



## **SAFE SANCTUARY POLICY & PROCEDURES**

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.

### **1. PURPOSE**

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

- 1.1. Provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, vulnerable adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and staff
- 1.2. Assist First Lutheran in evaluating a person's suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or accompany the activities of children, youth and vulnerable adult
- 1.3. Satisfy the concerns of parents, caregivers, and staff members with a screening process for staff and volunteers

- 1.4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator
- 1.5. Reduce the possibility of false accusations of abuse made against volunteers and staff

## 2. GENERAL DEFINITIONS

- 2.1. **Staff:** Any pastor, program ministry staff or support staff member who is paid.
- 2.2. **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 accompanies children, youth, or vulnerable adults.
- 2.3. **Approved Adult:** Any staff or volunteer over 19 years of age who has satisfied all the requirements of the Safe Sanctuary Policy.
- 2.4. **Children and Youth:**
  - 2.4.1. A **child** is defined as anyone under the age of 12.
  - 2.4.2. A **youth** is defined as anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 19 years old.
- 2.5. **Vulnerable Adults:** A vulnerable adult is defined as any person who is 19 years or older who meets one or more of the following:
  - 2.5.1. Has a court appointed guardian
  - 2.5.2. Is unable to live independently or provide self-care due to physical or mental impairments
  - 2.5.3. Has grossly impaired judgment or behavior due to mental impairment, mental illness, or cognitive, intellectual, or developmental disability
- 2.6. **Types of Abuse** (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 28-710; 28-348 to 28-387)
  - 2.6.1. **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 one’s life or physical health; or causes or permits a child, youth or vulnerable adult to be cruelly confined or cruelly punished.
  - 2.6.2. **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.

- 2.6.3. **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.
- 2.6.4. **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 one’s mental health or sense of security.

### **3. CREATING A SAFE SANCTUARY: SAFEGUARDS FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE ADULTS**

First Lutheran Church desires to be a safe place for everyone especially the most vulnerable among us: children, youth and vulnerable adults. Primary responsibility for safety of children, youth and vulnerable adults resides with the parent/guardian or caregiver.

- 3.1. Children should not roam the building, grounds and parking lot unaccompanied at any time. Parents are responsible for monitoring their children.
- 3.2. 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.
- 3.3. Children should not be in the kitchen without an adult supervisor present.
- 3.4. Virtual gatherings will be advertised in advance and two adults not related to each other should be present during the gatherings. Virtual gatherings will be password protected to ensure known attendees.

### **4. SCREENING, SELECTION, TRAINING AND SUPERVISION PROCEDURES FOR CHURCH PROGRAMMING**

#### **Screening**

The following screening procedures are to be used with volunteers and staff, including those leading or participating on virtual gatherings 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.

- 4.1. 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 conducted every 3 years.
- 4.2. First Lutheran will conduct a driving or motor vehicle records check for any person, who we secure to transport children, youth or vulnerable adult other than their immediate family member.
- 4.3. 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:
  - 4.3.1. Conversation with the applicant,
  - 4.3.2. Further investigation of circumstances and/or charges,
  - 4.3.3. Documentation of conversations,
  - 4.3.4. Final determination will be made by the staff leader in consultation with the Lead Pastor or his/her Designee.
- 4.4. When indicated by 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 voluntary candidates.
- 4.5. All information collected will be maintained in confidence. The staff leader will store all application materials – background checks, notes from interviews, etc. – in a locked file cabinet or other secure location.

### **Selection of Approved Adults**

- 4.6. **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.
- 4.7. **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**

- 4.8. Training in abuse awareness and prevention will be provided for all staff and volunteers before they start working with children, youth and vulnerable adults. This training will be provided every year.
- 4.9. Training will include:
  - 4.9.1. An overview of the Safe Sanctuary Policy & Procedures
  - 4.9.2. Signs of Abuse
  - 4.9.3. Risk Factors
  - 4.9.4. Procedures for Handling Disclosures
  - 4.9.5. Reporting Procedures
  - 4.9.6. 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:

- 4.10. **Two Adults:** In all activities involving children, youth and vulnerable adults, no fewer than two Approved Adults should be present. In situations where only one Approved Adult is available, there will be 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. If at any time there is only one adult present, doors will be left fully open. If at any time there is only one adult alone in a vehicle with a child, youth or vulnerable adult, parents or caregivers and the Lead Pastor will be informed of the situation.
- 4.11. **Private Meetings:** All private 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.
- 4.12. **Pick-up:** Staff and volunteers will remain at their assigned post until all children, youth and vulnerable adults in their care have been picked up by a parent, caregiver, or parent-

approved person. No children, youth, or vulnerable adults should be released to find their parents/caregivers or wait unattended for transportation.

- 4.13. **Onsite Restrooms:** Young children (age 6 and under) shall be accompanied to the restroom.
- 4.14. **Offsite Restrooms:** Children (age 12 and under) will 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. Youth will be sent to the restroom in pairs. Should a child or vulnerable adult need assistance using the toilet, the stall door will remain ajar and another adult must be present.
- 4.15. When supervising or assisting private activities such as dressing, showering or diapering infants, children, youth or vulnerable adults, staff and volunteers will remain in an area observable by other adults or work in pairs.
- 4.16. **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, the Approved Adults must be the same sex as the children, youth or vulnerable adults and cannot share 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 housed with children, youth or vulnerable adults participating in one open space such as a church basement or camp lodge.
- 4.17. **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 and to a parent/guardian or caregiver. An incident report will be filed with the Lead Pastor.

## **5. REPORTING PROCEDURES**

### **Mandatory Reporting**

- 5.1. 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 the report to be true.
- 5.2. 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 and present it to the Lead Pastor (*See Appendix*).
- 5.3. The Lead Pastor will then use the information to contact 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.
- 5.4. The Lead Pastor will ensure proper documentation of any follow up conversations.

### **Policy and Procedure Violations**

- 5.5. 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.
- 5.6. 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:
  - 5.6.1. A telephone call or meeting with the staff leader responsible for supervision of the person in violation
  - 5.6.2. A telephone call or meeting with the Lead Pastor, if the person is a supervisor, but not the Lead Pastor
  - 5.6.3. A telephone call to the Congregational Council President, if the person is the Lead Pastor

## **Investigation**

- 5.7. 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.
- 5.8. Lead Pastor must promptly notify First Lutheran's insurance carrier should a report be made where the alleged perpetrator is a staff or volunteer, unless the alleged perpetrator is the Lead Pastor, then the Congregational Council President will notify the insurance carrier. Also notify the Nebraska Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, to whom we also report such allegations.
- 5.9. 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.
- 5.10. Volunteer subjects of any investigation will be temporarily removed from their positions pending completion of the investigation.
- 5.11. 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**

- 5.12. First Lutheran leaders, staff, and volunteers will cooperate fully with law enforcement or governmental agencies investigating allegations of injury, abuse, or molestation.
- 5.13. One individual – ordinarily the Lead Pastor or a staff member, a member of the Congregational Church Council or legal counsel – will be the designated spokesperson to handle all inquiries from the news media. At the direction of legal counsel, 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.



## **6. POLICY REVIEW AND ENFORCEMENT**

### **Review**

- 6.1. The leadership of First Lutheran Church will review this policy and the procedures established within it every 3 years. When changes are made, ministry leaders will communicate them to all staff and volunteers affected by the policy changes.

### **Enforcement**

- 6.2. The Lead Pastor or someone designated by the Lead Pastor is responsible for assigning oversight of this policy and ensuring all policies and procedures are being upheld.

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### **Approval**

Issue Date and Adopted by Congregational Council August 14, 2012

Revised and Adopted by Congregational Council October 9, 2018

Revised and Adopted by Congregational Council March 8, 2022

# FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH 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 Victims: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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): \_\_\_\_\_

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*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**

Name of Lead Pastor/Designee: \_\_\_\_\_ Date/Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary: