

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
371 Wolcott Hill Rd, Wethersfield, CT 06109
Safe Church Policy¹

(adopted by action of the Church Council, June 25, 2013)

Statement of Policy

It is the policy of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church that our Church (St. Paul's Church) be a safe place for all who come here to worship, minister, or seek Christian care or advocacy. To this end, this "Safe Church Policy" has been established to clarify specific standards for safe behavior and the appropriate reporting of and response to allegations of misconduct so that we may share the good news of Jesus Christ by respecting the dignity of all human beings. This policy shall apply to all clergy, lay employees, volunteers, and members.

As a member of a Reconciling in Christ synod, St. Paul's Church affirms the boundless love of God for all of God's children regardless of sexual orientation, life challenge or ability. All people are welcome to worship with us, to join our congregation, to participate in the mission and ministry to which God is calling us in our community, and to share in all aspects of our life together as the people of God.

I. Definition of Terms

- a. **Safe Church Response Team:** The team that is designated by the Council to serve for one year and comprised of the Pastor, Council President, and one other person of the Council's choosing. In the event of an apparent conflict of interest by one or more members of the team, the Council shall designate alternate team members to fill their places as long as said conflict of interest exists.
- b. **Safe Church Advocacy Team:** This team shall help in the implementation and communication of the Safe Church Guidelines. This team shall be responsible for an annual Safe Church Audit.
- c. **Safe Church Audit:** See I.b. below.
- d. **Youth Ministry Team:** This team shall be appointed annually by the congregation council and shall be responsible for overseeing the development and maintenance of all ministries related to youth and youth education.
- e. **New England Synod Safe Church Officer:** This is the Associate to the Bishop designated to oversee and advocate for Safe Church Policy among the congregations of the New England Synod. For the current Safe Church Officer, and for contact information, see section IX, References, below.

¹ The People of St. Paul's Church wish to acknowledge and thank the people of Grace Lutheran Church, Hartford for sharing their Safe Church Policies with us. This document has incorporated much of their work.

II. Designated Committees

- a. Each year, the Congregation Council shall appoint a Safe Church Response Team to receive, follow up and respond to any complaints of alleged violations of St. Paul's Safe Church Policy. The designated team will include the senior pastor, Congregation president, and another member of the congregation.

In the event that a member of the Response Team is making an allegation, they shall recuse themselves from the Response Team so as to avoid any conflict of interest or lack of impartiality in responding to the allegation. In this case, the Council shall designate a temporary replacement who will act until such time as a formal response to the allegation is finalized.

- b. There shall be a Safe Church Advocacy Team, appointed by the Congregation Council, who shall make a yearly audit of St. Paul's Safe Church policy compliance.

A Safe Church Audit shall include:

1. Updating a roster of adults who work with children or youths;
2. Updating of the signed and dated acknowledgements by volunteers indicating that they both understand and shall abide by this policy;
3. Updating of all public record checks for all volunteers working with children and youths;
4. Updating any additional background checks;
5. Maintaining a list of all who have attended Safe Church training programs and making sure that all certifications by volunteers are up to date;
6. Making sure that all teams and ministries of St. Paul's have developed policies that are in compliance with these Safe Church Policies;
7. Making sure that all policies related to maintaining a safe church *facility* are up to date.

III. Communication of Policy

This Policy shall be given to and reviewed by the Congregation's clergy, employees, and those working with children and youth to ensure their understanding and support of this Policy. This review shall take place annually under the direction of the Safe Church Advocacy Team. Their signature below indicates that the individual has reviewed, understands and supports this policy statement.

In addition, the Congregation shall periodically publicize this Policy to all its members and volunteers. The means of publication and the locations of copies of this policy shall be determined by the Safe Church Advocacy Team.

IV. Sexual Misconduct

Introduction

When sexual misconduct happens in the church, the proclamation of the gospel is impaired. Everyone suffers: the abused, the perpetrator, the church and the world. If timely and thorough attention is not given to allegations of sexual misconduct, the hope of the gospel is hidden and people can become estranged from God and the church. Therefore, for the sake of the gospel and humankind, St. Paul's Church is fully committed to address the problem of sexual misconduct by awareness, preparation, education and effective policy. However, we depend on the reporting of incidents to enable us to respond faithfully.

It takes courage to report incidents of sexual misconduct. Reporting in itself can begin the process of healing and protect others from inappropriate behaviors. Reporting can also help the person guilty of misconduct receive the assistance that is needed for amendment of life. Finally, reporting improper behaviors is a necessary factor in making the church a safe place for all people.

Definition of Sexual Harassment and Misconduct

Sexual harassment and misconduct refers to behavior that is not welcome to the recipient and is personally offensive. It includes but is not limited to:

- a. Unwelcome sexual advances, leering, whistling, or sexual gestures;
- b. Deliberate assaults or molestation as well as impeding or blocking movements;
- c. Actual or threatened retaliation;
- d. Offering employment or other benefits in exchange for sexual favors;
- e. Questions or comments about sexual behavior;
- f. Gender-based harassment;
- g. Undesired physical contact;
- h. Inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance;
- i. Persistent sexually-oriented humor or language;
- j. Continued or repeated jokes, language, epithets or remarks of a sexual nature;
- k. Causing another person to engage in a sexual act by threatening that other person, placing that other person in fear or asserting undue influence over that other person;
- l. Providing or displaying pornographic media;
- m. Any attempt to engage in or perform any of the above; and

n. Any additional activity that is covered by Federal or State laws.

V. Behavioral Standards for Ministry with Children and Youth

A "Youth" is always defined as any person not having attained the age of 18. A person who has attained the aged of 18 but has not graduated from high school is also always considered a youth under these rules.

In working with youth (middle school and high school), at least one adult must have attained the age of 21, AND must be at least 4 years older than the oldest youth in the group.

Adults shall not:

- 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, 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;
- e. Engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth;
- f. Discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth.
- g. Send, transmit or communicate via phone, mail, email, text message, or in any other manner without the full knowledge and consent of the parents or legal guardians of the child or youth. (When an email, text message, or other communication is sent to a youth, it should always be sent ("cc'd") to the parents or legal guardians as well.)

Ratio guideline for adults:youth are as follows (keeping in mind the two-adult rule as the default).

0-5 years old 1:5

6-10 years old 1:6

11-14 years old 1:8

15-18 years old 1:10

(Note, with the two-adult rule, the minimum number of adults will always be 2)

Other guidelines for adults working with children and youths

- a. All group activities shall be monitored by awake adults at all times.
- b. Adults shall not transport any unrelated individual youth in their vehicles.
- c. A roster of all participants and chaperones involved in the event shall be available during the event including name, contact information, signed permissions and medical info as needed.
- d. No unrelated teenager may be alone with a younger child at any time. (An adult may be within earshot.)
- e. Proper age-appropriate restraints are to be used in all vehicles transporting children and youth.
- f. Males and females shall sleep in separate quarters. Where this is not possible, reasonable separation of space is required and appropriate awake adult supervision is constant.
- g. All adults transporting children and youth will agree to a driving background check. They may be asked to have their license and insurance information on file with the church.
- h. No drivers under the age of 25 are to transport unrelated children and youth on behalf of the church.
- i. Even if taken as prescribed, the use of sedating medications by drivers is forbidden.
- j. No photographs or other recordings (for example, audio or video) of youth or children are to be used for web or print publication without the written consent of the parent(s). Such consent will outline the potential risks of publication of images and recordings. Any publications or recording will not include identifying information such as last name or personal contact information.

Anyone who knows of, or suspects a violation of these policies during a youth event shall immediately report the violation to the Pastor, Congregational Council President, or, if unable to contact either of these, the New England Synod Safe Church officer.

Screening and Selection for Ministry with Children and Youth

St. Paul's Church will conduct public record checks on ALL existing and future employees and volunteers who regularly work with children or youth.

For all NEW employees and volunteers who begin to work regularly with children or youth after June 25, 2013, the following components of a background check, *in addition to* a public records check, will be conducted:

- a. An informational and gift-assessment questionnaire shall be completed;
- b. An interview with two or more members of the youth ministry team;

- c. A reference check conducted by the Youth Ministry Team.

Volunteers should not be permitted to work with children or youths until they have been known to the clergy or congregation and have been an official member of St. Paul's Church for at least six months and have completed the steps listed above.

Regularly working with children or youth includes but is not limited to:

- a. Sunday School;
- b. Vacation Bible Camp;
- c. Youth Education (including, but not limited to Confirmation instruction and all related events);
- d. Youth programs (regardless of their location).

Monitoring Programs and Interactions with Children and Youth

Two unrelated adult rule. At all events and ministries for children and youth there shall be at least two unrelated adults present. If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youth, that adult shall immediately report those circumstances to the clergy. 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.

Any new programs, trips, or events that involve children or youth should be given prior approval by the senior pastor of the congregation. No event for children or youth shall take place in a private residence without prior approval by the senior pastor.

Adults who have a separate and private relationship with any unrelated child from the church away from sanctioned church youth activities shall be responsible for assuring parents are fully informed and consent to all interactions.

St. Paul's Church shall conduct a "safe church audit" annually and shall publish a list of adults meeting the requirements to work with children and youth.

St. Paul's Church computers will have adequate password protection. There shall be adequate supervision of anyone using a St. Paul's Church computer to access the Internet. Any activity on a St. Paul's Church computer is not considered private and may be accessed by authorized persons. Such authorized persons shall include St. Paul's congregational officers, council members and clergy.

Any use of a computer or other device that uses St. Paul's wireless internet connection (WiFi) shall not be considered "private" and shall be overseen by a responsible adult.

Non-church related use of the WiFi (such as for homework or other personal purposes) shall only be done with the permission and knowledge of the pastor or a supervising adult.

Education and Training

St. Paul's Church clergy, employees and volunteers who work with children or youth shall attend training on how to prevent child abuse and promote healthy boundaries in church settings. Records of training will be recorded in the Safe Church Audit. The senior pastor will approve curriculum and trainers for the requisite training. Training recommended by the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is preferred (for example, training presented by the Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut).

Reporting Concerns

Anyone who knows of or suspects a violation of these policies shall immediately report the violation to the senior pastor, the president of the congregation's council or their designated representative.

Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies by a clergy person shall immediately notify the Bishop's Office of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at (508) 791-1530 extension 105.

Anyone who suspects that child abuse has taken place at church or in another setting shall bring it to the attention of the senior pastor and council president. In the event that they are unable to reach either of these persons, they may bring it to the attention of the New England Synod Safe Church officer.

Under Connecticut law, clergy are mandated reporters of suspected abuse or neglect of children. As mandated reporters, clergy are required to (1) make an oral report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) Hotline within 12 hours of suspecting that a child has been abused or neglected; and (2) make a written report (using DCF form 136) within 48 hours of making the oral report.

The Hotline number is (800) 842-2288.

DCF form 136 is available at www.state.ct.us/dcf. (Click on the link "Forms".)

When making a written report it is advisable to keep a copy of the report and to mail the report first class/return receipt requested so that there is documentation that the report was made as required by law.

Follow Up to Reports of Sexual Misconduct

- a. Each incident that is reported will be promptly followed up by the Safe Church Response Team with confidentiality, care and concern for all involved.
- b. Follow up will include interviews of all concerned.
- c. Follow up will include review of all relevant documentation.
- d. The follow up will be conducted in such a way as to maintain confidentiality to the extent

practicable under the circumstances. Should an individual's words or conduct be determined to constitute misconduct or harassment, recommendations for action will be developed and appropriate action will be taken.

- e. The designated committee will be sensitive to the needs of all involved and shall provide any support necessary, including access to counseling, during the follow up and response.
- f. The designated committee will review all information available or uncovered during the follow up and, when deemed necessary and with the advice of the New England Synod, will seek legal counsel to assist in the investigation and resolution.

Response to Reports of Sexual Misconduct

- a. Upon reaching a course of action, the committee will communicate the results and resolution by meeting separately with the person filing the complaint and then with the accused.
- b. The committee may recommend a course of action that may include counseling, education, or disciplinary action.
- c. If a complaint is not substantiated, all parties will be informed both orally and in writing.
- d. St. Paul's Church will not engage in or tolerate retaliation against any clergy person, lay employees, or volunteer for making a good faith claim of misconduct or harassment or providing information relating to such complaints.

Sex Offenders

- a. The Congregational Safe Church Advocacy Team shall regularly check Connecticut's Sex Offender Registry for names of offenders that may be members or attendees of St. Paul's
- b. Convicted Sex Offenders must be disclosed to the Congregation.
- c. Charged and Convicted Sex Offenders must have a covenant approved by the church council that specifically outlines their relationship to the faith community including all requirements to maintain a safe environment for all. They are never to be in a church facility or Sponsored Institution unaccompanied.

VI. Concerns Related to the Elderly and Those with Developmental Disabilities

Suspected Abuse

Anyone who suspects that the abuse of a person with disabilities has taken place at church or in another setting shall bring it to the attention of the senior pastor and Council president. In addition, they shall make an oral report to the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities within 72 hours of suspecting that an adult with developmental disabilities has been abused or neglected at (860) 297-4300. They shall make a *written* report to the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities within 5 calendar days of making the initial report. The form for making the written report is available by calling (860) 297-4300.

Under Connecticut law, clergy are mandated reporters of suspected abuse or neglect of the elderly. If there is suspicion of abuse, neglect (including self-neglect) or exploitation of a person 60 years or older, reporting to the Department of Social Services is required.

Reports are made by calling (888) 385-4225 or after-hours at Info-Line 211. Reports must be made within 5 calendar days of suspecting that an elder has been abused or neglected.

Under Connecticut law, clergy are mandated reporters of suspected abuse or neglect of adults with developmental disabilities.

Visitation of Home Bound Members

It is strongly encouraged that, whenever possible, the "two unrelated adults" rule should apply to any ministry visits by members of St. Paul's to its home bound members. If this is not possible, it is strongly encouraged that a visit takes place at a time when a family member of the home bound person is present.

VI. Other Safety Related Policies:

Firearms

Firearms are prohibited from the church property or at any church activity. The senior pastor of the congregation may make special exceptions for off-duty police officers or others who are required by law to carry firearms.

Alcohol or Tobacco Use:

No non-sacramental alcohol shall be consumed or served on Church property. (See St. Paul's Policy on the Use of Alcoholic Beverages for further details.)

St. Paul's buildings and grounds shall be smoke free areas.

Computer and Internet Use:

St. Paul's Church computers will have adequate password protection. There shall be adequate supervision of any youth using a St. Paul's Church computer to access the Internet. Personal use of any of St. Paul's computers is strongly discouraged. The only exceptions to this is in the case of an emergency or where such use can be reasonably understood as an extension of or is congruent with St. Paul's official ministries.

Any use of a computer or other device by a youth that uses St. Paul's wireless internet connection (WiFi) shall not be considered "private" and shall be overseen by a responsible adult. Non-church related use of the WiFi (such as for homework or other personal purposes) shall only be done with the permission and knowledge of the pastor or a supervising adult.

Any adult who accesses the internet via St. Paul's WiFi, is strongly encouraged to do so in a way that would not violate the values of this congregation. The access to sites that feature nudity, pornography, glorified violence, or other degrading material is prohibited.

Safety Issues related to the Building and Grounds

- a. Keys should be returned by those who no longer need them.
- b. A record of all key holders and those with knowledge of the security/lock codes shall be maintained in the church or Sponsored Institution's office.
- c. Periodic audits shall take place to insure the accuracy of these records.

See attached document for other policies concerning safety issues related to the Buildings and Grounds.

VII. Approval and Adoption

The Congregation Council of St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church has approved this policy as of June 25, 2013.

VIII. References

New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Statement of Policy: Response to Sexual Misconduct <http://www.nesynod.org/resources/peopleandpolicies>

Specific details about performance of background checks, norms for various types of youth events, and supervision of compliance with this policy can be obtained: at training events offered by the Synod; from your Congregation's Safe Church Advocacy Team; or from the Synod Safe Church Officer.

The Safe Church Officer for the Synod is: Pastor Tim Roser, Associate to the Bishop, 603-662-2081, troser@nesynod.org.

The Bishop's Office of the New England Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America can be reached at (508) 791-1530 extension 105.

The Episcopal Diocese of Connecticut

1335 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105 I (860) 233-4481

https://www.ctepiscopal.org/Content/Safe_Church_and_Pastoral_Response_Resources.asp

Training dates: see

https://www.ctepiscopal.org/Content/Safe_Church_Training_Schedule.asp

Background checks:

https://www.ctepiscopal.org/Content/Background_checks.asp

Secure Search

(866) 891-1954

<https://www.securesearchpro.com/faith-based-organization>

COSTS & SERVICES The cost of the basic background check using SecureSearch is \$13. This includes a multi-state criminal search; national sex offender search, Social Security Number validation, Social Security Number death index search, name and address history search for the past 30 years, and an alias search. It also includes a county courthouse review of criminal records for the past seven years, and a "red-flag review" by SecureSearch personnel. SecureSearch will add \$9.00 per county if a person has lived outside of CT within the last 7 years or if a red flag has come up.

The Abuse and Neglected Hotline for the Connecticut Department of Children and Families is (800) 842-2288.

Suspected abuse or neglect of the elderly is reported to the Department of Social Services at (888) 385-4225 or after-hours at Info-Line 211.

Suspected abuse or neglect of adults with developmental disabilities is reporting to the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities at (860) 297-4300.

IX. Acknowledgement by Volunteers and Leaders

My signature indicates that I have reviewed and understand St. Paul's Safe Church Policy (official version 1.0) and that I agree to abide by all its intents expressed and implied.

Name _____ Date _____

Signature _____

Position / Role _____

Please detach this page, upon signing, and return it to the Office where it will be kept on file.