

Safe Church Policy

The Churches at Island Pond: Bethesda Lutheran Church and East Church

Introduction

Jesus showed his value of children when he said, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs." (Mark 10:14) The Kingdom of God is a place of shalom, that is well-being for all people. It is a kingdom of love, peace, and justice, where all are loved, welcomed, safe, live in harmony and have what they need to enjoy the life that God intended for them.

The intention of this policy is to follow Jesus' example by providing a safe, healthy and well-supervised environment for the Churches at Island Pond: safe for those who worship, safe for those who come to minister, safe for those who come in need, safe for those who come to learn, and safe for those who come to participate in our ministry programs.

Screening and selection for paid staff positions for ministry with children and youth

The pastor will do a CORI background check on all applicants for employment who regularly work with children or youth.*

The applicant will complete and sign the following:

1. A job application form,
2. A CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) Request Form,
3. shall sign a form indicating that they have reviewed the Safe Church Policy, and
4. shall complete a safe church training.

The applicant will complete an interview(s), and background checks and will provide references.

Screening and selection for volunteer positions for ministry with children and youth

The pastor will do a CORI background check on all volunteers who regularly work with children or youth.*

The applicant will complete and sign the following:

1. A Volunteer Information form,
 2. A CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) Request Form, and
- shall review the Safe Church Policy.

The applicant must attend and participate in the life of the congregation for 6 months prior to service.

Education and training

The pastor shall attend a safe church training and attend refresher trainings every three to five years. Paid staff who regularly work with children or youth shall attend a safe church training and attend refresher trainings every three to five years.

Volunteers who regularly work with children or youth shall be encouraged to attend a safe church training in person or online.

The church shall maintain a record of those who have attended such training.

Behavior

Behavior encompasses a broad spectrum or a continuum including: speech, gestures, and humor as well as physical contact. Some of these behaviors may be acceptable in other social contexts but are inappropriate in ministerial relationships. Some behaviors, such as hugging, may be innocent in themselves, but may be sexualized by intensity, duration, and so forth. All persons engaged in our ministry are responsible for knowing the possible impact of their words and actions on persons with whom they interact.

Boundary guidelines

It is important to show caring, encouragement and affection to those with whom we work and serve whether adults or children. However, our actions must reflect a positive and pastoral way that preserves a sense of protection, safety, integrity and respect for people of all ages. Because we often deal with individuals who are emotionally and/or psychologically fragile or otherwise personally vulnerable, especially children who are more vulnerable to inappropriate behaviors, it is imperative that those engaged in the ministry of these churches maintain their own psychological, emotional, and spiritual health and that they have adequate preparation and education for helping those individuals they seek to serve in ministry. It is our policy to encourage leaders, whether paid or volunteer, to nurture safety within ministerial relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources. Touching children should be confined to the head, back, shoulders and hands, and quick hugs should only be given if the child initiates it.

Types of abuse

Staff and volunteers have a ministerial relationship, that is, a relationship of trust between one carrying out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

We denounce abuse in all forms including abuse of power, sexual abuse, harassment, exploitation and coercion. Sexual harassment or sexual exploitation of parishioners or other individuals by anyone engaged in the ministry of the Churches at Island Pond is unethical, unprofessional behavior and will not be tolerated.

Power begins when a position of authority and responsibility has been established and accepted. It can be cumulative and arise from a number of sources, such as occupation, experience, physical size and/or attractiveness, gender, age, and race, wealth, and charisma. It can be negative: a top-down abuse of power primarily benefiting the one who holds it, or it can be positive: a service to benefit others.

Sexual abuse is sexual involvement or conduct by clergy, a church employee or volunteer with a person who is under 18 years of age or is legally incompetent. Sexual abuse can affect any person, regardless of age.

The State of Massachusetts has statutes establishing criminal penalties and reporting requirements concerning sexual abuse. It is our policy to make reports immediately in accord with those reporting provisions in state law, except concerning disclosures given under the seal of the confessional and to cooperate fully with law enforcement officials in investigating allegations of sexual abuse that are within the scope of such statutes.

Sexual harassment is any unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that makes the recipient feel uncomfortable or threatened. This can be any form of written contact, verbal contact, including jokes, comments and propositions, physical contact including intentional touching in any form and visual contact such as staring at another's body. Both Federal and State laws prevent sexual harassment.

Sexual exploitation is developing or attempting to develop a sexual relationship and/or sexual behavior between a clergy, staff or volunteer with an individual he/she has a ministerial relationship whether or not there is apparent consent.

Sexual coercion is the use of force – physical, emotional or supervisory – to gain sexual gratification.

Supervision of all employee and volunteer workers

Open door policy - Doors to rooms where children and youth meet need to have a window to allow the persons in the room to be visible to persons outside the room. If the door does not have a window, the door must be partially open at all times.

Two adult rule - Our goal is to have two adults present when working with children and youth in any capacity. Plans for all events and ministries for children and youth should include at least two, unrelated adults present at all times. If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youth, that adult shall immediately report those circumstances to the pastor.

It may be appropriate for a Sunday School class to have only one teacher so long as at least one other adult can maintain visual contact with the teacher. When only one adult is present in the room, if the door does not have a window, the door to the room must remain open.

Parents of confirmation students will be made aware that the pastor is the only adult in the class. The door will remain open until it is replaced with a door with a window. Parents will be invited to attend class. Parents will be encouraged to drop off and pick up their student on time.

Workers under the age of eighteen – Workers under the age of 18 will be supervised by an adult when working with children/youth in any situation.

Overnight events - At least two adults must be present at all times. When the group is mixed gender ideally there will be an adult of each gender present. Sleeping areas will be separated by gender.

Offsite events - When children/youth are taken off site to an event, two or more adults must accompany them.

Transportation - When children or youth are transported by a personal vehicle it is highly desirable to have two adults present however, it is not always practical. When children or youth are transported by a van, it must be registered and have passed safety inspection and at least two adults must be present. A permission slip should be signed by a parent to indicate that the parent is aware of the individual transporting their child. A blanket permission slip for local travel is acceptable. Drivers for church sponsored children and youth events must be 21 years of age or older and have a valid driver's license.

Alcohol, drugs and pornography - Adults shall never, under any circumstances:

- a. provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs or pornography,
- b. consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- c. be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or the misuse of legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- d. engage in illegal behavior or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior,
- f. engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth, and
- g. discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth.

Firearms and concealed weapons are prohibited at any church activity. Special arrangements may be made for off-duty police officers or others required to carry firearms.

Confidentiality - It is essential to maintain confidentiality with children and youth except when it is revealed that somebody has been, is, or would be subject to harm of any kind. Such information must be passed on to those who can help.

Private relationships - Adults who work with children or youth within a congregation should be discouraged from having a separate and private relationship with any unrelated child from the church away from sanctioned church, youth activities.

Church computers - Church computers should have adequate password protection. Activity on a church computer is not considered private and may be accessed by authorized persons.

Safe church policy - The safe church policies should be posted in areas where activities for children and youth take place and should be given to all adults who regularly work with children and youth and to parents, and it will be posted on the church website.

The church will maintain appropriate insurance coverage

It is recommended that volunteers working with children and youth in any capacity check for coverage under their individual homeowners policy.

Responding to concerns and suspected incidents

All reports will be taken seriously and investigated.

The pastor shall be informed of any suspected or alleged violations of the policy.

The pastor shall inform the appropriate lay leader (Council President for Bethesda/Moderator for East) of any suspected or alleged violations.

The safe church committee shall be convened to investigate any suspected or alleged policy violations. It shall recommend appropriate action when it is determined that a violation has occurred. Clergy shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected and appropriate remedial and/or disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or volunteer ministry with the church.

The Bishop of the New England Synod, ELCA/ Conference Minister and President of the Massachusetts Conference, UCC, shall be notified of any violations by clergy, and shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected and appropriate remedial and/or disciplinary action.

Legal counsel shall be obtained if needed.

The insurance company shall be informed of any violations.

Reporting suspected abuse

Anyone who is aware of an actual or potential violation of these policies in the church environment shall immediately report the violation to the Pastor.

Anyone who is aware of an actual or potential violation of these policies by a clergy person shall immediately report the violation to the Synod/Conference office. [New England Synod office 508-791-1530 Massachusetts Conference UCC Office 508-875-5233]

Anyone who has reason to suspect that child abuse has taken place, whether at church or away from church, shall report it to the appropriate civil authority.

Contact information

It is the responsibility of adults who are exposed to children to immediately report suspected abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families (DCF). DCF is the Massachusetts State agency charged with protecting children and strengthening families. DCF responds to reports 24 hours a day and offers a wide range of services through contracted agencies appropriate to each circumstance. If the Department determines a child has been abused or neglected, DCF will take immediate and appropriate steps to protect the child from further abuse or neglect and will provide services to the family. Likewise, if serious abuse or neglect has occurred, DCF is mandated under Massachusetts General Law (Chapter 119, §51B) to notify the District Attorney, who has the authority to file criminal charges. DCF will also notify the mandated reporter who filed the report of its decision. If the report is supported, the Department provides the family with services to reduce the risk of harm. Even if the report is unsupported, the Department will offer family services on a voluntary basis. To report possible child abuse or neglect in Massachusetts, **you must first file an oral report by calling the Child-at-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200** to notify the appropriate area office of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Even if you complete the 51A Report Form, you must also first phone DCF directly or the Child-at-Risk Hotline. For information on how to report child abuse and neglect outside of Massachusetts, please call the National Child Abuse Hotline, 1-800-4-A-CHILD.

Safe church officer and committee

The Safe Church Officer for Bethesda and East churches is the pastor. A safe church policy committee shall be organized. It shall review the policy annually and recommend any changes. It shall be convened to investigate any suspected or alleged policy violations. It shall recommend appropriate action when it is determined that a violation has occurred.

Policy for partner organizations

Groups such as the Make Way for Ducklings preschool, ACTS (Action Centered Tutoring Services) and the Bethesda Youth Basketball organization shall review and be familiar with this policy and shall have in place their own policy which meets or exceeds this policy.

Policy approval

This policy was adopted by Bethesda Lutheran Church Council on September 19, 2012.

This policy was adopted by East Church Board of Directors on September 12, 2012.

It went into effect on October 15, 2012.

*CORI checks will be done on: the pastor, Sunday School teachers, and nursery helpers. They will be repeated every three years and kept in a password protected computer file.