



SAFETY OF MINORS: POLICIES AND PRACTICES

**Revised 6/13/2016
Approved by Council 7/19/2016**

I. OVERVIEW

This document provides the policies and procedures for St. John's Lutheran Church on the Safety of Minors. The purpose is to guide and inform all who serve and work with persons under the age of 18 at St. John's, including clergy, staff, lay leaders, and volunteers. This set of policies and procedures seeks to address the most relevant issues and examples surrounding the personal safety of minors, but is not necessarily comprehensive. Interpretation and application of these policies and procedure are the responsibility of the Senior Pastor, with the advice and approval of the Congregational Council.

II. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

St. John's Lutheran Church is a vibrant, urban, Christian community in the heart of mid-town Sacramento. St. John's serves people throughout the greater metropolitan area, with members living as close as the downtown area, and as far as neighboring counties. The congregation includes a diverse group of people, who hail from varying backgrounds, cultures, religions, socio-economic statuses and they come in many different versions of "family." But all seek to come together to be one in the body of Christ, and to support the mission to "Live God's love in the World."

III. PURPOSE

Within the context of this population and mission, St. John's has a responsibility to provide a safe and nurturing environment for our members to worship, learn and find fellowship. We feel a special responsibility towards children and youth, who are more vulnerable members of our population, and whose parents entrust them in our care for classes, activities, and travel. Thus, our goal is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that fosters the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of minors.

IV. DEFINITIONS & SCOPE

- A. As used in this document, “minor” refers to anyone who is under the age of 18. “Child” or “children” refers to minors who are age 12 and under. “Youth” refers to minors who are age 13-18.
- B. The procedures outlined in this document apply to all persons who work directly with minors in any activity that is planned by, sponsored by, or takes place on the campus of, St. John’s Lutheran Church regardless of whether those persons are paid or volunteer for that work.
- C. While it is not possible to foresee and mitigate every possible danger, this policy is a good faith effort to identify and plan for the most likely types of situations that could arise. Therefore, this document outlines our response to:
 - A. Earthquake, Fire, and other natural disasters
 - B. Poisoning
 - C. Injury
 - D. Intruders
 - E. Inappropriate behavior by others

V. SAFETY PROCEDURES

- A. **Earthquake, Fire and other Natural Disasters.** The Children’s Ministry will work in conjunction with St. John’s Property Management to develop a response plan for Children’s programs, in the event of a natural disaster. This will take into account various scenarios, including how to respond during special events, such as Vacation Bible School. The plan will include training for teachers, volunteers and staff, and public information, including posting signs at the entry to every classroom.
- B. **Poison Control and Personal Injury.** First Aid kits are available in the nursery and in designated areas in the Christian Education area. Our goal is to complete the following four items by the end of 2016. We will:
 - 1. Post the Poison Control phone number at the phone in the nursery, with a Poison Control information sheet.
 - 2. Place a first aid kit on the 3rd floor.
 - 3. Make it more obvious where all the kits are.
 - 4. Ensure that some of our teachers have first aid training or are medical professionals who could respond to an emergency.
- C. **Intruders.** Many schools have a plan to respond to intruders. Such a plan does not exist at St. John’s. In conjunction with the Property Management team and the Senior Pastor, the Children’s Ministry Coordinator will create an intruder response plan. The Coordinator will then communicate the plan to teachers, parents, and children.
- D. **Inappropriate Behavior by Others.** The procedures regarding the protection of minors’ personal safety are outlined below in Section VI of this document.

VI. EXPECTATIONS OF PERSONS WHO WORK WITH MINORS

- A. St. John's will follow reasonable screening measures in the selection and recruitment of both paid and volunteer workers. All persons described in Section IV (B) of this policy will be screened by the Employment or Volunteer Application, personal interview, background check, and reference check.
- B. Any adult or youth who volunteers to work with minors must be a member or an active participant of St. John's for at least six months before beginning such service. Before a volunteer may begin any regular teaching assignment with minors, he or she will be asked to sign a statement affirming that he or she has never been convicted of a crime against a minor. Anyone who has had such a conviction, and anyone who refuses to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with minors.
- C. All employees and volunteers are expected to perform their duties in a manner that affords minors' respect. Thus, appropriate behavior management of minors will include positive reinforcement, redirection, quiet time, and parental notification.
- D. Hall monitors will be designated to accompany younger children to and from the restroom, to help direct children to their assigned classrooms, and to ensure that no child is left unattended in the halls.
- E. Parents of all children up to Grade 4 (or their designee) must sign their children in and out of the classroom each week.
- F. In each of the classrooms, the assigned teacher must be an adult, 18 years or older, who has completed high school. Two adult teachers assigned to each class is optimum, although a youth who meets the requirements of paragraph (B) above may serve as an assistant teacher in a children's class.
- G. Parents of minors have the right to visit and observe any program involving minors at any time without prior notice.
- H. If a one-on-one interaction with a minor is necessary and appropriate, the adult must conduct that interaction in an environment that provides visibility by other adults, or else must notify another duly-screened adult of the location and purpose of the interaction.
- I. Persons designated to provide automobile transportation to or from church youth events must be known to the designated leader of the event. The driver must:
 - 1. Have a valid state driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated;
 - 2. Have no record of convictions for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license or reckless endangerment;
 - 3. Have proof of insurance; and
 - 4. To every extent possible, avoid being alone in a car with an unrelated minor.
- J. If any youth group stays overnight at the church, two or more adult leaders must be present. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders must be present. Minors will be released only to parents, legal guardians, or persons authorized by the parent or guardian prior to the event.

- K. Leaders of youth groups not affiliated with St. John's must read this policy and sign a written pledge to abide by the expectations of this policy, prior to using St. John's facilities.
- L. During an overnight youth trip, at least one adult will be present for every ten youth. Ideally, a five-to-one youth-to-adult ratio should be maintained. A minimum of two adults will be present, regardless of the group size, and when both boys and girls are participating, at least one male and female adult will be present. In no event may one adult take one youth on an overnight trip alone. Adults must maintain appropriate distance from youth with regard to sleeping arrangements and must sleep in separate beds or sleeping bags. Supervision of youth will be maintained before and after events until all children are in the custody of their parents, legal guardians, or a person authorized by the parent or guardian.
- M. The relevant persons at St. John's who are required to report any suspected instances of child abuse under California law are clergy and an "administrator or employee of a public or private organization whose duties require direct contact and supervision of children" (Pen. C. Sec. 11165.7(a)). California law also encourages public and private institutions to provide their volunteers whose duties require direct contact with children with training in the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect (Sec. 11165.7(f)). Consistent with the mission of providing a safe and nurturing environment for minors, including a place where minors feel safe to discuss difficult issues with a trusted adult, St. John's has provided this training to all relevant persons. Thus any person to whom this policy applies is prepared to follow the procedures outlined in California law, should the situation arise.
- N. All persons to whom this policy applies must attend a training session that informs them about this policy. Thereafter, they will be invited to be present at any meetings scheduled to discuss this policy, or specific issues that arise pursuant to this policy. Clarification of staff action and plans of action will be open for discussion at any such meeting.
- O. The Senior Pastor reserves the right to adapt these policies as needed for unique situations and ministry programs.

VII. REGISTERED SEX OFFENDERS

This section applies to a person who is required to register as a sex offender pursuant to California Penal Code Section 290 and following, if the crime which required the person to so register involved a minor ("RSO"). If it is discovered that an RSO regularly attends St. John's or is seeking membership at St. John's, St. John's will take the following steps:

- A. In a thoughtful and compassionate manner, the Senior Pastor will inform relevant program staff and the Executive Committee of the Congregational Council. Others may be informed if the Senior Pastor and Executive Committee deem it necessary.
- B. The Senior Pastor will form a Support Group of at least four people, comprised of one person from each of the following categories: law enforcement, mental health, legal, the Congregational Council;
- C. The Support Group will develop a written covenant that will be signed by the Senior Pastor and the RSO. The covenant may include, but not be limited to the following:
 1. The RSO will not participate in any programming or classes for minors, including not entering the Christian Education building while these events are taking place;
 2. The RSO must be accompanied at all times on the church property with a member or members of the Support Group, including visits to the bathroom and in the parking lot;
 3. The RSO must not approach a minor on church property for any reason; and
 4. The RSO must be in continued prayer and conversation with his /her Support Group and the Senior Pastor, or his/her designee, about his/ her participation in church-related activities.
- D. If the RSO's crime occurred at St. John's or to a member of the St. John's community, the RSO will not be allowed to participate in any church service or activity. St. John's pastors and/or staff will try to help the RSO find another church.
- E. If the Senior Pastor deems it necessary to modify the procedure outlined in this section, he shall consult with, and get the approval of, the Congregational Council.