

**BETHLEHEM LUTHERAN CHURCH ELCA
SAFE CHURCH COMMUNITY POLICY**

W8267 Highway 33 East, P.O. Box 606, Portage, WI 53901
608-742-8502, www.bethlehemlcportage.org

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Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA Safe Church Community Policy

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Contact Person (s):	Lead Pastor and Church Council President

Adopted March 16, 2017, by Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA
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608-742-8502, www.bethlehemplcportage.org

A Commitment to Sanctuary

In recognition of the spiritual and public trust given to this faith community, Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA is committed to being a true sanctuary, both nurturing and protecting its members and visitors.

Worship of God requires openness, trust, intimacy, vulnerability, and a safe, supportive community. Abuse and harassment are, therefore, violations of the faith shared by this congregation. Accordingly, the congregation will maintain official policies and procedures which assure prevention of instances of abuse, appropriate intervention into alleged incidents of abusive behavior, and care for all involved. These procedures will be reviewed by the Personnel Committee and approved by the Church Council annually to correspond to changes in civil law and the community.

Vision

Ancient Bethlehem is known as the first place which sheltered the infant Christ child. Under the care of his loving parents, Jesus was protected from those who sought to harm him. Inspired by the place from which we take our name, Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church seeks to provide a safe and secure environment for youth/vulnerable adults who participate in our programs and activities. By implementing the below practices, our goal is to protect the youth/vulnerable adults of Bethlehem from incidents of misconduct or inappropriate behavior while also protecting our staff and volunteers (workers) from false accusations.

Definitions

This document is the Safe Church Community Policy ("Policy"). For purposes of this Policy, the term "child", "children" or "youth" includes all persons under the age of eighteen (18) years. The term "vulnerable adult" includes any adult who has a physical or mental condition that substantially impairs his/her ability to care for his/her needs. The term "worker" includes both paid and volunteer persons who work with youth/vulnerable adults. Bethlehem Lutheran Church of Portage, Wisconsin for all purposes of this Policy is also referred to as "BLC" or "Church".

In envisioning how we might live out our vision of sanctuary, we determined that:

- Youth/vulnerable adults can grow in faith and know God only if they are physically and emotionally safe at church.
- Parents need to feel assured of their children's safety in all church activities, and of the church's commitment to provide for their child's safety, in order to focus on worship and their own spiritual growth.
- Staff and volunteers need to be equipped, protected, supported and accountable as they lead and nurture youth/vulnerable adults.

Background

We of BLC are motivated because we are entrusted with the spiritual, educational and moral development of our youth/vulnerable adults. The Church Council of BLC has worked to develop policies and procedures to keep our congregation a safe sanctuary for our youth/vulnerable adults. Measures designed to protect our youth/vulnerable adults may also help protect our congregation from unfounded charges and legal liability. These policies and procedures are designed to enhance our service to Christ. This goal will direct our implementation and future modification of these policies and procedures.

Creating a Safe Church Community

We have developed a strategy to help ensure that the youth/vulnerable adults entrusted to us are safe at our Church, that parents are assured of their safety, and that adults who work with them are equipped, protected, supported, and held accountable. Since our staff and volunteers are often in situations where they are working and talking with youth/vulnerable adults, they may be the first ones to recognize a problem or concern facing a youth/vulnerable adult. Our Policy, therefore, is designed not only to protect families but also to provide our volunteers and staff with resources to help them report suspected abuse. Our strategy involves a plan for:

- **Worker selection;**
- **Worker training, including Standards of Behavior (as provided in this Policy);**
- **Reporting of suspected abuse;**
- **Record keeping; and**
- **Limiting contact with known/convicted child/vulnerable adult offenders.**
Known/convicted child/vulnerable adult offenders will be allowed in the church to participate in worship and attend functions and programs (including Sunday School program performances in the sanctuary) and interact with members. However, they will not be allowed to attend youth-only activities (youth gatherings, lock-ins, Sunday School classes, confirmation classes, etc.) without the prior approval of all parents/guardians of the youth that will be present at the activity and by following the requirements of their probation in regard to proper supervision and/or presence of mentor(s).

Worker Selection: We Want To Make Sure This is A Good Match

All who work on behalf of BLC with any youth under the age of 18 or vulnerable adults will be properly selected, screened, trained, and supervised, not only to minimize the risk of child/vulnerable adult abuse at BLC by volunteer or paid workers, but also to honor BLC's

commitment to helping people discover their God-given gifts and apply them in God's service. This may include youth under the age of 18 who work with younger youth.

Levels of Supervision

The levels of supervision of program areas will be as follows:

- Lead Pastor
- Administrative Assistant(s), Interns (if any), Music Director(s), Youth Director(s), Part-Time Staff Member(s)
- Associate Pastor / Lay Associate — Confirmation leaders, youth leaders, chaperones, drivers, and teachers.

Screening Procedures for Primary Workers

Screening procedures for primary workers are established for workers who, in the normal course of their duties, are expected to be alone for any period of time with one or more youth/vulnerable adults work in a supervisory capacity on our Church grounds and offsite church-related activities. This includes, but is not limited to, all paid staff, Pastor(s), confirmation leaders and teachers, drama directors, nursery staff, volunteers, choir directors, lay ministers, interns, youth director, and any and all paid positions and volunteers.

When selecting youth workers, we cannot guarantee that an individual will be an effective and safe youth leader, but the selection process helps us gather information to make an informed decision. Therefore, we ask that:

- Volunteers ideally be actively involved in the congregation before applying for a position in which they are expected to be primary workers for any period of time with one or more youth/vulnerable adults.
- Volunteers and staff, before they begin work with youth/vulnerable adults, complete the Youth Worker Registration forms (included in the back of this Policy) and have a background check conducted, evaluated and approved by at least two of the following: Lead Pastor, Church Council President, Church Council Vice President or the Sunday School Superintendent.
- Potential youth/vulnerable adult workers provide two references who are acquainted with the applicant's work with youth/vulnerable adults.
- The Lead Pastor, or his or her designee, may conduct an interview with the potential worker.
- Volunteers and staff age 18 and over, participating in BLC's youth ministries shall have a background check performed. No one will be accepted who has had a criminal sexual or physical abuse violation or conviction.

All information will be kept in strict confidence. See **Record Keeping** for rules regarding record access and security.

Screening Procedures for Secondary Workers

Screening for secondary workers are established for workers who are not expected to be alone with youth/vulnerable adults. This includes, but is not limited to, Bible Study leaders and workers, dinner helpers. For that individual, we ask that:

- Potential workers complete the *Youth Worker Registration* forms.
- The Lead Pastor, or his or her designee, may conduct an interview with the potential worker.

Supervising Youth Workers

The two-adult rule is our goal when working with youth/vulnerable adults. Situations in which an adult is completely alone with one or more youth/vulnerable adults are to be avoided.

- During Confirmation, mid-week programs, Bible Study, etc., a second adult may check into the class and meeting rooms.
- Counseling should be as confidential as possible without sacrificing safety.
- Planned individual contact outside the Church property should occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian.

Training Staff and Volunteers Who Work With Youth/Vulnerable Adults

Volunteers and staff who have been accepted to work with youth/vulnerable adults primary capacity will receive training which includes:

- A description of this Policy, including the procedure defined for reporting suspected abuse.
- An explanation of the expectations of persons who work with youth/vulnerable adults, and
- Basic information about child/vulnerable adult abuse and neglect so that these persons can understand the issues and be alert to signs of abuse in the youth/vulnerable adults with whom they work. Primary and secondary workers must attend and/or complete at least one training session every year.

Expectations of Volunteers and Staff

Each volunteer or staff member working with youth/vulnerable adults at BLC is expected to:

- Be a role model for youth/vulnerable adults,
- Organize meaningful experiences,
- Be alert to signs of potential child/vulnerable adult abuse or neglect,
- Adhere to the specific guidelines for his/her position as specified in the training program.

If a volunteer or staff member working with youth/vulnerable adults becomes aware of a violation of this policy in the course of a youth activity or activity involving vulnerable adults, they are to promptly notify the proper authorities. If the circumstance is severe or may become abusive (such as drugs, guns, and/or known/convicted child/vulnerable adult offender are present), the leadership should work to segregate the youth/vulnerable adults from potential harm and notify the Lead Pastor, Church Council President, adult leader, or call the authorities as warranted.

In the case of a known/convicted child/vulnerable adult offender, if they arrive at an event without the proper permission to be present:

1. They will be asked to leave by the adult leader.
2. If they do not leave or create a disturbance, police will need to be notified by the adult leader so authorities can check if they are breaking parole or probation.

In addition to the above expectations, BLC has developed **Standards of Behavior** (as provided in this Policy) for all individuals working with youth/vulnerable adults on behalf of our Church. The standards are designed to protect youth/vulnerable adults, adults, families, and the Church.

Standards of Behavior

A. Positive Discipline

Discipline used in Church activities should be positive, respectful, and caring. Physical punishment and emotional abuse are not permitted. Volunteers and staff should be alert to the physical and emotional health of the youth/vulnerable adults with whom they work.

B. Open Door Policy

Staff and volunteers should work with youth/vulnerable adults in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter - not behind closed or locked doors. Parents and guardians are always welcome to attend classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, and events.

C. Transportation

Volunteer drivers should be accompanied by a second person (such as another adult, a teen assistant, or the driver's child) when dropping off or picking up minors/vulnerable adults unless prior approval has been obtained from the parent or guardian. Safety of the child/vulnerable adult is always the paramount consideration.

D. Respect of Privacy

Adult leaders and staff need to respect the privacy of minors/vulnerable adults and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Situations requiring privacy include using restrooms, changing clothes, and taking showers. Adults need to protect their own privacy in similar situations. Unforeseen circumstances may require an adult leader or staff to contact the parent or guardian to alert them of an issue.

E. Overnight Accommodations

A minimum of two adult leaders should be present at any overnight activity. If youth/vulnerable adult participants include males and females, ideally the adult leaders

would be males and females. If this condition cannot be met, the event will proceed only upon approval of the Lead Pastor. When minors/vulnerable adults and adults must share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room for the sake of safety and/or cost-efficiency, parents will be informed prior to the commencement of the activity. An adult should not occupy the same bed as a minor/vulnerable adult unless it is the child/vulnerable adult of the parent of the same gender.

F. Housing

A minimum of two adult leaders should be present at any private home activities. When private homes are used for events, the program staff or adult leader member will make final approval of all adults involved as hosts, hostesses, and chaperones. At least two youth/vulnerable adults must be present at the event.

G. Sexual Activity

No sexual activity is permitted. Sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual material, the exposure of sexual parts of the minor's/vulnerable adult's body and/or the adult's body or other sexual behaviors is strictly prohibited. Leaders will equally enforce zero tolerance of students as well.

H. Tobacco and Alcohol

While supervising youth/vulnerable adults on behalf of BLC, adult leaders and staff will not use tobacco or alcohol. When driving youth/vulnerable adults on behalf of the Church, adults will not be under the influence of alcohol or prescription or non-prescription medication that could impair the ability to drive safely. Leaders will equally enforce zero tolerance of students as well.

I. Illegal Substances, Firearms, or other weapons

The use or possession of illegal substances, firearms, or other weapons while supervising youth/vulnerable adults on behalf of BLC is strictly prohibited. Leaders will equally enforce zero tolerance of students as well.

What Is Abuse?

There are five types of child/vulnerable adult abuse*

1. **Physical** abuse is the deliberate physical injuring of a child/vulnerable adult.
2. **Sexual** abuse is the involvement of a child/vulnerable adult in any sexual act or situation for the gratification or benefit of another.
3. **Emotional** abuse is maltreatment which causes low self-esteem in a child/vulnerable adult undue fear or anxiety, or other damage to a child's/vulnerable adult's well-being caused by such acts as angry fault finding, humiliating and belittling a child/vulnerable adult mistakes or failures, and deliberate inattention to a child's/vulnerable adult's emotional needs.
4. **Neglect** is not providing food, clothing, shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, education, supervision, or other basic necessities.
5. **Financial Exploitation** is putting a child/vulnerable adult in a situation for financial gain of another person.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

Any individual who has reason to suspect abuse, or is aware of a potentially unsafe condition that could lead to abuse, should immediately report that information to any of the following: the Pastor or the Church Council President. If the Pastor or Church Council President is not available, report to the adult leader member who should then make best efforts to follow up within 48 hours, but not later than one week, with a report to the Pastor or Church Council President. The individual may be asked to complete a written report describing the basis for his or her concern.

Also, if after going through the proper screening a youth/vulnerable adult worker is charged with conduct unacceptable to working with youth/vulnerable adults under this Policy, he or she is expected to self-report within 48 hours, but not later than one week, with a report to the Pastor or Church Council President.

Also, for purposes of reporting, a copy of Wisconsin Statutes 548.981(2) regarding mandated reporting is attached to this Policy for reference.

Record Keeping

The Church Secretary will keep the following materials on file for all persons covered by this Policy:

- Youth Worker Registration forms, including documentation of interview and references, if applicable.
- Documentation of training for primary workers and secondary workers.
- Results of criminal records check for primary workers.

Security and Responsibility for Maintaining Records

Records on youth/vulnerable adult workers will be kept in a locked file in a Church staff member's office and maintained by the Church Secretary under the direction of the Lead Pastor. Access is limited to the Lead Pastor, Church Council President, and the Church Secretary.

Policy Compliance

A member of the Personnel Committee and a member of the Executive Committee of the Church Council will conduct an annual audit in the month of February to ensure that all responsible personnel are compliant with this Policy.

Questions and Answers

People Covered

Who should go through the Safe Church Training Program?

All adults and youth who work with youth/vulnerable adults on an ongoing basis should take part in the program. This is defined as Primary and Secondary workers.

What about the one-time volunteer?

People do not need to go through the process if: (1) they are working with youth/vulnerable adults on a one-time basis; and (2) a staff member or volunteer who has gone through the process is also present. Volunteers who have not gone through the Safe Church Training

Program should not be put in situations where they will work alone with youth/vulnerable adults and without supervision. Also, as previously provided, known/convicted child/vulnerable adult offenders will not be allowed to attend youth/vulnerable adult-only activities (youth gatherings, lock-ins, Sunday School classes, confirmation classes, etc.) without the prior approval of all parents/guardians of the youth/vulnerable adult that will be present at the activity and by following the requirements of their probation in regard to proper supervision and/or presence of mentor(s).

What if volunteers or staff say they have had background checks and/or youth protection training as part of their jobs or experience in other programs?

Results of criminal records checks are confidential and, therefore, cannot be shared among agencies. The potential worker must authorize another criminal records check for his/her work at BLC. Youth Protection Training is specific to BLC and must be completed by all volunteers.

The Process

Why do we have to do a Criminal Records Check on volunteers?

We require the Criminal Records Check because it provides essential information about the applicant's background. We also require it because it protects the congregation. Here's how:

- It's easy - it takes only a moment of the volunteer's time to authorize the check and a background check agency performs it at low cost for non-profit organizations.
- Requiring a Criminal Records Check is a powerful deterrent to the career abuser.
- Career abusers look for places where they can have easy access to youth/vulnerable adults. With so many other community organizations doing careful screening, Churches without screening policies may be at an increased risk.

How much time should we give staff/volunteers to complete the Safe Church Training Program?

Ideally, individuals would not work with youth/vulnerable adults until they attend the training and their records have been received and assessed. However, due to scheduling realities, this might not be possible. BLC will schedule training opportunities such that workers may attend within six months of the time they begin their work or more frequently as necessary. Failure to complete the Safe Church Training Program after two reminders will require, the volunteer or staff member (Primary and secondary workers) to cease their participation in youth/vulnerable adult activities.

What about retraining?

A full training session will be scheduled each fall for all youth/vulnerable adult workers, and at other times throughout the year, as needed. All youth/vulnerable adult workers shall attend the training every year. A master list of completed training will be maintained in the Church office.

BLC's Policy is adapted from Christ Lutheran Church of Byron, Minnesota's Safe Church Community Policy adopted January 17, 2008 and effective March 2009. The resources cited in their policy are:

"Our policy is adapted from *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*, published by Church Law & Tax Report; *Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities*, written by Bethel Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Madison, WI.; *Parish Protection Program for Children and Youth*, published by the South Central Wisconsin Synod of the ELCA; and, *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, published by the Crime Prevention Center, State of California.

Other works consulted:

- *Policy 99-001 Statement of Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct by Members of the Clergy and Rostered Laypersons*, adopted by the Sierra Pacific Synod.
- *It Should Never Happen Here: A Guide for Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse in Ministry*, by Ernest J. Zarra III, 1997 Baker Books
- *Better Safe Than Sued: Keeping Out of Trouble in Youth Ministry*, by Jack Crabtree, 1998 Group Publishing Safe Haven for Children - A Resource for Congregations, 1998 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- *Safe Volunteers: Effective Screening Techniques to Minimize the Risk of Abuse by Volunteers*, The Journal of Volunteer Administration, Summer 1994
- *Out of Harms Way: the "Two Adult Rule,"* Praxis, September, 1998, published by the Sierra Pacific Synod.
- *ELCA Youth Ministry Help Sheet - Ensure Safe Boundaries in Youth Ministry*, 1998 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America/Division for Congregational Ministries - Youth Ministries
- *Volunteer and Child Protection Policy*, Los Altos Methodist Church, October, 1996
- *Policy and Procedures for Volunteers in Children and Youth Ministries*, First Presbyterian Church of Burlingame, September, 1998
- *Advent Lutheran Church Policy for Creating a Safe Church Community*, Advent Lutheran Church, Morgan Hill,

This Safe Church Community Policy for Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA has been adapted from the Christ Lutheran Church, Byron, Minnesota Safe Community Policy and Hope Lutheran Church, San Mateo, California, Safe Community Policy. The Safe Church Community Policy is intended solely for the use of Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA in performing its functions as a religious body. It is not a contract, agreement, promise, or undertaking by the Church to do or refrain from doing anything. It is not intended that the Policy be imposed as rigid law, binding the Church or others; rather, the Policy must be interpreted and applied compassionately in accordance with the theological and Biblical principles of the Gospel. Any actions or decisions by the Church in connection with the Policy are to be undertaken at the Church's sole discretion, in accordance with the theology and ecclesiology of the ELCA, and in the exercise of Bethlehem Lutheran Church ELCA's constitutional rights as a religious body.