

North Cape Lutheran Church

Policy and Practice #2-3: Youth Protection Policy

Date Accepted: Nov. 21, 2013

Date Revised: May 14, 2015

***** Initially approved by Congregation Council November 21, 2013 Revision only to align with Policy development project.**

Policy Statement:

It is the policy of North Cape Lutheran Church to provide a safe environment within all church functions on and off campus for the youth of our congregation, employees, visitors and volunteers. Our ministry to children and young adults is a central part of our spiritual calling. "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). In seeking to follow the mandates of Christ, we desire to provide a safe and secure environment in which all can grow in their faith. Abuse, whether mental, physical, or sexual, whether inflicted by laypersons or clergy, professionals or volunteers, cannot and will not be tolerated at North Cape Lutheran Church. This is a serious matter, especially because of the nature of children not being fully equipped to understand or defend themselves. Such abuse leaves many victims.

Section 1: Introduction

The purpose of this document, policy and practice is to provide a roadmap for church leadership and members who work with our youth. This policy and practice statement has been adopted by NCLC for the purpose of providing a safe environment for the children and youth entrusted to our care. NCLC seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for the youth who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the practices below, our goal is to protect the youth of North Cape Lutheran Church from incidents or inappropriate behavior, while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Section 2: Background

The NCLC church board has developed these policies and procedures to protect Youth. Fortunately, our work was not initiated in response to problems within our congregation. We initiated these policies to comply with a request from our church's liability insurance provider. These policies and procedures are designed to enhance the mission and ministry of North Cape Lutheran Church.

Section 3: Definitions

Employee—By definition for purposes of this Policy, Employee shall refer to any person whose salary or hourly wage is paid by North Cape Lutheran Church.

Youth—By definition for purposes of this Policy, Youth is defined as anyone who is under the age of 18.

Adult Volunteer—By definition, or purposes of this Policy, Adult Volunteer is any member who is at least 21 years of age who works with the youth of this congregation in any capacity.

Young Adult Volunteer—By definition, for purposes of this Policy, Young Adult Volunteer is any member 18 through 20 years old, who at the discretion of the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and/or Pastor(s), may volunteer to assist with a Church-sponsored Youth activity.

Youth Volunteer - By definition, for purposes of this Policy, Youth Volunteer is any youth under the age of 18, whom at the discretion of the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and/or Pastor(s), may volunteer to assist with a Church-sponsored Youth activity.

Practice:

All youth volunteers will be supervised by an Adult Volunteer or an Employee.

Youth Volunteers may not be allowed to volunteer as drivers, off-site trip chaperones, or overnight chaperones.

All Young Adult Volunteers under the age of 21 will be supervised by an Adult Volunteer or an Employee.

Young Adult Volunteers shall not be permitted to volunteer as drivers, chaperones for off-site events, or chaperones for overnight events.

Young Adults may be permitted to attend these events at the discretion of the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and/or Pastor(s), but not serve in a Volunteer capacity. Nevertheless, they shall be screened according to the guidelines set forth in Section 5 before they can participate.

Selection of Workers & Volunteers

All Employees, Adult Volunteers and Young Adult Volunteers who desire to work with Youth participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

A) Six Month Rule

No volunteer applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with Youth until he/she has been involved with North Cape Lutheran Church for a minimum of six (6) months.

This time of interaction between our leadership and the applicant allows for better evaluation of the suitability of the applicant for working with Youth.

B) Written Application

All persons seeking to work with Youth must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by NCLC. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with Youth, previous church affiliations, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions. The written application shall include a statement signed by the proposed Volunteer that releases the church or its designees to perform a complete criminal and civil background check. If an individual declines to sign the authorization form, s/he will be unable to work with Youth. The application will be maintained in confidence on file at North Cape Lutheran Church.

C) Personal Interview

Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss his/her suitability for the position.

D) Reference Checks

Before an applicant is permitted to work with Youth, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to a personal or family reference, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with Youth in the past. Documentation of the reference checks will be maintained in confidence on file at North Cape Lutheran Church.

E) Criminal Background Check

A national criminal background check is required for all employees (regardless of position) and for the following categories of Volunteers:

- Those who will be involved in overnight activities with Youth.
- Those counseling Youth.
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of Youth; and
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with Youth (such as vehicle drivers).

What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with Youth will be determined by North Cape Lutheran Church? Generally, convictions for an offense involving Youth and/or for offenses involving violence, indecency, sexual misconduct, and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with Youth. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event.

Terminations

It is our policy to make a reasonable effort to retain good Employees and Volunteers. However, volunteering at North Cape Lutheran Church is for no specified time, regardless of length of

service. Just as the Volunteer is free to leave for any reason, the Church reserves the same right to end its relationship with any Volunteer at any time, with or without notice, for any reason not prohibited by law. Causes for immediate dismissal include but are not limited to:

- Theft or vandalism of Church assets.
- Endangerment of health and safety of the Church, any Youth, Employee, Volunteer, Church member, or guest of the Church.
- Blatant disregard or damage to the property of the Church, or the personal property of any Youth, Volunteer, Employee, Church member or guest of the Church.
- Possession or use of illegal substances.
- Use of alcohol while volunteering.

Two Adult Rule

It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adults be in attendance at all times when Youth are being supervised during our programs and activities. At least one of these adults shall be an Employee or Adult Volunteer. Parents and guardians are always welcome to attend any Church sponsored activity.

Some Youth classes may have only one adult teacher in attendance during the class session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three students with the adult teacher. We do not allow Youth to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling or mentoring situation or in the case where one Adult Volunteer is driving Youth.

Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

For purposes of this policy, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child’s physical, psychological or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- **Physical abuse**—any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- **Emotional abuse**—emotional injury when the child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- **Sexual abuse**—any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, incest, and pornography.

- **Neglect**—failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, supervision, or other basic necessities.

Reporting of All Reasonable Suspicions of Abuse

Wisconsin is a mandatory reporting state, which means that any person subject to this law is required to report reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect to Social Services. North Cape Lutheran Church expects that all volunteers and employees who work with Youth will report any reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect to Social Services whether or not they are subject to mandatory reporting. Such a report should be made even if the alleged abuse or neglect did not occur at North Cape Lutheran Church or during NCLC activities. All reasonable suspicions of abuse or neglect should be reported directly to Racine County Human Services at 262-638-7720.

In addition to a report to Social Services, any individual involved in the care of Youth at NCLC who becomes aware of suspected abuse or neglect of Youth under his/her care, should also report this immediately to the Senior Pastor for further action, including reporting to authorities as may be mandated by state law.

Employees and volunteers should not attempt to conduct their own investigations of reasonable suspicions of abuse, but rather report them immediately to Racine County Human Services. It is important that we remove ourselves from the situation once reasonable suspicion of abuse has been reported so that the proper legal authorities can conduct a proper investigation.

Additional Actions to Be Taken if Suspected Abuse or Neglect Occurs at North Cape Lutheran Church or During Sponsored Programs

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at North Cape Lutheran Church or during our sponsored programs or activities, the following procedure shall be followed.

- 1) The parent or guardian of the child will be notified, unless the parent or guardian is the alleged perpetrator.
- 2) The individual alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with Youth pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
- 3) Civil authorities will be notified, and North Cape Lutheran Church will comply with Wisconsin requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. NCLC will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
- 4) Our insurance company will be notified, and we will complete an incident report. Any documents received relating to the incident and/or allegations will immediately be forwarded to the insurance company.

- 5) The Senior Pastor of North Cape Lutheran Church will be our spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect, unless he or she is alleged to be involved in which case the Church Board President or appointed member of the executive committee shall be the spokesperson. We will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation. All other representatives of the church should refrain from speaking to the media.
- 6) A pastoral visit will be arranged for those who desire it.
- 7) If the suspected perpetrator of the abuse or neglect is an ordained minister or a rostered leader of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the alleged abuse shall be reported by the Congregation Council President to the Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
- 8) Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position with Youth.

Open Door Practice

Classroom doors should remain open unless there is a window in the door or a side window beside it. Doors should never be locked while persons are inside the room. Doors may be shut, but not locked, for counseling situations.

Teenage Employees/Volunteers

We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for babysitters (paid or volunteer) who are themselves under 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to Teenage Workers:

- Must be at least age 14.
- Must be screened as specified above.
- Must be under the supervision of an adult.

Check-in/Check-out Procedures

Youth under age 8 will only be released from activities at North Cape Lutheran Church into the care of their parents, legal guardians, or other authorized individuals. Parents and legal guardians will be asked to provide a list of individuals authorized to pick up their child from activities at North Cape Lutheran Church.

For Youth under age 8, a “sign-out” form will be used for youth activities. Parents, legal guardians, and authorized individuals will sign the form when they pick up their child. NCLC

Volunteers and Staff will verify that the individual is authorized to pick up the child before release.

Transportation and Drivers

Transportation to and from events at the Church is responsibility of the families.

In the rare instance where an Employee or an Adult Volunteer gives a Youth a ride to and/or from events at Church, it shall be with the express permission of a parent or guardian. In those cases when Youth will be traveling from church to an off-site activity with an Employee and/or and Adult Volunteer, the following guidelines will be observed:

- Such travel shall only be with the express permission of a parent or guardian.
- All drivers must be at least 21 years of age, and be in possession of both a valid driver's license and proof of insurance.
- Wisconsin State Law requires that seat belts be worn by everyone in the vehicle while the vehicle is in motion. The Church requires that the Drivers ensure that everyone in the vehicle is wearing their seat belts at all times.
- Drivers must observe all local and state laws regarding use of a motor vehicle.

Off-site/Overnight Events

A North Cape Lutheran Church (NCLC) event is an event that has been approved by the Pastor, Director of Youth and Family Ministry, or approved Volunteer who leads the group/class. In addition to the other applicable requirements of the Youth Protection Policy, all NCLC sponsored off-site/overnight events must satisfy the following three requirements:

- The presence of at least two unrelated Employees or Adult Volunteers, and there will be an Employee or Adult Volunteer of the same gender as the participants.
- Written parental permission and a medical release card must be obtained for each participant for overnight events, or when group transportation is provided.
- Parents will be given the agenda of the event, address of destination, phone contact information, and the anticipated departure and return time.

When arranging overnight accommodations, the following guidelines shall be followed:

- Employees and Adult Volunteers shall not share overnight accommodations exclusively with Youth.
- When Youth and an Employee or an Adult Volunteer must share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room for the sake of safety and/or cost efficiency, parents will be informed prior to the commencement of the activity and parental approval will be obtained in writing.

An adult will not occupy the same bed as a Youth unless it is the child of the parent of the same gender.

- Private homes will never be used for overnight Church-sponsored events.
- Young Adult Volunteers are not permitted to serve as chaperones on overnight events. However, they may participate at the discretion of the Director of Youth and Family Minister and/or Pastor. They may not occupy the same bed as a Youth.

Sick Youth Practice

It is our desire to provide a healthy and safe environment for all of the Youth at North Cape Lutheran Church. Parents and guardians are encouraged to be considerate of other Youth when deciding whether to place a Youth under our care. In general, Youth with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

- Fever, diarrhea, vomiting within the last 48 hours
- Green or yellow runny nose
- Eye or skin infections
- Other symptoms of communicable or infectious disease

Youth who are observed by our Employees or Volunteers to be ill will be separated from other Youth and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the Youth be picked up for the day.

Medications Policy

It is the policy of North Cape Lutheran Church not to administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to youth under our care.

Exceptions to the medications policy may be granted to parents of Youth with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe reactions). Parents of such Youth should address their situation with the Director of Youth and Family Ministry and/or Pastor(s) to develop a plan of action.