

Safe Sanctuary Policy & Procedures

First Lutheran Church of Lincoln, Nebraska

To help protect children and vulnerable adults, First Lutheran Church has adopted the following Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures. It is important that all First Lutheran staff and volunteers understand and implement these guidelines to help prevent abuse against children, youth and vulnerable adults. This policy stems from our awareness that abuse has been, and continues to be, a major problem in society. Statistics show that the church is not immune to this problem; in fact, churches can be especially vulnerable because they are naturally trusting and unsuspecting institutions. As a church, it is clear that we need to be intentional about the business of providing protection and reducing the risk of abuse within our buildings and programs. The goal of this policy is that all who attend First Lutheran Church are able to pursue activities and worship in a safe environment where abusive conduct is not tolerated and where staff and volunteers are protected from false or wrongful allegations. The following policy includes: the purpose and definitions for these guidelines; screening, selection, training, and supervision procedures; safeguards for children, youth and vulnerable adults; and reporting procedures.

I. Purpose

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of abuse in order to:

- A. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, vulnerable adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and staff
- B. Assist First Lutheran in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control over the activities of children, youth and vulnerable adults
- C. Satisfy the concerns of parents, caregivers, and staff members with a screening process for staff and volunteers
- D. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator
- E. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and staff

II. General Definitions

- A. **Staff:** Any pastor, program ministry staff or support staff member who is paid.
- B. **Volunteer:** Any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of or who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- C. **Approved Adult:** Any staff or volunteer over 19 years of age who has satisfied all the requirements of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.

D. *Children and Youth*

1. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12.
2. A **youth** is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 19 years old.

E. *Vulnerable Adults:* A vulnerable adult is defined as any person who is 19 years or older who meets one or more of the following:

1. Has a court appointed guardian
2. Is unable to live independently or provide self-care due to physical or mental impairments
3. Has grossly impaired judgment or behavior due to mental impairment, mental illness, or developmental disability

F. *Types of Abuse* (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 28-710; 28-348 to 28-387)

1. *Physical Abuse*

"Abuse" means knowingly, intentionally, or negligently causing injury; or permitting a child, youth or vulnerable adult to be placed in a situation that endangers his or her life or physical health; or causes or permits a child, youth or vulnerable adult to be cruelly confined or cruelly punished.

2. *Neglect*

"Neglect" means knowingly, intentionally, or negligently causing or permitting a child, youth or vulnerable adult to be deprived of basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, or care to the extent that there is harm or risk of harm.

3. *Sexual Abuse / Exploitation*

"Sexual abuse" is any sexually oriented act, practice, contact, or interaction in which a child, youth or vulnerable adult is or has been used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator, the adult, or another person.

4. **Emotional Abuse**

“Emotional abuse” includes knowingly, intentionally, or negligently causing or permitting a child, youth, or vulnerable adult to be placed in a situation that endangers his or her mental health or sense of security.

III. Screening, Selection, Training, and Supervision Procedures

Screening

The following screening procedures are to be used with volunteers and staff who are entrusted with the care and supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over children, youth and vulnerable adults. All information collected will be kept confidential.

- A. Prior to consideration, all candidates for employment or a volunteer position that involves working with children, youth or vulnerable adults will complete and return the Ministry Team Application Form (*See Appendix*).
- B. All applications will be reviewed carefully, ensuring that the candidate is an appropriate match for the ministry position. All qualified applicants will be interviewed as a means of determining if they are a good fit for the area of ministry they are interested in and to ask additional questions to screen for potential risk factors and/or additional factors that would put children at risk – such as substance abuse.
- C. Applicants will be asked to provide at least two references. References will be asked to verify information supplied by the applicant and to provide any information that might help determine the applicant’s suitability for the position (*See Appendix*).
- D. First Lutheran will conduct a criminal background check, including a sexual offender registry check, on all staff and volunteers who are entrusted with the care and supervision of children, youth and vulnerable adults or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control or oversight over children, youth and vulnerable adults. Criminal background checks will be updated every 5 years.
- E. First Lutheran will conduct a driving or motor vehicle records check for any person, who we secure to transport children or youth other than his/her immediate family member.
- F. All information gathered will be carefully reviewed and evaluated to make a determination of whether or not the person is appropriate to work with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults. Should the report come back with any negative information, additional

information will be sought and the following procedure will be followed:

- 1. Conversation with the applicant
 - 2. Further investigation of circumstances and/or charges
 - 3. Documentation of conversations
 - 4. Final determination will be made by the staff leader in consultation with the Lead Pastor or his/her Designee
- G. When indicated by reference and/or background checks, staff or volunteer candidates who pose a threat to others, and/or have a prior history of physical or sexual abuse against another person, will be removed immediately from consideration for employment or ministry positions.
- H. All information collected will be maintained in confidence. The staff leader will store all application materials – the application form, background checks, reference check, notes from interviews, etc. – in a locked file cabinet or other secure location.

Selection of Approved Adults

- A. **Minimum Age:** All staff or volunteers working directly with children, youth and vulnerable adults must be at least 19 years old and must be at least two (2) years older than the age of persons that they will be supervising. Volunteers who do not meet these requirements may work with children, youth and vulnerable adults if paired with an Approved Adult.
- B. **Six Month Rule:** All volunteers are required to have been active in the life of First Lutheran for a minimum of six months. Volunteers who have been active in the congregation for fewer than six months may work with children, youth and vulnerable adults if paired with an Approved Adult.

Training

- A. One hour of abuse awareness and prevention education and training is required for all staff and volunteers before they start working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. Subsequent training will be required once every three years.
- B. Training will include:
 - 1. An overview of the Safe Sanctuary Policy & Procedures
 - 2. Signs of Abuse
 - 3. Risk Factors
 - 4. Procedures for Handling Disclosures
 - 5. Reporting Procedures
 - 6. Guidelines for Appropriate/Inappropriate Behavior

Supervision Procedures

To maximize the protection of children, youth and vulnerable adults and to minimize the risk of abuse, all staff and volunteers must abide by the following:

- A. **Two Adult Rule:** In all activities involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, no fewer than two Approved Adults should be present at all times. In situations where only one Approved Adult is available, another Approved Adult will be assigned as a “roamer”, to move in and out of rooms and meeting spaces. The “roamer” will have visual and physical access to all areas (either requiring doors to be open or having prominent windows in the doors). Supervision will increase in proportion to the risk of the activity and number of participants.
- B. **Open Door Rule:** All one-on-one meetings with children, youth or vulnerable adults shall be conducted in a public place or take place in offices with windows or the door shall remain open while the office is in use. Glass in room doors must never be covered. If a room door does not have a window, the door must be kept ajar whenever children, youth or vulnerable adults are present.
- C. Whenever possible, at least two unrelated staff or volunteers will be in the room when children, youth or vulnerable adults are present. Doors will be left fully open if one adult needs to leave the room temporarily and during arrival to the class or event before both adults are present.
- D. Workers should arrive at least 10 minutes before a scheduled activity. They must remain at their assigned post until all people in their care have been picked up by an authorized person. No children, youth, or vulnerable adults should be released to find their parents/caregivers or wait unattended for transportation.
- E. **Transportation:** Two adult leaders shall be present in any vehicle transporting a single child, youth or vulnerable adult. One adult leader may transport multiple children, youth, or vulnerable adults if necessary as long as the other vehicles involved in the activity are in sight while travelling. Exceptions are allowed for emergencies.
- F. **Restrooms:** Young children (preschool or under) shall be accompanied to the restroom. When using public facilities and/or facilities with more than one stall the staff or volunteer will check the facility before allowing the child to enter to ascertain that it is safe for the child. The staff or volunteer shall wait outside the facility to escort the child back to the activity. Whenever possible, the escort will be the same sex as the child. Older children will be sent to the restroom in pairs. Should a child or vulnerable adult need

assistance with toileting, the stall door must remain open and another adult must be present.

- G. **Lodging:** Children or youth will room together without an adult. In situations where Approved Adults must room with children, youth or vulnerable adults in a hotel, cabin, tent, or other similar situation, there must be two Approved Adults and at least two children, youth or vulnerable adults. The Approved Adults must be the same sex as the children, youth or vulnerable adults. Approved Adults cannot sleep in the same bed with individual children, youth or vulnerable adults unless they are the parent or guardian of that individual. It is acceptable to have multiple Approved Adults sleep with all the children, youth or vulnerable adults participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge.
- H. **Discipline:** Staff and volunteers are prohibited from using physical punishment in any way for behavior management of children, youth and vulnerable adults. No form of physical discipline is acceptable. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, or any other physical force. Physical force may only be used to stop a behavior that may cause immediate harm to the individual or to another child, youth, or vulnerable adult, or other participant of an activity. Disciplinary problems should be reported to the ministry leader or to a parent/guardian or caregiver.
- I. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants or children, staff and volunteers will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.

IV. Creating a Safe Sanctuary: Safeguards for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults

The following guidelines have been designed as a precautionary measure in a spirit of care for the most vulnerable among us. This policy recognizes that care of children, youth and vulnerable adults rests not just with parents and caregivers but the entire church community. The layout of our building with multiple entrances, levels, and wings makes it difficult to control who enters and has access to various areas of the church. As such, the entire congregation is encouraged to be diligent about the care of our children, youth and vulnerable adults.

- A. All children and youth (through middle school) should be in the sanctuary (or nursery) during worship and in classrooms during the education hour, unless the family chooses a responsible, known adult to be with them. Children under six years of age should be accompanied by a parent if they go to the restrooms during worship.

- B. Parents of nursery-aged and preschool children are instructed to take their children to the bathroom at the beginning of nursery care or the education hour, and between worship and the education hour.
- C. Children should not leave the building alone, and children and youth should not leave the building with an adult other than their parents (i.e. teacher, youth leader, etc.) without prior notice to parents.
- D. Anyone who sees a child leaving the building alone or finds a child alone without a parent should assist the child in finding his/her parent.
- E. Children should not be in the kitchen without an adult supervisor present.
- F. Children are not permitted to roam the building unaccompanied at any time. Parents are responsible for monitoring where their children are playing.

V. Reporting Procedures

Mandatory Reporting

- A. State law requires any person who suspects that a child, youth or vulnerable adult has been physically or sexually abused or neglected to report it promptly. Failure to report suspected abuse may be a crime. Every state provides immunity from civil liability for persons required to report suspected abuse in good faith without malice. Simply stated, “in good faith” means that the person submitting the report believes what he or she is reporting to be true.
- B. All staff and volunteers who suspect that a child, youth or vulnerable adult has been or is being abused at home, school, or in the community at large must immediately make a report to their staff leader. Together they will fill out the Suspected Abuse Incident Report Form (*See Appendix*).
- C. The staff leader will then use the information gathered to place a call to the Nebraska Child Abuse Hotline, the Adult Protective Services, or to local law enforcement. This report **MUST** be made within 24 hours of the initial report.
- D. The staff leader will ensure proper documentation of any follow up conversations.

Policy and Procedure Violations

When staff or volunteers observe another member of their ministry team behaving in a manner that violates any provision of this policy, they **MUST** immediately report their observations. *NOTE: If there is uncertainty as to whether a situation requires reporting, it will be referred to the Lead Pastor or another church staff leader with responsibility for carrying out these policies and procedures.*

Such inappropriate behaviors or possible policy violations that relate to interactions with children, youth or vulnerable adults should be reported in one of the following ways:

- A. A telephone call or meeting with the staff leader responsible for supervision of the person in violation
- B. A telephone call or meeting with the Lead Pastor, if the person is a supervisor, but not the Lead Pastor
- C. A telephone call to the Congregational Council President, if the person is the Lead Pastor

Investigation

- A. If allegations involving staff or volunteers lead to a report involving Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, or law enforcement, legal counsel may be sought. Advice from legal counsel will be the basis for our response to the allegations.
- B. Staff leaders must promptly notify First Lutheran’s insurance carrier should a report be made where the alleged perpetrator is a staff or volunteer. Also notify the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to whom we also report such allegations.
- C. Staff members who are the subject of an investigation will be removed from their position, with pay, pending completion of the investigation. Staff members who admit to the abuse or molestation will be terminated consistent with the established employment practices of this church.
- D. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be temporarily removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
- E. First Lutheran will permanently remove any staff or volunteers from their duties within the organization if they are found guilty of abuse or molestation. Whenever termination of employment is a factor, legal counsel will be consulted.

Dealing with Law Enforcement, News Media

- A. First Lutheran leaders, staff, and volunteers will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.
- B. One individual – a member of the leadership team, a staff member, a ministry leader, or our attorney – will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. The spokesperson will be the only person to convey information concerning the situation, doing so in a prudent manner to avoid compromising an ongoing investigation and to maintain the privacy of the individuals involved.

VI. Policy Review and Enforcement

Review

The leadership of First Lutheran Church will regularly review this policy and the procedures established within it. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all staff and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

Enforcement

The Lead Pastor or his/her Designee is responsible for assigning oversight of this policy and ensuring all policies and procedures are being upheld.

Adopted 08/14/2012

First Lutheran Church of Lincoln – Council

First Lutheran Church

Ministry Team Application Form

Please complete all of the questions accurately and fully. Attach additional sheets as needed.

Name of applicant: _____

Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Length at current address: _____

Home Phone: _____ (check if N/A) Cell Phone: _____ (check if N/A)

Email Address: _____

Driver License Number: _____ State: _____ SSN: _____

Experience: Please include all experience working with children, youth or vulnerable adults over the past 10 years (*attach additional sheets as needed*):

Organization: _____

Supervisor: _____ Phone: _____ Dates: From: _____ to: _____

Duties: _____

Organization: _____

Supervisor: _____ Phone: _____ Dates: From: _____ to: _____

Duties: _____

Organization: _____

Supervisor: _____ Phone: _____ Dates: From: _____ to: _____

Duties: _____

Organization: _____

Supervisor: _____ Phone: _____ Dates: From: _____ to: _____

Duties: _____

What position are you interested in filling? _____

What interests you about this area of ministry? _____

What experiences have prepared you for working in this position? _____

Your honest answers to the following questions will assist First Lutheran Church in providing the finest care possible. ***Please attach additional sheets if necessary.***

Have you ever been accused of physically, sexually or emotionally abusing a child or an adult? Yes No

If yes, please explain: _____

Have you ever been arrested, charged, indicted or convicted for any criminal offense (misdemeanor or felony) other than a traffic violation? Yes No If yes, please explain: _____

Have you ever had your driver's license suspended or restricted for any reason? Yes No

If yes, please explain:

Have you ever been hospitalized or treated for alcohol or substance abuse? Yes No

If yes, please explain:

Other than the above questions, is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would cause you or the church to have concerns about your being entrusted with the supervision, guidance and care of children, youth, or vulnerable adults?

Yes No If yes, please explain:

Acknowledgment, Release and Signature:

I understand and agree that:

- A. All information I have provided may be verified. I agree to release from liability any person or organization that provides information regarding me. I do hereby agree to indemnify and hold harmless, First Lutheran Church, its employees, representatives and agents from any claims or causes or action relating in any manner to the verification of or attempts to verify the information provided. I understand that any information received will not be disclosed to me, and I hereby waive any right I have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me on this form.
- B. I hereby give my permission for First Lutheran Church to obtain information relating to my criminal history record through the appropriate agency. I understand this information will be used in part to determine my eligibility for a volunteer position with the church. I also understand that I will have the opportunity to review the criminal history, and a procedure is available for clarification, if I dispute the record as received.
- C. I agree to be bound by First Lutheran Church's Safe Sanctuary Policy and Procedures. I understand that these may be changed, withdrawn, added to or interpreted at any time at First Lutheran's sole discretion and without prior notice to me.
- D. By signing this form, I certify and affirm that the information I have given is true, complete and correct in all respects. I understand that providing false information is grounds for not choosing me for a volunteer position or for my discharge if I have already been chosen.

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please Print Name Here: _____

References: Please list two references who can comment on your ability to work with children, youth or vulnerable adults

Reference #1:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ How long have you know this person? _____

Relationship to you: _____

Reference #2:

Name: _____

Street Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Daytime Phone: _____ How long have you know this person? _____

Relationship to you: _____

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Reference Verification Form

Name of applicant: _____

Reference Name: _____ Phone: _____

Describe the position the applicant is applying to hold and that the applicant has given full permission for you to speak to references knowing information gathered will not be disclosed.

1. What is your relationship to the applicant?
2. How long have you known the applicant? / How well do you know them?
3. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to children, youth, or vulnerable adults?
4. How would you describe the applicant's ability to relate to their peers?
5. How would you describe the applicant's leadership abilities?
6. How would you describe the applicant's ability to follow directions?
7. Do you know of any reason the applicant should not work directly with children, youth, or vulnerable adults? If so, please describe.
8. How would you feel about having the applicant as a volunteer/worker with your child, youth, or vulnerable adult?
9. Are there any other comments you would like to make on the applicant's behalf?

Reference inquiry completed by:

Name: _____ Date: _____

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Suspected Abuse Incident Report Form

Completing this *Suspected Abuse Incident Form* will assist Staff Leaders in responding to the concern or allegation. All information on this form will be provided on a confidential basis to the appropriate law enforcement agency. ***It is imperative that the person taking action with the information in this report be familiar with the state and local law reporting requirements.***

Name of person observing or receiving disclosure of abuse (Reporter):

Street Address of Reporter: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

Primary Phone Number of Reporter: _____ Home Cell

Secondary Phone Number of Reporter: _____ Home Cell

Date of Incident: _____ Time of Incident: _____

Location of Incident: _____

Name(s) and Age(s) of Alleged
Victim(s): _____

Name(s) of those suspected of abuse or causing
neglect: _____

Relationship of the accused to the alleged victim: _____

Reporter's Statement of Concern: (Please describe in detail: what happened, where, when, who was involved, etc.)

Victim's statement (quote any/all relevant statements made by the victim):

Describe the victim's demeanor: _____

Describe any physical indicators of abuse: _____

What immediate action was taken: _____

Does anyone else have relevant information? Were there any witnesses?

Name	Phone Number
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Reporter's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Report Received by (Staff Leader): _____

Documentation of Follow Up:

Report to Law Enforcement/Child Protective Services

Name of Agency: _____ Date/Time: _____

Person who took the call: _____

Summary:

Recommendations:

Report to Victim's Parent/Guardian

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____ Date/Time: _____

Summary:

Report to Lead Pastor or Designee

Date/Time: _____

Summary: