

# Immanuel Lutheran Church, Safe Church Policy

(January 12, 2018)

## 1. General Purpose Statement

"Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." Romans 15:7. The Christian Church is a place of hospitality which participates in the grace of God. In obedience to Christ and the way of life to which he calls us, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Oxford, CT intends that all persons involved in our congregation's life and ministry experience Christ's gracious hospitality. The church has traditionally been a place of refuge, and all should find in the church a place of safety.

We intend to provide a safe environment for all people who participate in our programs and activities. By stating the policy below, our goal is to protect the children and other at risk people of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Oxford, CT, from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

## 2. Definitions

- a) **At Risk People** - People who are vulnerable to being taken advantage of due to their young or old age, or physical or mental disability.
- b) **Child/Children** - Any person under the age of eighteen (18) years.
- c) **Child Abuse** - Any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological or emotional health and development, detailed in Section 5.
- d) **Church** - Immanuel Lutheran Church, Oxford, CT
- e) **Interview Team** - A Church Council Representative, Pastor and one other person, typically a ministry leader related to the role of the position that the prospective worker is applying for.
- f) **Safe Church Representative** - A member of the congregation selected by Church Council to have oversight of Immanuel's Safe Church Policy, the single point of contact for reporting and spokesperson for the congregation.
- g) **Workers** - Both paid employees and volunteer persons who work with children, or at risk people, who have successfully completed the evaluation process, Section 3f.

## 3. Selection of Workers

All persons who desire to work with the children, or at risk persons participating in our programs and activities will be screened. This screening includes the following:

- a) **Six Month Rule** - No applicant will be considered for any position involving contact with children, including one-on-one mentoring, until they have been an active participant with the Church for a minimum of six (6) months. This does not apply to parent helpers.
- b) **Written Application** - All prospective workers must complete and sign a written application in a form to be supplied by the Church. The application will request basic information from the applicant and will inquire into previous experience with children, previous affiliations with other Churches, reference and employment information, as well as disclosure of any previous criminal convictions.
- c) **Criminal Background Check** - A nation-wide criminal background check is required for all prospective workers (regardless of position) and for the following categories of workers:
  - Those who will be involved in our Sunday School, Youth Group and Catechism activities;
  - Those who will be involved in overnight activities with children;

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- Those counseling children;
- Those involved in one-on-one mentorship of children;
- Those having occasional one-on-one contact with children, or at risk persons (such as, Church/temple sponsored athletic team coaches and vehicle drivers); and
- All prospective employees.

Before a background check is run, prospective workers will be asked to sign an authorization form allowing the Church to run the check. If a prospective worker declines to sign the authorization form, this will be noted on the form and they will be unable to work with children, or at risk persons.

- d) Reference Checks** - Before an applicant is permitted to work with children, at least two of the applicants' references will be checked. These references should be of an institutional nature as opposed to personal or family references, preferably from organizations where the applicant has worked with children, or at risk persons in the past.
- e) Personal Interview** - Upon completion of the application, a face-to-face interview may be scheduled with the applicant to discuss their suitability for the position.
- f) Evaluation** - The Interview Team meets to review all of the information from Section 3a through 3e and evaluate the prospective worker. What constitutes a disqualifying offense that will keep an individual from working with children will be determined by the Interview Team on a case-by-case basis in light of all the surrounding circumstances. Generally, convictions for an offense involving children and/or for offenses involving violence, dishonesty, illegal substances, indecency and any conduct contrary to our mission will preclude someone from being permitted to work with children. Failure to disclose a criminal conviction on the application form will also be a disqualifying event. A Synod representative can be contacted to assist with the evaluation.
- g) Records** - Documentation developed during the selection of workers process, Sections 3a – f, will be maintained in confidence on file at the Church.

## 4. Rules of Operation

- a) Two Adult Rule** - It is our goal that a minimum of two unrelated adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are at Church, participating in programs and activities. 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. The Church does not allow a child to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity unless in a counseling situation.
- b) Open Door Policy** - 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 children, or at risk persons are inside the room.
- c) Teenage Workers** - We recognize that there may be times when it is necessary or desirable for workers who are themselves under age 18 to assist in caring for children during programs or activities. The following guidelines apply to teenage workers:
- Must be at least age 14,

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- Must be separated by 4 or more years in age,
- Must be under the supervision of an adult, and
- Must never be left alone with children.

**d) Check-out Procedure** -For children below third grade, a security check-out procedure will be followed. The child will be signed out by a parent or guardian. Christian Education Ministry representatives will be responsible for releasing the child to the care of a parent or guardian. Older children may be released without a parent or guardian to provide Worship Service support.

**e) Sick Child Policy** - Parents are encouraged to be considerate of other children when deciding whether to place a child under the Church's care. In general, children with the following symptoms should NOT be dropped off:

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

Children who are observed by our workers to be ill will be separated from other children and the parent or guardian will be contacted to request that the child be picked up for the day.

**f) Medications Policy** - It is the policy of the Church to not administer either prescription or non-prescription medications to the children under our care, without written instructions and consent of the parent or guardian. Any medication brought to the Church will be provided to the Church worker for administering. No child will self-administer any medication.

Parents of children with potentially life-threatening conditions (such as asthma or severe allergic reactions) should address their situation with the Christian Education Ministry Chairperson to develop a plan of action.

**g) Posting of Photos** - No identifying photos of children or at risk persons will be posted without first obtaining written permission from the person or parent/guardian.

**h) Restroom Guidelines** – The main doors to the restrooms in the Sunday School shall always remain open when used by children. Workers should check the bathroom first to make sure that it is empty, and then allow the children inside. The workers should then remain outside the bathroom door and escort the children back to the classroom. If a child is taking longer than seems necessary, the worker should call the child's name. If a child requires assistance, the workers should prop open the bathroom door, and leave the stall door open as they assist the child. Similar care and concern for children and at risk persons should be taken for all single-use bathrooms.

**i) Driving Church Members** – Church members are allowed to drive children or at risk persons to or from a Church event, when directed by a Church Ministry representative, if the driver is at least 18 years of age, has been a driver for at least 3 years, has a valid driver's license, the vehicle is registered and has up-to-date insurance coverage and the driver has completed the Selection of Workers process, Section 3.

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## 5. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

Child abuse between child and worker 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, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- **Neglect** – depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

Any suspected issue with of any section of this Policy should be reported to the Pastor, or the Safe Church Representative. Responses to all allegations of abuse to children or at risk persons will conform to state and federal laws.

In the event that an incident of abuse or neglect is alleged to have occurred at this Church or during Church sponsored programs or activities, the following steps shall be taken by the Safe Church Representative:

1. The parent or guardian of the child will be notified.
2. The worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children pending an investigation and instructed to remain away from the premises during the investigation.
3. Civil authorities will be notified and the Church will comply with the state's requirements regarding mandatory reporting of abuse as the law then exists. The Church will fully cooperate with the investigation of the incident by civil authorities.
4. The Church's 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 Safe Church Representative is responsible for reporting the suspicious activity or allegation, unless they are alleged to be involved, in which case the Church Council, with the advice of the Pastor, will select another Safe Church Representative. The Safe Church Representative will be the Church spokesperson to the media concerning incidents of abuse or neglect The Church will seek the advice of legal counsel before responding to media inquiries or releasing information to the congregation.
6. Pastoral care, including visitation and the Eucharist, may be provided for those who desire it, at the discretion of the Pastor.

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7. Any person who is not found innocent of the alleged abuse or misconduct will be removed from their position working with children or youth, or at risk person.
8. Records and documents developed as part of responses to allegations of abuse will be maintained in the Church as confidential.

### **6. Training**

The Church will provide training on this child protection policy to all new workers and will strive to provide opportunities for additional training classes or events on an annual basis. All workers are strongly encouraged to attend these training events. Records and documents developed during the screening process will be maintained on file in the Church as confidential.