

# Safe Church Policy

## Immanuel Lutheran Church

### Oxford, Connecticut

#### Intent

- 1 “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 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. This policy addresses particularly the care of children and youth, remembering especially Christ’s own welcome and blessing of the children who came to him. We intend that children and youth be safe from abuse **and harm** of any kind on our premises and in our programs. In order to reduce the risk of child abuse, this policy establishes a prevention plan which includes four elements: 1) selecting and screening workers; 2) worker supervision; 3) reporting obligations; and 4) responding to allegations.<sup>1</sup>

#### Oversight

- 2 A Safe Church Committee shall have oversight of Immanuel’s Safe Church Policy.
- 2.1 The Safe Church Committee shall include six members appointed by the Congregation Council to three year terms, with terms staggered so that two members are appointed each year. Appointed members of the Committee may serve successive terms without limitation at the discretion of the Congregation Council. New terms will begin on Feb. 1 of each year.
- 2.2 In addition to the members appointed by the Congregation Council, the Pastor and the Council President will serve as members of the Committee *ex-officio*.
- 2.3 The Safe Church Committee will report directly to the Congregation Council, and through the Council to the Congregation.
- 2.4 The Committee will have a chairperson and a secretary, chosen for one year terms, at the first meeting of each year on or after Feb. 1.
- 2.5 In its role of oversight, the Safe Church Committee will introduce, implement, and sustain Immanuel’s Safe Church policy.
- 2.5.1 The Safe Church Committee will review all applications of persons who work with our children **in either paid or volunteer positions including: the pastor(s); Sunday School and**

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<sup>1</sup> James F. Cobble, Jr., Richard R. Hammar and Steven W. Klipowicz, *Reducing the Risk II: Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse* (Matthew, NC: Christian Ministry Resources, 2003) 18.

**Confirmation teachers, aides, and mentors; Youth Group volunteers; and Nursery School volunteers.**

- 2.5.2 The Safe Church Committee will provide or arrange for appropriate training for all who have responsibility for the care of children in congregational ministries, programs, and events, in accord with Immanuel's Safe Church Policy. This will include both initial training and refresher training.
- 2.5.3 The Safe Church Committee will provide for the training of workers with children and youth in recognizing possible symptoms of molestation **or other forms of mental or physical abuse or neglect.**
- 2.5.4 The Safe Church Committee will provide training to those who have supervisory responsibility **for** making risk assessments and developing prevention plans to reduce risk to our children.
- 2.5.5 Following any allegation of child abuse the Safe Church Committee will support the Congregation Council and the Pastor in providing an appropriate and caring response to those who are involved.
- 2.5.6 The Safe Church Committee will prepare an annual report to the Congregation Council regarding the implementation of this policy with recommendations for addressing concerns or for policy changes. After review by the Congregation Council this report will be made available to the Congregation at its annual meeting.
- 2.5.7 The Safe Church Committee will meet **not less than three times each year, and** as often as necessary to accomplish its duties.

## **Selecting and Screening Workers**

- 3 All employees and all volunteers who work with children will be screened.
- 3.1 Screening will include the use of: 1) a written application; 2) reference checks; 3) a personal interview; and 4) additional **criminal or FBI** background checks as judged necessary by the Safe Church Committee.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.2 The Safe Church Committee will assure that these steps have been taken before a person is permitted to work with children.
- 3.3** No person may work with children until he or she has been a member or actively involved in the life of the congregation for one year. The Committee may recommend to the Congregation Council exceptions to this requirement in unusual circumstances.
- 3.4 Once employees are hired or volunteers are accepted they will receive training appropriate to their responsibilities in relation to children. Volunteers or employees who work with children are expected to complete appropriate initial training within six months and to receive refresher training as required by the Safe Church Committee.
- 3.5 Records and documents developed during the screening process will be regarded as highly confidential, and access to them will be restricted to members of the Safe Church Committee and those the Committee deems have a need to know.

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<sup>2</sup> Cobble 20.

## Supervision of Workers

- 4 Since not all circumstances can be foreseen, persons who have supervisory responsibility in relationship to children and youth in the congregation, for example, the Sunday School superintendent, the adult leaders of the youth group, or the coordinator of the nursery during Sunday worship, will conduct risk assessments of programs and events with children or youth, develop an appropriate prevention plan, and provide appropriate levels of supervision in accord with their plan to maintain a safe environment.
- 4.1 Risk assessments will review three crucial risk factors: 1) isolation; 2) accountability; and 3) power and control.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.2 Risk assessments will be mindful of four principles: 1) As risk increases, supervision should increase. 2) Risk increases as isolation increases. 3) Risk increases as accountability decreases. 4) Risk increases when there is an imbalance of power, authority, influence, and control between a potential abuser and a potential victim.<sup>4</sup>
- 4.3 Supervisors will document their prevention plan and provide a copy to the Safe Church Committee. Ongoing programs, such as Sunday School, regular youth group meetings, or the nursery during Sunday worship, can provide this plan once each year to the Committee at the beginning of the School year. Occasional events, such as an overnight ski trip, require a prevention plan for each event.

## Reporting Requirements

- 5 An effective reporting procedure is important because it functions as a deterrent to child abusers who thrive on secrecy and are more likely to engage in criminal activity where they can go unnoticed.<sup>5</sup>
- 5.1 All church workers, paid or volunteer, are expected to report suspected child abuse.
- 5.2 Workers report to their immediate supervisors. Supervisors report to the President of the Congregation or to the Pastor.
- 5.3 Any member of the congregation or other person involved in the congregation's life and ministry may bring allegations of abuse directly to the President of the Congregation or to the Pastor.
- 5.4 The State of Connecticut (Gen. Stats. 17a-101 et. seq. (2002)) defines reportable abuse as physical, sexual, or mental abuse inflicted by a person responsible for a child's health, welfare or care, or by a person given access to such child by such responsible person.
- 5.4.1 Mandatory reporters in the State of Connecticut include any member of the clergy, school teacher, principal, or guidance counselor, mental health professional, licensed marital and family therapist, or any person paid to care for a child in any public or private facility, day

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<sup>3</sup> Cobble 41.

<sup>4</sup>Cobble 41-45.

<sup>5</sup>Cobble 52.

- care center or family day care home which is licensed by the state.
- 5.4.2 Volunteer church workers **and members**, while not included as mandatory reporters, are expected to report within the church's line of reporting as soon as possible, and to cooperate fully with any investigation undertaken by the state.
- 5.4.3 The President of the Congregation Council or the Pastor will initiate contact with local law enforcement or with the State of Connecticut Department of Child and Families (800-842-2288 "Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline") when there is reason to believe there has been an instance of child abuse. An oral report to authorities will be made not later than 12 hours after there has been cause to suspect abuse. The reporter shall submit a written report within 48 hours of the verbal report. The report will include: 1) the names and addresses of the child and his parents or other person responsible for his care; 2) the age and gender of the child; 3) the nature and extent of the child's injuries; the approximate date and time of injuries; 4) information about previous maltreatment to the child or the child's siblings; 5) the circumstances in which maltreatment came to be known to the reporter; 6) the name of the person suspected to be responsible for the maltreatment.
- 5.4.4 **In the event that the Pastor and/or Congregation Council President is suspected of misconduct then reports may also be brought to the Vice-President of the Congregation Council who will then have responsibility to report as described in 5.4.3.**
- 5.4.5 The State of Connecticut offers the following immunity for reporters (17a-101e(b) (West 1998)): Any person, institution or agency which, in good faith, makes or, in good faith, does not make a report shall be immune from any liability, civil or criminal, which might otherwise be incurred or imposed and shall have the same immunity with respect to judicial proceeding which results from such report provided such person did not perpetrate or cause such abuse or neglect.

## **Response to Allegations of Abuse**

- 6 If a report of suspected abuse is made to state authorities the President of the Congregation Council will notify the congregation's insurance company.
- 7 If a report of suspected abuse is made to state authorities the Pastor will notify the office of the Bishop of the New England Synod.
- 8 Following an allegation of child abuse the Safe Church Committee will support the Congregation Council and the Pastor in providing a caring response. Such caring response should affirm three simple points: 1) that the complaint is being taken seriously; 2) that procedures exist for such complaints and that they will be followed to ensure proper follow-through; and 3) that the church desires to extend care and support in whatever ways possible to the victim and the victim's family.
- 8.1 The allegation should be carefully documented.
- 8.2 Professional Assistance should be consulted. Resource persons for such consultation include the Bishop of the New England Synod, the congregation's insurance company, the congregation's attorney, **counselors and social workers**.
- 8.3 Congregational leadership will fulfill state reporting requirements.
- 8.4 **Any person accused will be removed from his or her position and have appropriate**

**restrictions placed upon his or her participation in congregational activities until resolution of the investigation. The Congregation Council, in consultation with the Safe Church Committee, will make any necessary decisions regarding these restrictions.**

- 8.5 While congregational members will want to be informed about allegations of abuse, care must be taken to not to engage in invasion of privacy or defamation. Sensitive information must be shared by congregational leadership in a proper setting that only includes church members.<sup>6</sup> When the Congregation Council believes that it is appropriate to inform members of the congregation of allegations of abuse on church property or in church programs such communication shall be done in such a way that it is protected by the legal concept of a “qualified privilege.” A qualified privilege protects “communications made in good faith on any subject matter in which the person communicating has an interest, or in reference to which he has a duty if such communication is made to a person having a corresponding interest or duty.”<sup>7</sup> “The concept of qualified privilege applies to communication between church leaders and congregational members concerning actions taken by the board in response to allegations or findings of sexual misconduct, when such board actions have a direct impact upon the congregational members.”<sup>8</sup> Communication with members of the congregation would ordinarily take the form of a letter sent only to members of the congregation, or a meeting of the congregation restricted to the members of the congregation. Whenever possible congregational leadership will consult the church’s attorney for guidance in preparing the information to be shared.
- 8.6 The President of the Council and the Pastor will choose a single person to serve as spokesperson for the congregation and refer requests for information to that person. Whenever possible this spokesperson will consult with the congregation’s attorney for guidance in preparing information to be shared with the public.

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<sup>6</sup> Cobble 59.

<sup>7</sup> Cobble 60.

<sup>8</sup> Cobble 60.