

St. Matthew's Lutheran Church – Youth Protection Policy and Procedures

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Policy Approvals:

Pastor

Pastor

Council President

Youth Director

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1. Background:

The disturbing and traumatic rise of physical and sexual abuse of children and youth has claimed the attention of our nation and society. We, as a community of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, need to be aware of these dangers as we work to serve our congregation.

2. Objectives:

These policies and procedures are intended to ensure that:

- St. Matthew's Lutheran Church is a safe church for our youth (under 18 years of age or still in High School).
- Our paid staff and volunteers are protected from the possibility of unwarranted accusations.

The following policies and procedures reflect our commitment to provide care and protection for children and youth while engaged in a youth activity and for those adults who are in contact with them.

3. Scope:

The Youth Protection Policies and Procedures set forth guidelines and expectations for both volunteers and paid professionals who work with youth at St. Matthew's.

4. Definitions:

4.1. A Youth Activity includes, but is not limited to such programs as Sunday school, Preschool, confirmation class, nursery, various youth groups and activities, Vacation Bible School, and the like.

4.1.1. The term "Youth Activity" refers to occurrences:

4.1.1.1 On the church premises

4.1.1.2 At the sites off the church property, which must be approved by the one of the Pastors or a Church Officer (President, Vice President, Recording Secretary, Treasurer or Financial Secretary)

4.1.1.3 Including overnight activities which shall require approval by both a Pastor and the Church Council

4.1.1.4 During the course of transportation which has been expressly arranged by the Chairperson of the activity. The term "Youth Activity" does not extend to transportation which is not part of the activity.

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4.2 Abuse is defined by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the Child Protective Services Law:

- 4.2.1 Any recent (an incident that occurred within the last two (2) years of when the report is made) act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious physical injury to a child under 18 years of age.
- 4.2.2 An act or failure to act by a perpetrator which causes non-accidental serious mental injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age; or
- 4.2.3 Any recent act, failure to act or series of such acts or failures to act by a perpetrator which creates an imminent risk of serious physical injury to or sexual abuse or sexual exploitation of a child under 18 years of age; or
- 4.2.4 Serious physical neglect by a perpetrator constituting prolonged or repeated lack of supervision or the failure to provide the essentials for life, including adequate medical care, which endangers a child's life or development or impairs the child's function.
- 4.2.5 A copy of the PA Child Protective Services Law is available in the office for review.

5 Policy Statement

5.1 Worker Requirements

- 5.1.1 For the purposes of this policy, "Youth Worker" shall be defined as an adult, age 21 or older, who has been approved and who regularly participates in youth activities. A parent or other adult who helps out for a single day/event or occasionally fills in at Faith Formation will not be considered a Youth Worker.
- 5.1.2 For the purpose of this policy, an adult will be defined as someone 21 years of age or older.
- 5.1.3 All adult employees and volunteers involved with youth "Youth Worker" must complete a Youth Worker Application Form. These forms are to be kept in a locked confidential file.
 - A. As part of the Youth Worker Application Form, all adult employees and volunteers must provide national criminal background check, FBI clearance check, child abuse check and complete a regular YPP training session. After completing the YPP training, the Youth Worker must sign that they have read, understand and will abide by the Youth Protection Policies and Procedures.
 - B. If you have previously obtained these clearances, they must be within a year of your submission date. Each of these clearances must be updated every three years.
 - C. One of the Pastors, the School Director or the Youth Director shall review the Youth Worker application and shall either approve or reject it. If the need for clarification or discussion is warranted, a personal interview may be conducted, and a final decision will be made jointly by one of the Pastors, the Youth Director and the Council President. Access to Youth Worker Applications and files will be limited to a Pastor, the Church Officers and the Parish Administrator.

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- 5.1.4 All adult volunteers who are members in good standing of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church/St Matthew's School and desire to work in a youth activity, shall do so only when their applications have been approved.
- 5.1.5 Volunteers must be members of St. Matthew's for six months before working with children and youth on a regular basis. This provision may be waived by one of the Pastors/School Director following successful completion of the youth worker application process as long there is reason for confidence that the volunteer has experience and references to warrant such a waiver, and as long as anyone who is not a parent of a child involved in St. Matthew's children's ministries is known by one of the Pastors and/or congregational leaders for at least six months prior to such a waiver.
- 5.1.6 Volunteers age 18 through 20 who wish to work with youth must complete the background checks and YPP training, however they cannot be considered an adult youth worker until 21 years of age.
- 5.1.7 Anyone who has been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse, or any child sex offense shall not be approved to work with youth in any capacity.

6 Behaviors and Actions

6.1 Discipline:

Consequences for unacceptable behavior should be individualized and consistent for each youth, appropriate to the youth's level of understanding and directed toward teaching the youth acceptable behavior and self-control.

- 6.1.2 There should be no harsh, cruel or unusual treatment of any youth. Examples of inappropriate discipline include, but are not limited to:
 - Spanking, hitting, or threats of it;
 - Running laps, sit ups, etc.;
 - Being put outside without proper clothing;
 - Hazing - physical or verbal;
 - Pinching, shaking or biting;
 - Putting anything in a youth's mouth;
 - Humiliating, ridiculing, or rejecting;
 - Subjecting a youth to harsh abusive or profane language; or
 - Requiring a youth to remain silent for inappropriately long periods of time.
- 6.1.3 An adult should use positive methods of discipline and guidance that encourage self-esteem, self-control and self-direction. Examples of appropriate forms of discipline include, but are not be limited to:
 - Using praise and encouragement of good behavior;
 - Reminding the youth of behavior expectations by using clear and positive statements;
 - Redirecting behavior using positive statements; or

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- Using brief supervised separation or time out from the group, when appropriate.
- Removing from future participation for continuing inappropriate behavior.

6.2 Expressions of Affection:

True expressions of affection contribute to a warm and healthy relationship, but the church expects reasonable limits on physical interactions. Adults and other volunteers shall respect a child's refusal of affection and take care not to make him or her uncomfortable.

6.2.2 Examples of inappropriate behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Any form of sexual contact or contact perceived as stimulating;
- Intimate kissing;
- Private massages;
- Lying down or sleeping beside youth;
- Tickling or wrestling;
- Hugging from behind;
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as closets or private rooms;
- Comments of a sexual nature that relate to physique or body development;
- Patting on the thigh, knee or leg;
- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces

6.2.3 Examples of acceptable behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Holding hands during prayers or when a person is upset;
- Side hugs;
- Holding hands while walking small children;
- Handshakes;
- High fives and hand slapping;
- Verbal praise;
- Arms around shoulders; or
- Pats on the back or shoulder.

6.3 At least two adults, at least one of which is an approved Youth Worker, shall be present for all youth activities and throughout those activities. (The intent of this policy is to avoid one-on-one activities between youths and adults.) A specific exception shall be granted in certain publicly visible Sunday School and Nursery care situations, as described in 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 below.

6.3.1. Exception for Sunday School classes (fifth grade and under) being held in publicly accessible and visible locations, like the preschool classrooms or choir room: A youth who is a confirmed member of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church can take the place of the second adult in that classroom. Such youth will be held to the same standards of conduct as adult volunteers.

6.3.2. Exception for Nursery Care being held in publicly accessible and visible locations, like the official Nursery, and being staffed by a paid Nursery Attendant:

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A youth who is a confirmed member of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, and who has successfully completed the Red Cross Babysitter's Training, DARC Babysitting Safety Workshop, or other child care training deemed by Council to provide an equivalent or superior training and up-to-date certification for child care, can take the place of the second adult in providing that nursery care.

6.4 Doors should be left open for all activities whenever possible.

6.4.1. Normal discussions should be conducted in open view of others.

6.4.2 When private discussions with a youth are necessary, two adults must be present.

6.5 Adult leaders must respect the privacy of youth members in situations such as changing clothes and taking showers on outings. Adults must also protect their own privacy in similar situations.

6.6 Youth Activities Away From Church:

Adults should never be alone with children or youth without the presence of a second adult. Transporting of children and youth for church sanctioned activities may be done by a single adult with the approval of the Chairperson for that activity and of the child's parent or legal guardian, and following the "Rule of Three." If there is only one adult in the car, there must be at least two youth passengers present.

6.6.1 All church sanctioned activities scheduled away from church property must be pre-approved by one of the Pastors or a Church Officer. Participating youths and their guests must have an approved written itinerary/permission form signed by a parent or legal guardian. The participation of a minimum of two adults, at least one of whom is an approved Youth Worker, is required for all trips unless there has been an exception for driving under 6.6 above.

6.6.2 Overnight Activities: Any employees and/or volunteers who will be involved with overnight activities or counseling of children or youth must be approved Youth Workers. The presence of a minimum of two approved Youth Workers is required for overnight activities. If children of different sexes are involved, there will be separate sleeping areas and bathroom facilities, and there will be adults of both sexes present at the activity. Overnight accommodations and the youths will be carefully supervised.

6.7 Use of Vehicles for Church Youth Activities:

When the activity Chairperson has expressly arranged transportation and a personal vehicle is being used to transport youths outside the church premises the following requirements apply to the driver and vehicle:

6.7.2 The driver must have a valid drivers' license.

6.7.3 The driver must have valid automobile insurance and permission to use the vehicle.

6.7.4 The vehicle must be in good working condition with a valid inspection sticker.

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6.7.5 The driver must be at least 21 years of age and shall operate the vehicle in accordance with all-applicable statutes and rules of the road.

6.7.6 Seat belts must be used at all times.

6.8 Alcohol and Drug Usage:

Any kind of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco use by youth at a youth event is strictly prohibited. Adults are prohibited from using illegal drugs and/or alcohol at any youth event. Tobacco products cannot be used in front of youth and/or during activities of an event. Adults must also maintain proper supervision of their youth at all times.

6.9 Weapons:

There are to be no weapons (e.g.: knives or firearms) laser pointers or fireworks at any youth event.

7 Reporting and Documentation

7.1 All church staff and approved workers are required to promptly report any suspected abuse, whether during a church activity or otherwise, to one of the Pastors and a Church Officer.

7.2 Anyone who suspects that a teacher, staff or Youth Worker has abused a child shall promptly report such suspicion to one of the Pastors and a Church Officer.

7.3 One of the Pastors and the Church Officer shall immediately investigate the report and determine if there is reasonable cause to suspect abuse, and immediately report their findings in accordance with the Child Protective Services Law.

7.4 Any person required to report a case of suspected child abuse who willfully fails to do so may be criminally prosecuted by the Commonwealth.

7.5 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer will take immediate action to thoroughly investigate the allegations, maintain confidentiality where appropriate, and document the process.

7.6 The following guidelines will be followed in the investigation of such allegations:

7.6.1 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer must create a full written report of all evidence and claims.

7.6.2 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall interview the child involved in the presence of the parent(s) unless a parent or guardian is a suspected perpetrator. They should listen carefully and calmly without criticism or suggestion that child is not telling the truth.

7.6.3 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall respect and protect the rights and privacy of the child and family.

7.6.4 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall affirm the child's feelings and, where applicable, assure the child that what happened was not his/her fault.

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- 7.6.5 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall assure the child and family that they will receive help. Promises about what will or will not happen to the accused abuser will not be made.
 - 7.6.6 All meetings, evidence and testimony shall be documented in writing and secured in a confidential file in the church office.
 - 7.6.7 If the allegation appears to be substantiated, the accused individual will be removed from her/his position until the investigation is completed by the proper authorities.
 - 7.6.8 If the allegation appears to be substantiated, one of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall report to the following:
 - 7.6.8.1 Church Officers;
 - 7.6.8.2 County Office of Child and Youth Services and Childline and Abuse Registry; and
 - 7.6.8.3 Church insurance carrier (only if abuse was during course of a youth activity).
 - 7.7 If the suspected perpetrator is a Pastor or a Church Officer the report should be made to:
 - 7.7.1 Two (2) congregation officers not implicated and,
 - 7.7.2 The Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.
 - 7.8 Other infractions not involving child abuse should be reported to and dealt with through the Pastor and/or Church Council.
- 8 Consequences
- 8.1 St. Matthew's Lutheran Church will not tolerate any form of child abuse. Offenders will be removed from positions working with youth, even if the offense occurs outside of church and church programs.
 - 8.2 Should the responsible civil authorities find the allegation substantiated:
 - 8.2.1 One of the Pastors and a Church Officer will minister to the child or children affected, and their parents, if the family desires such ministry.
 - 8.2.2 The offender will be permanently removed from his/her position and also ministered to by one of the Pastors and a Church Officer if desired by the offender.
 - 8.2.3 Any pastors of the church will be available for additional support and counseling for those who may need their services.
 - 8.2.4 Appeal:

Decisions made pursuant to these policies and procedures will be reviewed by one of the Pastors along with the Congregation Officers at the written request of anyone associated with the allegation.

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8.3 Publicity:

Should the news media need to be informed of the situation, one of the Pastors and a Church Officer shall mutually prepare a statement for the press. No other communication will be given out by church staff or members.

9. Permission to attend church:

With specific, strict guidelines and agreed upon procedures in place, “known sex offenders” may be participating members of our congregation, excluding youth activities.

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Youth Worker Application

For Children and Youth Programs

It is the goal of St. Matthew's Lutheran church to create a safe and secure atmosphere for all children who participate in activities of this church. To facilitate that purpose, it is necessary to gather certain information from individuals desiring employment or offering volunteer services to children and youths, such as criminal background checks. This information will be kept confidential and will be for the sole purposes of helping the church provide a safe and secure environment for those children who participate in our programs and use our facilities.

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: _____ Date: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Social Security #: _____

Present Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____

What type of work with children or youth do you prefer? _____

If you might be involved in driving children or youth to activities off the church property, please provide the following information:

Driver License State/Number: _____

Insurance Information, Company: _____ Policy Number: _____

**I HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE YOUTH PROTECTION POLICY
AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY IT.**

Signature _____

Please complete all following pages.

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CHURCH HISTORY AND YOUTH WORK

Do you regularly attend the services of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church?

Which service? ___ First? Or ___ Second

List (name and address) other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

List previous church work involving youth that you have been involved in during the past five years
(identify church and type of work): _____

List previous non-church work involving youth that you have been involved in during the past five years
(identify type of work and name of organization, etc.): _____

List any gifts, callings, training, education, or other factors that have prepared you for working with
children and/or youth: _____

List two (2) reasons why you want to be involved in work with children or youth: _____

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PERSONAL REFERENCES

Please list two personal references (not former employees or relatives):

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

How long have you known this person? _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

How long have you known this person? _____

APPLICATION STATEMENT

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give St. Matthew's any additional information that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children and/or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually from any and all liability for damages, or alleged damages, of whatever kind of nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, or anyone else on account of compliance or any attempts to comply with this authorization. I waive any right that I might otherwise have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Applicant's signature: _____ Date: _____

Church Use

Reviewed and approved by: _____ Date: _____

Reviewed and approved by: _____ Date: _____