

St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church

Safe Place Policy and Procedures

PURPOSE

It is the purpose of the members and staff of St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church to provide a safe and secure environment for members, friends, guests, staff and volunteers entrusted to our care. We do this to encourage those members, friends, guests, staff and volunteers to grow in their relationship with God and one another.

A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our members, friends, guests, staff, volunteers and our entire church family at St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church.

SCOPE

This policy shall apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who will have the responsibility of supervising the activities of members, friends, guests, staff and volunteers.

DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions shall apply:

1. "Preschooler," "child," "children," "youth," and "minor" shall be defined as any individual *under* the age of eighteen (18) (or whose mental capacity is that of a minor).
2. "Adult" shall be defined as any individual at least eighteen (18) years of age.
3. "Worker" shall be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors.
4. "Teenage Worker" shall be defined as any worker at least fourteen (14) years old or older, but under the age of eighteen (18) enlisted to assist with the care of minors.
5. "Child Abuse" shall be defined as verbal, physical, emotional, or sexual abuse of a preschooler, child, youth, or minor.
6. "Criminal Background Check" (CBC) and "Child Abuse Clearance Checks" are the procedure used by St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church and other qualified agencies to check the background of adult volunteers and employees for criminal activity.

WHAT IS CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?

“Any sexual activity with a child – whether in the home by a caretaker, in a day care situation, a foster/residential setting, or in any other setting, including on the street by a person unknown to the child. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child, provided the child is four years older than the victim.”

Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready.

Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects.

WORKER ENLISTMENT

1. All paid employees of St. Paul’s Third Lutheran Church will be required to complete an Employment Application.
2. After an application is received, prior employment and volunteer service and personal references will be checked.
3. Criminal Background Checks and Child Abuse Clearance Checks will be performed on each applicant after the applicant has signed the authorization/waiver/indemnity for, and prior to being enlisted as a worker. National background checks will be performed on paid employees as deemed necessary. (Only the Pastor of St. Paul’s Third Lutheran Church will have access to the criminal background check reports). The Pastor will make recommendations to the appropriate committees (i.e. Pastor Search committee in the case of a prospective Pastor). A State background check will be performed on volunteers **who have ongoing, regular care of children or youth.**
4. Standard interview questions will be developed and used in personal interviews with volunteer employee applicants, after reviewing the applications of the applicant, checking all references, and receiving a criminal background check report. These interview sheets will be filled out with the results of the interview and kept in the employee personnel file, as well as the reference checks and the applications. A separate file will be maintained permanently on each worker, whether paid or a volunteer.
5. No regular volunteer will be allowed to work with minors until they have been a member of the church for a minimum of six (6) months, or a regular attendee for a minimum of one (1) year.

6. At the applicant's request, St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church shall allow the Applicant to review his/her criminal history record transcript at the church, but in no event shall the church allow the applicant to retain and/or copy his/her transcript.
7. The church shall immediately notify the background reporting agency if an internal grievance (applicant disputes) is filed by an applicant because of incorrect information or other reasons related to criminal histories provided by the agency. The church shall submit in a reasonable time period the "Criminal History Record Resolution Request" or similar document to the agency.

WORKER TRAINING

Each new worker will be given the legal definition of child abuse in writing, as well as the policy of the church on reporting of child abuse. New workers will also be required to read the written materials available on this subject to help them gain an appreciation for the reality of the concern. This will help workers identify child abuse in the future if they see signs of it.

VOLUNTEER INFORMATION FORM

Employees and volunteers of activities or programs for minors of St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church will be required to complete a Volunteer Information Form providing personal and confidential information necessary to perform security background checks and reference checks on each individual worker. While this process understandably trespasses into the privacy of our lives, the security of our children outweighs the personal invasion inherent with such investigation and disclosures. All personal information voluntarily disclosed the results of all security background and reference checks or the refusal of any person to participate in a program or activity in lieu of such disclosure requirements will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Whether disclosed voluntarily or by result of the security background check, the following items will automatically disqualify a volunteer from participating in the leadership, sponsorship or supervising of any activities or programs with minors:

Any conviction for:

- Criminal homicide;
- Aggravated assault;
- Sexual abuse;
- Sexual assault (rape);
- Aggravated sexual assault;
- Injury to a child;
- Incest;
- Indecency with a child;
- Inducing sexual conduct or sexual performance of a child;
- Possession or promotion of child pornography;
- The sale, distribution, or display of harmful material to a minor;
- Employment harmful to children;
- Abandonment or endangerment of a child;
- Kidnapping or unlawful restraint;
- Public lewdness or indecent exposure;
- Enticing a child.

All charges for these crimes or charges or convictions for any other crimes not listed above will be reviewed by the church for reviewing applicant transcripts. Only qualified persons (as stated above) may view information obtained on the criminal history record transcript.

SPECIFIC ACTS AND OMISSIONS IN VIOLATION OF THE POLICY

The following acts of omissions are violations of this Policy and will not be tolerated or accepted during any activity or program and are to be immediately reported to the designated program staff after the safety of the child, children, youth, or minor involved has been assured.

- ❖ Any direct observations or evidence of sexual activity in the presence of or in association with a minor.
- ❖ Any display or demonstration of sexual activity, abuse, insinuation of abuse, or evidence of abusive conduct towards a minor.
- ❖ Sexual advances or sexual activity of any kind between any person and a minor.
- ❖ Infliction or physically abusive behavior or bodily injury to a minor.
- ❖ Physical neglect of a minor, including failure to provide adequate supervision in relation to the activities of St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church.
- ❖ Mental or emotional injury to a minor.
- ❖ The presence or possession of obscene or pornographic materials at any function of St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church.
- ❖ The presence, possession, or being under the influence of any illegal or illicit drugs.
- ❖ The consumption of or being under the influence of illegal or illicit drugs or alcohol while leading or participating in a function for minors at St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church.

WORKER SUPERVISION

1. No adult may be alone with children or youth.
2. Church staff and Sunday School Officers will supervise on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.
3. Parental permission shall be obtained in advance for involvement in church sponsored programs, activities or whenever an adult might be spending time alone with a child in an unsupervised situation.
4. A door without windows shall remain open at all time.
5. Educate all volunteers and paid workers with minors as to the church's policies and procedures concerning this matter.

RESPONDENT TO ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT

- A. All accusations and suspicions of harassment or misconduct should be timely reported in writing to the Pastor or Congregational President (who will contact the other).
- B. If the Pastor is accused of sexual harassment or misconduct, the Congregational President (Congregational Vice President or Secretary if President is unavailable) should immediately consult the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the ELCA.
- C. The reporting person should timely document the incident in writing, containing as much information as possible, including:
 1. The names and addresses of those involved, as well the name of parents or other person responsible for the care of an involved child.
 2. Dates, times and locations the suspected misconduct occurred.
 3. The age and gender of the subjects of the report.
 4. The nature and extent of the suspected misconduct.
 5. The name and relationship of the person or persons responsible for causing the suspected misconduct, if known.
 6. Names of any possible witnesses.
 7. The person making the report and where that person can be reached.
 8. Any actions taken by the reporting source.
- D. The designated leadership person (Pastor, President, VP, Secretary) needs to:
 1. Respond immediately to the allegation seriously in accordance with this document.
 2. Respond to each of the following groups;
 - a. Possible victim and family
 - b. Appropriate congregational leadership

- c. Proper law enforcement (Children & Youth/Northampton County 610-559-3290; or Childline 1-800-932-0313)
 - d. Our insurance carrier or their agent
3. Do NOT respond to accused offender until law enforcement and legal counsel are consulted
 4. Document entire process
 5. Communicate with the congregation in an appropriate manner
 6. Support the victim and family
- E. While the matter is being reviewed, the individuals implicated in the allegation shall be suspended immediately from further activities involving children and youth at St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church. This action shall be taken by the Pastor and the Council (or the Executive Committee acting on its behalf) and communicated in writing as soon as possible to the person(s) about whom allegations have been reported.
- F. Safe Place Policy orientation will include a segment on how to respond to and report an accusation or suspicion of abuse. The Pastor and Safe Place Team will stay informed regarding the proper reporting procedures and changing laws.

INSURANCE

The church shall obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance coverage that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. If available, the church should have the levels of coverage that are required for limited immunity.

CONCLUSION

Churches need to be prepared! This is the legal reason for creating safety policies, but there's a deeper, more significant reason – to protect the children. Policies are only printed expressions of the value placed on children. If the only reason for safety policies is to protect the organization, the church has missed God's love for children.

Some people may think that our church is too small or that our church “knows” everyone to worry about these safety problems. Remember it's much easier to make plans and develop safety policies as a means of prevention, rather than wait until they are needed as a reaction to an abuse case.

Some churches tend to take the biblical concept of trusting God to an extreme. They think nothing bad can happen to Christians. We must not be unwise regarding children's safety. There is no automatic protection from evil for the faithful. We're to watch and be ready. Accidents will always happen. There will always be unforeseen circumstances that need to be handled. But the church should build into its organization sturdy safety-policy fire blocks into the walls of its ministry to protect children.

St. Paul's Third Lutheran Church desires to be “a church that cares” through the implementation of the above policy. Adoption of these provisions will enable St. Paul's III Evangelical Lutheran Church to provide a more safe and secure environment for each individual of our church family and its guests.