



Light of Christ Lutheran Church

Children and Youth Ministry Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures

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Mission Statement

Light of Christ takes seriously its responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults who participate in our ministries. Every volunteer and church worker plays a key role in fostering the spiritual development of individuals and families in our church community. This Safe Sanctuary Policy, which includes guidelines, procedural directions, and implementation practices, was created in an effort to provide a safe community for all.

Policies

The following policies are meant to protect and safeguard the children, youth, and volunteers of Light of Christ, and to help us model safe, healthy, and appropriate behaviors in our ministries.

Youth Safety Forms

All youth (7th through 12th grade) participating in a Light of Christ sponsored event (including Confirmation, retreats, lock-ins, off-site trips) must have a Universal Permission form (Appendix A) on file filled out by their parents or guardians at the beginning of each program year. This form will be kept on file and valid for one year at the church and will be stored in a secure place. For visitors, friends of youth, or anybody who has not signed the Universal Permission Slip, the One-Time Permission Form/Medical Release/Liability Release form (Appendix B) must be filled out before he/she can participate. An Event Registration Form (Appendix C) will be filled out and handed in for any off-site or overnight trips, assuming he/she has completed the Universal Permission form or the One-Time Permission form.

Youth Covenant

In addition to the Universal Permission Form, all youth participating in Confirmation and High School programs will be asked to complete a Youth Ministry Covenant (appendix F) that outlines Light of Christ's expectations of their behavior and their respect of themselves, others, and church property.

Supervision

- There should always be at least two non-related adults in the church building when there are children or youth present for a church-related activity.
- There should never be a situation in which one adult is alone with one child or youth.
- Teachers and other adult leaders will be assigned in teams of two or more for every child and youth event. If there are not enough adults the event/class needs to be combined with another or it must be cancelled until enough adults can be recruited.

- Planned individual contact outside the church building should occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian.
- *Open door policy:* When youth or children ask to meet privately with staff members, staff will meet with them in open areas or in offices with an open door. When a child or youth asks to meet alone, they will be informed that there must be 2 adults in the meeting-no exceptions.
- A youth worker/volunteer (under age 18) CANNOT replace either one of the two adults in the “two adult rule.”

Adult to Minor Communications and Contact

- All youth and adults should be informed that any communication that is sent via digital means (email, social networking site posts, texts, etc.) is not confidential and may be reported or shared with others.
- Adults should archive or save all email correspondence with youth.
- Church staff and adult volunteers who work directly with youth are required to use church sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members regarding church-sponsored activities. Church-approved digital communication methods are methods that maintain the youth’s privacy, while also allowing content such as transcripts and pictures to be saved in case of a need arises for future reference.
- Text messaging between church staff and youth must be done in a group text messaging system where other youth and/or parents receive a copy of the message being sent. Apps that allow mass messages to be sent to a large group of people to spread word of announcements or events are encouraged to maintain contact with youth, but must be conducted in a safe, researched application that maintains privacy of all recipients of messages. Current smartphone apps that allow this type of communication are GroupMe and Remind.
- Permission to contact youth via email and text should be given by parents or guardians in the Universal Permission Form (Appendix A).

Social Media

Light of Christ recognizes the potential positive impacts of social media. Yet, we also believe it is important to create guidelines when posting on social media as it relates to Light of Christ or any church sponsored offsite event. These guidelines will continue to evolve as new social networking technologies emerge.

Light of Christ's overarching policy regarding social media is best described by Martin Luther's explanation of the 8th Commandment, which is as follows: "We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead, we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light."

Light of Christ staff and volunteers will adhere to these above principles and will encourage youth to be mindful of what they post on social media as representatives of Light of Christ.

Drugs and Alcohol

There is a zero-tolerance policy of drugs and alcohol on Light of Christ premises and at any church sponsored offsite event. A promise to adhere to this policy is included in the Youth Ministry Covenant (Appendix F).

Overnight Events

- A minimum of two adult leaders must be present at any overnight activity. If youth participants include males and females, there must be at least one male and one female adult present. Separate sleeping spaces will be provided for male and female youth and adult leaders at events. When minors and adults must share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room for the sake of safety and/or cost-efficiency, parents will be informed ahead of time. An adult should not occupy the same bed as a minor, with the exception of a parent/child combination.
- Any over the counter or prescribed medications that a youth is to take during the event must be checked in with and dispensed by an adult leader.

Outings Away From Church Property

All children and youth participating in out-of-town and overnight outings must have written consent and completion of the required forms. There must be access to a phone when groups are away from the church property.

Transportation

- Adult volunteers who will be driving during an event or volunteering for an overnight event will submit to and pass a background check and motor vehicle report. Blemishes on the background check regarding traffic violations will be subject to inquiry and may be dismissed at the discretion of the review panel.

- It is permissible to have one adult per car carrying youth to an off-site event, but at no time should an adult be alone with a child other than his/her own. Two children and one adult in a vehicle is appropriate.
- Parents are expected to notify adult leaders if their youth/child(ren) will be leaving an event at a time other than the event's designated ending time.

Procedures for dealing with a Registered Sex Offender:

Each case will be evaluated on the basis of relevant facts, and a specific course of action will be determined. Unless circumstances of the conviction dictate otherwise and the insurance company agrees to waive "policy exclusion" of the individual, the following protocol will be followed.

Any person having been placed on a sex offender registry as the result of a sexual misconduct or molestation offense will be allowed to attend church services under the following conditions:

1. The conditions of their parole allow them to do so.
2. They agree to periodic meetings with the Pastor or his/her designee for the purpose of imposing conditions and reviewing compliance with such.
3. They agree to be accompanied by an assigned member whenever on property.
4. They are not allowed to use the church restrooms, unless accompanied by an Usher or their assigned member.
5. They are not allowed off-premises social interaction with any children or youth.
6. They are not allowed to ask for or have church keys in their possession.
7. It is understood they will never be hired as an employee or work with the church's children or youth in any way.
8. The registered sex offender is to be presented with a written copy of their restrictions and, by their affixed signature, must agree to abide by these conditions. It is also understood that if they violate any of these conditions, their attendance privileges may be revoked.

Implementation

Volunteer Standards

All volunteers over 18 who have any contact with youth and children must submit to a background check and go through volunteer training. Volunteers should generally be at least four years older than the youth or children they work with and have been part of the church community for six months, subject to the discretion of the pastor.

Background Checks

Background checks must be conducted on all staff and volunteers that are involved in the leading/supervising of church programs and activities involving children, youth, or vulnerable adults both on and off church property, or are acting on behalf of the congregation or church. In addition, Federal, State, and County background checks will be completed for all staff members for every place that he/she has lived since 18 years of age.

A Background Screening Consent form (Appendix D) will be filled out by all persons subject to a background check and will be submitted to the review panel responsible for conducting the check. All volunteers and staff will submit to a background check every two years. Background checks will be conducted by the MN Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, or a third party organization, with signed consent releases by all volunteers. A review panel of at least five persons consisting of a Light of Christ Council representative, the Pastor, the Youth and Family Director, Children and Family Ministry Director, Children and Family Ministry Team designee, and a Youth and Family Ministry Team designee will review the background checks, and at the discretion of the review team, volunteers and staff members will be determined eligible or ineligible based upon the results of the background check, length of time since offense, relevancy of offense, and other salient factors. All material and information that comes before this review panel will remain strictly confidential.

All background reviews will normally be completed within one month of receiving background reports and a notation of accept or decline will be made in that person's file. Shredding of the documents will take place after a minimum of a ten-day hold period, after final determinations have been completed. Volunteer files will be kept on Light of Christ property in a locked and secured area of the church with strict limitations on access.

The Review panel will have a meeting with the volunteer if he/she has been convicted, arrested, or charged of any offense, including but not limited to the following offenses: murder; assault (1st-4th degree); domestic assault; kidnapping; criminal sexual conduct; manslaughter; arson; any assault crime against a minor/vulnerable adult; criminal sexual misconduct (any degree); sexual solicitation; malicious punishment or neglect or endangerment of a child; exploitation of a vulnerable adult, and

fraud related crimes involving a vulnerable adult; hate crimes, as determined by local, state and federal statutes; violations of harassment/restraining orders, orders for protection; controlled substance crime (any degree); transmission, solicitation, possession, production or receipt of child pornography. After meeting with the volunteer, the Review panel will determine the eligibility of the volunteer and his/her capacity to serve the children and youth ministries. A review of the decision will take place if an offense is committed after the submission of the background check.

Training

All staff members, teachers, and volunteers who work with youth and children will receive training on safe church policies and procedures. Training and education about child abuse awareness, mandated reporting, emergency procedures, and basic safety instruction will be offered regularly, and every volunteer must complete this training every two years he/she is involved in children/youth programs at Light of Christ.

Training will be focused on the basics of reporting to child protection when there is a concern of neglect or abuse. Volunteers are not expected to know what statute defines as abuse or neglect, rather when to make a report and how to make a report. Training will cover a basic understanding of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect but will focus on child safety and reporting when there are questions.

Training will also include an overview of what is appropriate behavior and what is inappropriate behavior between adults and children/youth in order to maintain physical, spiritual, and emotional safety for all involved.

Some positive and appropriate forms of affection by adults to children and youth are as listed below:

- Brief hugs
- Pats on the head, shoulder, or back
- Handshakes
- High-fives
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, shoulders and arms
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands with young children while walking
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for hugs with small children
- Holding hands during prayer

Below are examples of inappropriate forms of affection that may be reported if deemed necessary:

- Lengthy embraces
- Kisses on the mouth
- Holding children over 5 years old on the lap
- Touching bottoms, chests, or genital areas other than for toileting of preschoolers
- Touching knees or legs
- Tickling
- Piggyback rides
- Massage
- Comments or compliments as they relate to physique or body development

Mandated Reporting

Per statute, volunteers are NOT mandated reporters (mandated reporters are defined in statute 626.556). By definition, clergy ARE mandated reporters.

Any person who suspects or knows of abuse or neglect can make a report. It should be expected that any person who goes through the formal process of volunteering for the church will agree to report if abuse or neglect is suspected. Calls can be made on their own or with the support of Pastor, or the CYF Director. The parents do not need to be notified that a report was made and in some cases, shouldn't be notified.

Training on what statute says about mandated reporting, abuse, and neglect will be provided on a yearly basis, or as needed or requested by staff or council. Training should be provided by a qualified professional (e.g. a Child Protection Social Worker).

Volunteer Database and Procedures for Approval

The volunteer database contains all information regarding the volunteer and his/her training requirements. An Excel spreadsheet that is stored on the church's network drive contains an updated list of all volunteers and their dates of training completion. Individual information is kept on file and managed. A yearly update of all files takes place at the beginning of the school year, and is regularly updated as volunteers sign up throughout the year.

Volunteers are given the Volunteer Training Packet (appendix E) which includes a checklist of all required steps to take in order to be approved to work with children and/or youth. In the Volunteer Training packet is a version of this document, the Safe Sanctuary Policies and Procedures, that volunteers will be required to read through.

The checklist is as follows:

- ☐ Submit to and pass a Background Screening test
- ☐ Complete online training
- ☐ Read through Safe Sanctuary policy

Once all steps on the checklist are completed and turned in, the individual will be deemed qualified and allowed to work with our children and youth at Light of Christ.

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