

St. Peter's Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy

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INTRODUCTION

St. Peter's Lutheran Church recognizes that there is a growing problem of child abuse in our society and has designed this policy to address the issue. It is the church's goal to provide a safe, caring and trusting atmosphere where children can learn and grow. Through the implementation of our policy, we hope to heighten awareness and reduce the risk of child abuse, whether it is physical, sexual or verbal. It is also our intent to protect staff and volunteers against false allegations.

Any incident that compromises a child's well-being will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately, consistent with Maryland's Public Law. St. Peter's will utilize resources within the Church and those of the appropriate government agencies to ensure the protection of all parties in an allegation.

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II. DEFINITIONS

Child – Anyone under the age of 18 years old.

Vulnerable Adult – Any adult over the age of 18 years who is physically and/or mentally disabled.

Employee - A person called by or hired to work for the Church for salary/wages or is paid by other arrangement.

Volunteer – A person who provides services to the Church and receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages or other benefits.

Youth Worker – A person who works with children and/or youth. The term youth worker applies to both employees and volunteers.

Abuse – The physical or mental injury of a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for the supervision of a child, or by any household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is significantly harmed or at risk of being significantly harmed; or sexual abuse of a child whether physical injuries are sustained or not. This includes any sexual contact with or exploitation between an adult or caregiver and a child even if the victim gives consent. Abuse is defined by the statutes set forth by the local Department of Social Services.

III. PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

A. Building Standards

- a. Windows in all classroom doors and/or doors kept open.

B. Program Supervision Guidelines

- a. Release all children only to parent or designated adult.
 - i. Assign at least 2 adults to each classroom and youth event.
 - ii. Assign one substitute teacher to be available if one of the two is missing.
 - iii. If a substitute teacher can't be found the class must be cancelled or combined with another.
 - iv. If an adult needs to leave in the course of the class or event, the door must be propped open.
- b. Obtain permission slips before youth are transported as part of a church activity.
- c. Obtain permission slips for youth to participate in any overnight activity that takes place on or away from church premises. At least two youth workers over the age of 21 must be present for the duration of the event. Overnight co-ed activities will be chaperoned by both male and female youth workers.

C. Bathroom Procedures During Activities

- a. Ask parents to take children to the bathroom prior to leaving them under church's supervision.
- b. When escorting a child to the bathroom alone, prop the main door open. When escorting a child to the bathroom alone, if the bathroom has multiple stalls, prop the main door open. If the child is using a single-person bathroom, the child is to enter alone and lock the door. On these doors, there is a safety feature that the door can only be locked from the inside and the door must be shut prior to locking in order to ensure the door remains locked. The adult will wait for the child in the hallway outside of the bathroom. Keys are available in the case of an emergency to unlock the door from the outside if necessary.

IV. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The Child Protection Policy Team shall consist of the Pastor, the Youth Coordinator and the Faith Formation Chairperson. The Team reports to the Faith Formation Committee.

A. Employee Hiring Procedures

- a. The **Child Protection Policy** will be reviewed with all prospective employees to ensure that the applicant has an understanding of the information.
- b. All newly hired employees will be informed that any and all accusations for abuse will be taken seriously and investigated by the proper authorities, both within and outside the church. They must sign the *Employee & Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement* (Attachment A) and it must be dated and witnessed.

- c. Criminal background checks and fingerprinting should be completed within 60 days of hire. Unfavorable results may result in termination.
- d. Background checks and fingerprinting will be completed every 5 years.

B. Volunteer Selection Guidelines

- a. Prior to consideration for volunteering, the applicant must be an active participant of St. Peter's congregation and ministries for a minimum of six months.
- b. The *Volunteer Application* (Attachment B) will be completed by all prospective volunteers. Volunteers must be 18 years old or older.
- c. A copy of the **Child Protection Policy** will be shared with all prospective volunteers. The *Employee & Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement* (Attachment A) will be read, signed, dated and witnessed annually.
- d. The application will be evaluated and references checked by the Parish Education Committee. When the applicant is approved by the Parish Education Committee, they will receive necessary paperwork to submit to a criminal background check and fingerprinting.
- e. The criminal background check and fingerprinting must be completed prior to volunteer start date.
- f. If unfavorable results occur, approval to volunteer will be left at the discretion of the Pastor and Faith Formation Committee. No one who has been convicted of a crime involving misconduct with children will be allowed to work with children or youth at St. Peter's Lutheran Church.
- g. Community Volunteers (i.e. Vacation Bible School) will be asked to follow **St. Peter's Child Protection Policy** and sign the *Employee & Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement* at the beginning of each activity session. Community volunteers may be requested to complete fingerprinting and a background check at the discretion of the Pastor, Youth Coordinator, and Day School Principal or Faith Formation Chairperson for the school or church respectively.
- h. Background checks and fingerprinting will be completed every 5 years.

Background Check and Fingerprinting Fees

1. The Sunday School account will be responsible for the necessary fees for Sunday School and Confirmation teachers.
2. The Youth account will be responsible for the necessary fees for all volunteers that work with the middle and high school youth programs.
3. The Sunday School account will be responsible for the necessary fees for all nursery volunteers requested.

V. EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER SAFEGUARDS

- A. All information gathered on applications, interviews and references will remain confidential. Information will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the church office.
- B. Any suspected charges of abuse will only be shared with the proper authorities, Pastor and Church Council President.
- C. The reporter's identity will be kept in strict confidence unless required by law.
- D. All employees and volunteers will receive the **Child Protection Policy**. Each person will read and sign it annually.
- E. A copy of the **Child Protection Policy** will be made available to the congregation on the church website. It will be made available to anyone who wishes a paper copy.
- F. A copy of the **Child Protection Policy** will be posted in all the classrooms and childcare rooms.
- G. The congregation will be informed and reminded of this policy annually by a member of the Faith Formation Committee at the semi-annual congregational meeting and it will be included in the annual report.

VI. REPORTING CHILD ABUSE

- A. Resolve all doubts in favor of reporting. If you are really unsure whether the suspected abuse has occurred, call and discuss the case anonymously with a representative of the local Department of Social Services (410) 853-3000. However, if you are advised that a report need not be filed, be sure to obtain the representative's name and make a record of the call. A written record of the call will be kept on file. All actions concerning suspected abuse will be reported to the Pastor and Church Council President promptly.
- B. Everyone has a legal (as well as moral) responsibility to contact law enforcement or the Department of Social Services if they have reason to believe a child has been subjected to abuse. We ask that oral reports to the authorities be made as soon as possible and that the Incident Report (Attachment C) be made and kept on file.
- C. If you suspect abuse has occurred on school or church property or during a church sponsored activity, it is important that you contact the Pastor in addition to notifying the Department of Social Services. The Pastor will notify the Church Council President of the suspected abuse as soon as possible.
- D. Because of the highly sensitive nature of the allegations of abuse, we ask that you cooperate fully with the investigation by the authorities. Please do not discuss your suspicions with others within the church except as provided for in this policy.
- E. Unless you suspect that the child abuse has occurred on school or church property or during a church sponsored activity, you do not need to report your concerns to anyone within the church. You do, however, need to report your

suspicious to the Department of Social Services or the Baltimore County Police.

- F. Any person who, in good faith, makes or participates in making a report of abuse or neglect or participates in an investigation or a resulting proceeding is given immunity from civil liability or criminal penalty under Maryland law.

VII. RESPONDING TO ALLEGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE

- A. St. Peter's Lutheran Church recognizes that all allegations of child abuse must be taken seriously. At the same time, we are aware that situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality. If St. Peter's Lutheran Church is notified by the Department of Social Services or local law enforcement that they have received a report of child abuse within the Church, the following steps will be taken:
 - i. The Church Council President and Pastor will be notified. The Church Council President will immediately contact the Church insurance carrier. The Church Council President will request that the carrier make a determination whether it will provide legal representation. If no legal representation is provided, a determination must be made by the Church Council whether to obtain the services of an attorney.
 - ii. Full cooperation must be given to the state and local authorities. In-depth investigations should be left to professionals who are familiar with such cases. The Police Department and the Social Service Agency will be provided with a copy of this policy.
 - iii. If appropriate, during the course of the investigation and after the allegations have been resolved, the Church Council will consider bringing in professional assistance to help the St. Peter's Lutheran Church congregation and community address any lingering effects of the incident.
 - iv. Follow advice and recommendations of the investigating authorities about whether any persons within the Church, such as parents of the other children, should be notified of the allegations of abuse.
 - v. Offer pastoral support and counseling if parents desire assistance.
 - vi. The accused person must be treated with dignity and support. If the accused is a Church worker, he or she will be relieved temporarily of all duties until authorities have completed their investigation. If the person is a paid employee, he or she will be placed on administrative leave until the allegations are resolved. Payment will be determined by the Church Council on a case-by-case basis.
 - vii. Any contacts with the media will only be handled by a person designated as the spokesperson for St. Peter's Lutheran Church. If a spokesperson is needed, he or she will be selected by the Church Council and will handle all contacts with the media and the Church concerning the matter in a discreet, informed and diplomatic way. The designated spokesperson will also be responsible for preparing and releasing a statement, which includes the information that St. Peter's

Lutheran Church has a Child Protection Policy in place and takes every reasonable precaution to prevent any abuse from occurring. In light of the sensitive and serious nature of any allegations of abuse, please refer all media contacts to the designated spokesperson.

- viii. Document all steps which are taken in response to the incident. A written record should be prepared promptly recording the date, times, participants, content of any meetings, discussions, telephone contacts, and media correspondence, including but not limited to email, text message, and social media, concerning the incident(s) and investigation (Attachment C).
- B. An individual currently working with children at St. Peter's Lutheran Church is obliged to inform the Pastor and Church Council as soon as any allegation is made against them. When the issue is resolved, the individual must supply a copy of the letter from the Department of Social Services stating the finding of their investigation. Upon receipt of the letter, the Church Council will make a decision upon the appropriateness of that individual working with children at St. Peter's Lutheran Church.
- C. Anyone currently under investigation for child abuse or neglect will not be permitted to work with children or youth at St. Peter's until the issue is resolved.

ST. PETER’S LUTHERAN CHURCH
EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER
ABUSE AWARENESS AGREEMENT

I have read and understand the St. Peter’s Lutheran Church *Child Protection Policy* and support the efforts of the Church to make this a safe place for children. To this end, I agree with and pledge to abide by the following statements:

1. If I have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse, I will not volunteer my services at any St. Peter’s Lutheran Church sponsored activity or program for children or youth. I agree to disclose all previous criminal convictions involving physical or sexual child abuse.
2. I will keep cognizant of the activities of children and adults in the Church, follow established reporting procedures and cooperate in resolving any alleged incident of abuse that may occur.
3. I am aware of situations in which I could be putting myself at risk of being accused of inappropriate actions, or in which I could be putting a child at risk of being abused. In addition, I will take every measure to avoid such situations. I will also participate in abuse awareness opportunities the Church provides.
4. Adult survivors of childhood sexual and physical abuse need the love and acceptance of the Church family. If I have such a history, I will discuss my desire to work with children and youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to employment/volunteer work.
5. I will provide character references and church membership information before being approved for working with children. I am aware that references will be kept on file.
6. If I am involved in any allegation of abuse on or off church property, I will notify the Pastor and Church Council President immediately. I am aware that I will not be allowed to work with children or youth until I can provide official paperwork of the resolution of abuse case. I am aware that it is at the discretion of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church whether I may work with children and youth again.

My signature on this form indicates my agreement with the *Child Protection Policy* and the above statements, and my pledge to abide by them.

Signature & Print Name

Date

Witness

Date

VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

This application is to be completed by all applicants for positions involving the supervising and custody of children. It will assist the church in providing a safe and secure environment for all children and youth. The term "child" or "children" includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years.

Date: _____

Full Name: _____

Other names previously used (if applicable) _____

Address: _____ City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Home phone _____ Cell Phone _____ Work Phone _____

Driver's License # _____ State _____ Exp. Date _____

Date of Birth _____ Social Security # _____

Position applying for _____

Are you a member of this church? Yes ___ No ___

Please list the names and locations of other churches that you have attended regularly within the last 10 years.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

List the name, address and phone number of (3) personal references. References may not be relatives or someone that resides in the same household.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____

During your lifetime, have you ever been arrested for molesting or abusing a child, accused of physical assault or a sexual offense of any nature? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, please explain _____

Have you ever been prosecuted for child abuse or molestation? Yes ___ No ___

If yes, please explain _____

Are you willing to be photographed for confidential church personnel records? Yes ___ No ___

ST. PETER’S LUTHERAN CHURCH
VOLUNTEER APPLICATION FOR WORK WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Applicant Statement

I hereby certify that I read and completed the above application. My answers are true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

I give permission for the church to maintain my photograph on file and conduct a criminal-court background check on me now and at regular intervals. If allowed to work with children, I agree to be bound by the bylaws and policies of St. Peter’s Lutheran Church.

I hereby authorize all persons, schools, organizations and law enforcement agencies to supply St. Peter’s Lutheran Church with any information concerning my character or background in connection with working with children and I hereby release them from liability or damages which may occur as result of their response to this request.

I authorize St. Peter’s Lutheran Church to supply my service records, in whole or part, to any prospective or future organization or agency with legal and proper interest in them. I understand that if allowed to serve, that any misrepresentation made by me in this application shall be considered sufficient cause for my dismissal without advance notice. I have been appraised of and support the church’s position regarding the problem of child abuse and neglect.

Signature _____ Date _____

ST. PETER'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
INCIDENT REPORT

Today's Date _____

Date of Incident _____

Location of Incident _____

Time Incident Occurred _____

Student(s) Involved _____

Age of Student(s) _____

Witnesses (if any) _____

Summary of Incident:

Completed by _____ signature
_____ print

Received by _____ signature
_____ print

Date _____

Was this reported to the Department of Social Services (DSS)? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please provide the following information...

Name of DSS representative _____

Date and time of call _____

If no, please explain why it was not reported _____
