during a designated timeframe. If a person is subsequently found innocent of all charges, they may be allowed interaction after a review by the pastor and his designee.

Any arrest or conviction involving:

Sexual abuse, including but not limited to

- Criminal Sexual Conduct
- Indecency with a youth or vulnerable adult,
- Possession or Promotion of Child Pornography
- Incest
- Prostitution or Solicitation of a Prostitute
- Public Lewdness or Indecent Exposure [any w/in past 10 yrs]

Physical abuse, including but not limited to

- Criminal Homicide

- Criminal Domestic Violence
- Exploitation or Neglect of a youth or vulnerable adult
- Threatening or Intimidating a youth or vulnerable adult
- Abandonment or Endangerment of a youth or vulnerable adult
- Employment Harmful to a youth or vulnerable adult
- Any offense resulting in the person's being listed on the central registry of child abuse or neglect
- Aggravated Assault, Assault and Battery of a High and Aggravated Nature, Assault involving a Weapon
- Kidnapping or Unlawful Restraint

Other, including but not limited to

- Larceny [any w/in past 10 years]
- Falsification of or failure to disclose background information
- Sale, distribution, or display of harmful materials to a youth or vulnerable adult
- Possession, use, or sale of drugs or controlled substances [any w/in past 10 years]
- Illegal possession and/or use of illegal weapons [any w/in past 10 years]
- Driving under the influence [2 or more w/in past 10 years]
- Disorderly conduct [2 or more w/in past 10 years]
- Public drunkenness [2 or more w/in past 10 years]

All arrests or convictions for crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the pastor and his/her designee for interpretation to determine whether a person should be disqualified from the above-mentioned participation.

Specific Acts and Omissions in Violation of the Policy

The following acts or omissions are violations of this policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be reported immediately to the pastor after the safety of the youth or vulnerable adult has been assured.

1. Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a youth or vulnerable adult.
2. Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a youth or vulnerable adult.
3. Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a youth or vulnerable adult.
4. Infliction of bodily injury to or physically abusive behavior towards a youth or vulnerable adult.
5. Physical neglect of a youth or vulnerable adult, including failure to provide adequate supervision.
6. Mental or emotional injury to a youth or vulnerable adult.
7. The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any church activity/program.
8. The presence or possession or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol.
9. The consumption of illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function involving youth or vulnerable adults.

Reporting Procedures

Procedures for Reporting Incidents of Abuse of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults

Incidents of abuse or reasonably suspected incidents of abuse of youth or vulnerable adults shall be reported as soon as possible (and at least within 24 hours) to:

Lexington County DSS (803-785-7333).

Reports may be made Monday through Friday, 8:30am-5:00pm. The person reporting an incident should ask for Child Protective Services Intake or Adult Protective Services Intake, whichever is appropriate. At hours other than the above, reports are made to: **Lexington County Sheriff's Department (803.785-8230).**

Request that the Department of Social Services on-call Case Worker call you back. In an emergency, call the sheriff's department *first*, then DSS.

In addition to reporting the incident to DSS and law enforcement, it shall also be reported to the pastor or designee. The pastor or designee shall also make a report or verify the making of a report.

Incidents/reasonably suspected incidents shall be reported to the liability insurer of the church and/or appropriate legal counsel within 24 hours.

Reports shall initially be made orally and then in writing.

Questionable or inappropriate behavior, when observed, shall be reported to the pastor or designee, as such conduct can precede abuse, even though the observed act itself is not.

All staff, members, and constituents of Mt. Hermon are encouraged to be sensitive to the potential for abuse of youth or other vulnerable adults. They shall be encouraged to caution others that activities they observe are, or may appear to be, inappropriate.

Organizations that use Mt. Hermon's facilities and have reporting procedures of their own shall follow those established reporting practices. In addition to following their notification procedures, the organization shall also notify the pastor or designee as soon as possible about any incident or suspected incident that allegedly occurred at Mt. Hermon.

Any report involving a Pastor or Deacon of the SC Synod of the ELCA shall also be made to: **South Carolina Synod Office of the Bishop 803-765-0590).**

Responding Procedures

Procedures for Responding to Allegations of Abuse of Children, Youth, or Vulnerable Adults

After receiving a report, the Pastor or designee shall be responsible for first securing the safety of the potential victim, for immediate notification of parent/guardian of the potential victim, and for notification of person(s) accused of the abuse. The safety of the potential victim must be safeguarded before the person(s) accused of abuse have been contacted.

In-depth investigation shall be carried out by Lexington County DSS or Lexington County Sheriff's Department, and not by church personnel.

Persons accused shall be immediately relieved of further responsibilities involving direct contact with children, youth, or vulnerable adults until the investigation is completed and the allegations are cleared.

All steps taken in the course of handling the incident or report shall be documented.

All parties involved in the incident or reasonably suspected incident, including the accuser, the accused, and the victim, shall be treated with dignity, support, and Christian love in accordance with the mission and principle of Mt. Hermon Lutheran Church. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded.

The Pastor or designee shall be the sole spokesman for the church insofar as media inquiries are concerned. Confidentiality of all persons involved shall be safeguarded.

Orientation and Supervision Procedures

It shall be the responsibility of the Mt. Hermon staff to reduce the risk of abuse by ensuring that appropriate practices are implemented within any program that involves youth or vulnerable adults.

An orientation session on safety issues involving youth and vulnerable adults **shall be offered at least annually**. This orientation is available to all members of Mt. Hermon and is required training for each new professional or compensated staff member and volunteer provider. The following goals shall be addressed:

- Protection of youth or vulnerable adults in Mt. Hermon's activities/programs;
- Protection of providers from exposure to "high-risk" situations and false accusations;
- Awareness of the symptoms of abuse;
- Understanding of the reporting procedures and the procedures for responding to incidents/reasonably suspected incidents of abuse.

Providers shall observe the "two-provider or visual access" rule at all times. This rule requires that a provider working with youth or vulnerable adults be accompanied by a second provider or provide visual access to the room.

Providers who will have one-on-one contact with youth or vulnerable adults shall secure prior parental approval and notify the pastor or designee.

Wherever practical, the "two-provider" rule applies to vehicles used to transport youth and vulnerable adults to and from activities that are not conducted at Mt. Hermon. In situations where two providers are not present in each vehicle, in no case shall only one youth be present in the same vehicle as only one provider. Also, solo adult drivers must try to establish a "caravan" with at least one other driver. The two or more vehicles shall remain within eyesight of each other. This is intended to prevent a solo adult from getting "lost" or placed in a high-risk situation during transit to or from an activity.

Drivers for all church sponsored events in which youth and vulnerable adults are presents shall be adult providers who are 21 years or older.

Compensated staff or their designees shall make unannounced visits to all scheduled small group classroom situations involving volunteer providers with youth or vulnerable adults.

The pastor or designee must approve all providers for any overnight church activity involving youth or vulnerable adults.

The **Safety Policy Team**, in consultation with the Support Team, shall make recommendations to the church Council for facility modifications that could further reduce the risk of abuse occurring on the church property.

The pastor and/or designee shall maintain current safety information/release forms for all active youth.

The following procedure shall be followed for all classes and activities involving youth in 5th grade or younger: they shall be dropped off and picked up inside the “classroom” by a parent/guardian or other approved person. Sunday School Teachers shall maintain a list of who is allowed to pick up each child and any safety concerns.

The following procedure shall be followed for all youth activities involving youth in 6th through 12th grade: they shall be dropped off and picked up inside the church building by a parent/guardian or other approved person. Youth driving themselves to and from the church will be expected to leave the church upon notifying a youth advisor. Youth advisors or a designee shall maintain a list of who is allowed to pick up each child and any safety concerns.

“Adult visitors” involved with an activity/program for youth or vulnerable adults shall be chaperoned by two approved providers. The “visual access” option is only available as a substitute for the “two providers” as long as one provider is present with the “adult visitor.”

Entities of other organizations that use Mt. Hermon facilities must either agree in writing to abide by this policy or operate under similar training and supervision procedures issued by that organization. The similar procedures of that organization must be submitted to and approved by the pastor or designee.

If a member/visitor of the church is on the Public Sex Offender Registry, that member must agree to be accompanied by two members who have been approved by council anytime the “offender” is at a church event.

This policy was approved by the Congregational Council on August 1, 2005.
Amended May 13, 2007, Oct. 24, 2007, January 2008 and February 2019.