

# **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY OF TREE OF LIFE LUTHERAN CHURCH**

## **A. Mission Statement Regarding This Child Protection Policy (CPP)**

At Baptism, parents and sponsors promise to help baptized children live in the covenant of Baptism and in communion with the Church. Parents and sponsors promise faithfully to bring children to the services of God's house, to teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, to place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and provide for their instruction in the Christian faith. The purpose of this congregation's ministry with children and youth is to support parents in fulfilling these responsibilities and to invite into participation those children and youth who have not yet been baptized. This congregation assembles weekly around Word and Sacrament. This community of faith provides opportunities for children and youth to learn about Christian faith, to develop an identity as part of the Christian community, and to serve others, following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This congregation's ministry with children and youth begins by striving to provide a safe environment with caring and effective leaders. In an effort to promote this safe environment, the congregation binds itself to the CPP described in this document.

In order to protect the safety of our children, youth and adults, all employees and volunteers will be required to subscribe to this policy.

## **B. Definitions**

**B.1) Child abuse.**--The term "child abuse" shall mean intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:

- (1) Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- (2) Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
- (3) Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act.
- (4) Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
- (5) Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- (6) Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
- (7) Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
- (8) Engaging in any of the following recent acts:
  - (i) Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
  - (ii) Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
  - (iii) Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
  - (iv) Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.
  - (v) Interfering with the breathing of a child.

(vi) Causing a child to be present at a location while a violation of 18 Pa.C.S. § 7508.2 (relating to operation of methamphetamine laboratory) is occurring, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.

(vii) Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the actor knows or reasonably should have known:

(A) Is required to register as a Tier II or Tier III sexual offender under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 97 Sub ch. H (relating to registration of sexual offenders), where the victim of the sexual offense was under 18 years of age when the crime was committed.

(B) Has been determined to be a sexually violent predator under 42 Pa.C.S. § 9799.24 (relating to assessments) or any of its predecessors.

(C) Has been determined to be a sexually violent delinquent child as defined in 42 Pa.C.S. § 9799.12 (relating to definitions).

(9) Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.

## B 2.)

a. A **child or youth** is any person considered a minor under the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; that is, a person who is under 18 years of age. A person who is incompetent is considered to be a child under this Policy irrespective of his/her age.

b. The **Administrative Pastor** is the Pastor or Senior Pastor under “call” to the congregation. In the absence of a “called” Pastor or Senior Pastor, the Congregation Council shall appoint a Pastor (Associate, interim, etc.) to be the AP until a “called” Pastor or Senior Pastor assumes his/her duties in the congregation.

c. **Response Team – Administrative Pastor, Congregation Council President**

d. **Approved Adult** is anyone over 18 years of age who has satisfied all the requirements of the CPP. An Approved Adult can be a volunteer or an employee of the congregation

1. A **Volunteer** is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages or benefits.

A **Youth Volunteer** is anyone under 18 years of age who works under the supervision of an Approved Adult

Approved Adults shall include:

- Director of Youth and Family Ministries
- Assistant Youth Director
- Youth Ministry Workers
- Sunday School Teachers
- Vacation Bible School Administrator and workers
- Mentors
- Children’s Choir Directors
- Nursery Attendant (staff)
- Other ministries related to children

Approved Adult Criteria:

- Have experience working with children or demonstrate ability to learn, and are called by God to do His work
- Maintain active church participation in this congregation or a congregation of the Lower Susquehanna Synod for six months or more (the Administrative Pastor and Congregational Council President may waive the six month requirement after vetting

the adult through their former congregation by phone conversation with the former pastor and one other congregation member)

- Successfully complete the requirements of the CPP

**Individuals who fail to comply with the process or above criteria will not be approved. An absence from church participation of a year or more requires renewal of approval status.**

### **C. Application Process for an Approved Adult**

1. Participate in church activities and maintain an active church participation in this congregation .
2. Obtain a Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check and Child Abuse History Clearance by applying for online clearances @ [www.dhs.state.pa.us/findaform/childabusehistoryclearanceforms/index.htm](http://www.dhs.state.pa.us/findaform/childabusehistoryclearanceforms/index.htm) and provide printouts of the clearances to the church office. A new records check is required for all applicants and must be renewed every **five** years. Applicants that have clearances from another organization or institution can supply a copy of those clearances if they are less than a year old. All employees of the church and anyone who has not lived in the state of Pennsylvania continuously for the past ten years, also need an FBI fingerprint check.
  - a. Fees for the FBI fingerprint clearance will be paid for/reimbursed by the church unless the individual offers to cover the cost.
3. Complete the Voluntary Disclosure Statement
4. Sign a the Child Protection Covenant acknowledging that the applicant has read and understood the CPP and agrees to comply with it.
5. View the volunteer mandated reporter video available on the church website
6. Clearances and related papers will be locked in a confidential file under the jurisdiction of the Administrative Pastor and Congregational Council President.

### **D. Appropriate Behavioral Guidelines**

To ensure that a nurturing Christian environment for children and youth is maintained within the congregation, to protect children, youth and adults who participate in activities sponsored by the church from sexual and/or physical abuse or mental injury, and to protect congregation members from false allegations of abuse, the congregation has adopted the following guidelines:

1. **Child Abuse Prohibited:** Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation's children and youth shall not violate that responsibility by causing, permitting or participating in non-accidental physical injury, non-accidental mental injury, sexual abuse or serious physical neglect of children.
2. **Sexual Abuse Prohibited:** Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation's children and youth shall not violate that responsibility by engaging in any activities that fall under definitions of sexual abuse or exploitation as set forth above. .
3. **Two Approved Adult Rule:** Two Approved Adults must be present during any children's church activity, one of which may be a circulating supervisor or administrator. At least one adult must be age 21 or older.

4. **Empty Room Rule:** After an activity, the Approved Adults should check rooms to ensure that all participants have vacated the room and that the lights are off.
5. **Drop Off/Pick Up Rule:** Parents must drop off and pick up their child(ren) at the room where the child's activity is occurring (for fifth graders and below). Parents are responsible for safe drop off and pick up of their child(ren) above sixth grade. Parents may authorize another adult to pick up their child(ren) by giving permission in writing or verbally to the appropriate Approved Adult in charge of the activity/event. Two adults, one of which must be an Approved Adult, should be present with children and youth until they are picked up. One of these adults may be a circulating supervisor or administrator.
6. **Permission Slips:** Children and youth must have permission to participate in any overnight activity and any activity that takes place away from church grounds. That permission must be in writing, signed by a parent or guardian who has had advance notice of the event details. It must identify the activity in which the child and youth will be participating. A list of Approved Adults who will serve as chaperones will be available at the beginning of each activity.
7. **Parental Consent Form:** Used only under specific circumstances as approved by the Administrative Pastor for example, private music or guitar lessons.
8. **Overnight Rule:** Overnight activities involving children shall be chaperoned by at least two Approved Adults. If the event involves mixed gender children, then there must be at least two Approved Adults of each gender.
9. **Ratio of children to adults:** Should be eight to one for overnight activities and twelve to one for other activities.
10. **Transportation of Children:** When children and youth are carpooled for church activities they shall be transported in groups, and the driver must be 21 years of age or older and an Approved Adult.
11. **Expressions of Affection:** True expressions of affection toward children can be a manifestation of Christ's love for all of us. A kind word of encouragement to a child or a pat on the back can be a small but significant act for both the adult and the child. That being said, adults must use caution and common sense when physically expressing affection toward children.
  - Respect a child's refusal of affection.
  - Never make a child feel uncomfortable.
  - Be aware of appropriate hand placement. A child or an observer could misinterpret a pat on the bottom or a bear hug.
  - Note that a body-to-body embrace, a touch on private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit), or any type of kiss is inappropriate.
12. **Participation Covenant:** *Can be utilized when an event is sponsored by our church that encompasses other youth or children besides those belonging to Tree of Life and more adults are needed. The Approved Adult ratio should still be in effect.*
13. **Safe and Secure Setting:**
  - Doors should be left open or a window should allow easy observation of the room.
  - Adequate insurance shall be maintained.
  - Settings and equipment used for children and youth events should be safe and appropriate

## F. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

Any Approved Adult who witnesses or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child involved in a childcare program or activity has been abused by anyone (including the child's family, guardians, an Approved Adult, employee, or volunteer) MUST report such knowledge or reasonable suspicions directly to the Childline and

Abuse Registry. Reports may be made by calling the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) (800-932-0313) or if the child is not in immediate risk of abuse or harm report electronically to [www.compass.state.pa.us/CWIS](http://www.compass.state.pa.us/CWIS) as required by law. Employees, and Approved Adults MUST inform the Administrative Pastor and Congregational Council President of the suspected abuse and subsequent report.

The congregation will cooperate fully with government authorities investigating allegations of abuse. The initiative for investigating alleged abuse resides with the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and should not be carried out by the congregation.

All allegations of child abuse or serious breach of policy procedures will be taken seriously by the Pastor(s) and the Congregational Council President. The Administrative Pastor and the Congregational Council President are involved so that there can be verification of the reporting activity. The Administrative Pastor and the Congregational Council President will notify the Office of the Synodical Bishop about any report to the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (Childline and Abuse Registry regarding suspected child abuse.

### **G. Response to the Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse**

**At the discretion of the Administrative Pastor and Congregational Council President, the following items may be implemented in any order or eliminated as deemed appropriate.**

1. The Administrative Pastor and the Congregational Council President will notify parents or guardians of the children involved in an alleged incident, unless the parents or guardians are the persons suspected of the abuse. Any phone calls or visits will be documented. No names of reporter or accuser should be disclosed. References to incidents, including details, names of victims, and perpetrators, shall remain confidential, except as required by law or as necessary to follow the Child Protection Policy.
2. The Congregation Council President will notify the congregation's insurance broker and/or carrier when the reporting procedures have been initiated. The phone call or written report will be documented. If the original notice is by phone, a letter documenting that report will also be sent to the insurance broker and/or carrier.
3. The Congregation Council President and Administrative Pastor, in consultation with the insurance carrier, will determine whether the congregation should engage legal counsel.
4. Congregation Council President is to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. The Congregation Council President and Administrative Pastor or their designee will act as the official spokesperson for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys or others.
5. All communications within the congregation regarding the report of suspected child abuse shall attempt to protect the dignity and privacy of those persons affected by the report, including the alleged child victim and the person suspected of child abuse, while at the same time ensuring that persons in responsibility and law enforcement authorities remain fully informed.
6. References to incidents, including details, names of victims, and perpetrators, shall remain confidential, except as required by law or as necessary to follow the Child Protection Policy.

**H. The Safe Sanctuary Committee consists of approved adults for the congregation to carry out responsibilities of the committee**

**The Responsibilities of the Safe Sanctuary Committee**

1. Review and make recommendations to the congregation for revising the Tree of Life Child Protection Policy regarding the safety of our children.
2. Provide a training video/powerpoint on the church website to be viewed by all Approved Adults
3. Make sure that Approved Adults are in compliance with updated clearances
4. Provide opportunities for assistance with online application for *Criminal Record Check* and a *Child Abuse History Clearance*.
5. Periodically check to make sure that all permission slips are being stored in the congregation office. Permission slips will be kept for three years following the event. If an incident of abuse is reported relating to an event, the permission slips for that event will be maintained until the matter is resolved.
6. Keep the Congregation apprised of updates or changes to the Child Protection Policy. Maintain updated policy information on the church website.
7. Have a list of Approved Adults as a reference in the church office.
8. Refer violations of the CPP by a staff member to the Mutual Ministry committee. Violation of the CPP by a volunteer is referred to the staff person in charge or the pastors.

**I. Forms:**

**Child Protection Covenant** To be signed by all persons desiring to become an Approved Adult

**Voluntary Disclosure Statement** To completed by all persons desiring to become an Approved Adult

**Parental Consent Form**

Used only under specific circumstances as approved by the Administrative Pastor

**Permission form including Pick Up Authorization** gives parent permission for a child's attendance at a child/youth activity or program and to designate other adults authorized to pick up a child from an activity/event.

**Exclusions for being an approved adult will be determined by the PA Child Protective Services Law.**

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