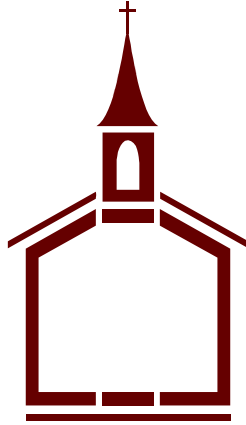


Hope Lutheran Church Policy for Creating a Safe Community

Adopted July 13, 1999, by the Church Council of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church,
600 W. 42nd Avenue, San Mateo, CA 94403
650-349-0100, helc@pacbell.net



A Commitment to Sanctuary

Adopted by the Church Council, September, 1998

In recognition of the spiritual and public trust given to this faith community, Hope Lutheran Church is committed to being a true sanctuary, both nurturing and protecting its members and visitors. Worship of God requires openness, trust, intimacy, vulnerability, and a safe, supportive community. Abuse and harassment are, therefore, violations of the faith shared by this congregation. Accordingly, the congregation will maintain official policies and procedures which assure prevention of instances of abuse, appropriate intervention into alleged incidents of abusive behavior, and care for all involved. These procedures will be reviewed by the Church Council annually to correspond to changes in civil law and the community.

In picturing how we might live out our vision of sanctuary, we determined that

- ✘ *Children can grow in faith and know God only if they are physically and emotionally safe at church.*
- ✘ *Parents need to feel assured of their children's safety in all church activities, and of the church's commitment to provide for their children's safety, in order to focus on worship and their own spiritual growth.*
- ✘ *Staff and volunteers need to be equipped, protected, supported and accountable as they lead and nurture children.*

Background

The Safe Community Task Force, authorized by the Church Council of Hope Lutheran Church, has worked to develop policies and procedures to keep our congregation a safe sanctuary for our children and youth. Fortunately our work was not initiated in response to problems within our congregation, but was prompted by an awareness of situations arising in other churches where there has been abuse of children by paid and volunteer child and youth workers. The advice of expert authors of the Church Law and Tax Report, among others, has shaped our response and assured us that measures designed to protect our children and youth may also help protect our congregation from unfounded charges and legal liability. These policies and procedures are designed to enhance our service to Christ. This goal will direct our implementation and future modification of these policies and procedures.

Leading social service agencies in our society have taken similar steps with good results. Among them are the City of San Mateo, scouting and youth sports organizations, and YMCA and YWCA. The experience of other congregations which have adopted similar policies is positive. We of Hope Lutheran Church are motivated because we are entrusted with the spiritual, educational and moral development of our children and youth.

Our policy is adapted from *Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church*, published by Church Law & Tax Report; *Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities*, written by Bethel Lutheran Church (ELCA) in Madison, WI.; *Parish Protection Program for Children and Youth*, published by the South Central Wisconsin Synod of the ELCA; and, *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, published by the Crime Prevention Center, State of California,

Other works consulted:

Policy 99-001 Statement of Policy Regarding Sexual Misconduct by Members of the Clergy and Rostered Laypersons, adopted by the Sierra Pacific Synod.

It Should Never Happen Here: A Guide for Minimizing the Risk of Child Abuse in Ministry, by Ernest J. Zarra III, 1997 Baker Books

Better Safe Than Sued: Keeping Out of Trouble in Youth Ministry, by Jack Crabtree, 1998 Group Publishing

Safe Haven for Children - A Resource for Congregations, 1998 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

"Safe Volunteers: Effective Screening Techniques to Minimize the Risk of Abuse by Volunteers," *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*, Summer 1994

"Out of Harms Way: the "Two Adult Rule," *Praxis*, September, 1998, published by the Sierra Pacific Synod.

"ELCA Youth Ministry Help Sheet - Ensure Safe Boundaries in Youth Ministry ," 1998 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America/Division for Congregational Ministries - Youth Ministries

Volunteer and Child Protection Policy, Los Altos Methodist Church, October, 1996

Policy and Procedures for Volunteers in Children and Youth Ministries, First Presbyterian Church of Burlingame, September, 1998



The Safe Community Policy is intended solely for the use of Hope Lutheran Church in performing its functions as a religious body. It is not a contract, agreement, promise, or undertaking by the Church to do or refrain from doing anything. It is not intended that the policy be imposed as rigid law, binding the Church or others; rather, the policy must be interpreted and applied compassionately in accordance with the theological and Biblical principles of the Gospel. Any actions or decisions by the Church in connection with the policy are to be undertaken at the Church's sole discretion, in accordance with the theology and ecclesiology of the ELCA, and in the exercise of Hope Lutheran Church's constitutional rights as a religious body.

The Safe Community Policy was developed for the child/youth ministry programs of Hope Lutheran Church, not including Hope's preschool. The staff of Hope Lutheran Preschool operates under its own specially developed procedural and behavioral standards which are in accordance with its status as a state-licensed child care facility.

Creating a Safe Community

We have developed a fourfold strategy to help ensure that the children entrusted to us are safe at our church, that parents are assured of their safety, and that adults who work with them are equipped, protected, supported, and held accountable. Since our staff and volunteers are often in situations where they are working and talking with youth, they may be the first ones to recognize a problem or concern facing a child. Our policy, therefore, is designed not only to protect families but also to provide our volunteers and staff with resources to help them report suspected abuse. Our strategy involves a plan for:

- **Worker selection,**
- **Worker training, including Standards of Behavior;**
- **Reporting of suspected abuse,**
- **Record keeping.**

Worker Selection: We Want To Make Sure This Is A Good Match!

All who work on behalf of Hope Lutheran Church with any children and/or youth will be properly selected, screened, trained, and supervised, not only to minimize the risk of child abuse at Hope by volunteer or paid workers, but also to honor Hope's commitment to helping people discover their God-given gifts and apply them in God's service.

The direct supervisor of program areas in each of the following categories will be as follows:

Senior Pastor -

All paid staff

Teaching Pastor -

Confirmation leaders

Director of Youth Ministries -

Youth leaders, chaperones, drivers

Director of Child & Family Ministries -

Sunday School, mid-week program, VBS staff, nursery caregivers

Director of Music Ministries -

Choir directors, musicians

Primary Screening Procedures

Primary screening procedures are established for workers who, in the normal course of their duties, are expected to be alone for any period of time with one or more children, or work in a supervisory capacity on our campus. This includes, but is not limited to, all paid staff, pastors, associates in ministry, administrative assistants, secretaries, directors of Christian education, family ministry, youth workers and directors, Sunday School and confirmation leaders and teachers, nursery staff and volunteers, choir directors, and custodial workers.

When selecting child/youth workers, we cannot guarantee that an individual will be an effective and safe youth leader, but the selection process helps us gather information to make an informed decision. Therefore, we ask that:

- Volunteers be actively involved in the congregation for at least six months before applying for a position in which they are expected to be alone for any period of time with one or more children.
- Volunteers and staff complete the Child/ Youth Worker Registration forms before they begin work with children or youth.
- Potential child and youth workers provide two references who are acquainted with the applicant's work with children and youth.
- The direct supervisor of the program area in which the applicant has interest will conduct an interview with the potential worker.
- Volunteers and staff, age 18 and over, participating in Hope's child or youth ministries shall be checked through the California Department of Justice for convictions for sexual or physical abuse, felony drug convictions, and felony convictions for violent crimes. No one will be accepted who has had a criminal sexual or physical abuse violation.

All information will be kept in strict confidence. See **Record Keeping** for rules regarding record access and security.

Secondary Screening Procedures

Secondary screening procedures are established for workers who are not expected to be alone with children. This includes, but is not limited to, VBS leaders and workers, Sunday School and Wonderful Wednesday assistants, dinner helpers, Summer Sunday School helpers. For that individual, we ask that:

- Potential workers complete the Child/ Youth Worker Registration forms.
- The direct supervisor of the program area in which the applicant has interest conduct an interview with the potential worker.

Supervising Child and Youth Workers

The two-adult rule is our goal when working with children and youth. Situations in which an adult is completely alone with one or more children are to be avoided.

- During Sunday School, Confirmation, mid-week programs, VBS, etc., an adult present in a supervisory role, checking into class and meeting rooms, serves as a second adult.
- Counseling should be as confidential as possible without sacrificing safety.
- Planned individual contact outside the church building should occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian.

Training Staff and Volunteers Who Work With Children and Youth

Volunteers and staff who have been accepted to work with youth in a primary capacity will receive training which includes

- A description of the background of the issue and why churches need to be involved,
- A description of Hope's Safe Community Policy, including the procedure defined for

reporting suspected abuse.

- An explanation of the expectations of persons who work with children and youth, and
- Basic information about child abuse and neglect so that these persons can understand the issues and be alert to signs of abuse in the children and youth with whom they work.

Primary workers must attend at least one training session every two years.

Expectations of Volunteers and Staff

Each volunteer or staff member working with youth at Hope Lutheran Church is expected to

- Be a role model for youth,
- Organize meaningful experiences,
- Adhere to the specific guidelines developed for his/her position.

In addition to the above expectations, Hope Lutheran Church has developed Standards of Behavior for all individuals working with children and youth on behalf of our church. The standards are designed to protect youth, adults, families, and the church.

Standards of Behavior

A. Positive Discipline

Discipline used in church activities should be positive, respectful, and caring. Physical punishment and emotional abuse are not permitted. Volunteers and staff should be alert to the physical and emotional health of the children and youth with whom they work.

B. Open Door Policy

Staff and volunteers should work with youth in reasonably open places where others are welcome to enter - not behind closed or locked doors. Parents and guardians are always welcome to attend

classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, and events.

C. Transportation

Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. Drivers should be accompanied by a second adult when dropping off or picking up minors, unless prior approval has been obtained from the parent or guardian. Safety of the child is always the paramount consideration.

D. Respect of Privacy

Adult leaders and staff need to respect the privacy of minors and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Situations requiring privacy include using rest rooms, changing clothes, and taking showers. Adults need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

E. Overnight Accommodations

A minimum of two adult leaders should be present at any overnight activity. If youth participants include males and females, ideally the adult leaders would be males and females. If this condition cannot be met, the event will proceed only upon approval of the direct supervisor of the program area. When minors and adults must share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room for the sake of safety and/or cost-efficiency, parents will be informed ahead of time. An adult should not occupy the same bed as a minor.

F. Housing

When private homes are used for overnight events, the program staff member will make final approval of all adults involved as hosts, hostesses, and chaperones. At least two youth will be assigned to each home.

G. Sexual Activity

No sexual activity is permitted between adults and minors. Sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual material, the exposure of sexual parts of the minor's

body and/or the adult's body or other sexual behaviors is prohibited.

H. Tobacco and Alcohol

While supervising children and youth on behalf of Hope Lutheran Church, adult leaders and staff should refrain from the use of tobacco and alcohol.

I. Illegal Substances and Firearms

The use or possession of illegal substances and/or firearms while supervising children on behalf of Hope Lutheran Church is strictly prohibited.

What is abuse?

There are four types of child abuse.

- **Physical abuse** is the deliberate physical injuring of a child.
- **Sexual abuse** is the involvement of a child in any sexual act or situation for the gratification or benefit of another.
- **Emotional abuse** is maltreatment which causes low self-esteem in a child, undue fear or anxiety, or other damage to a child's well-being caused by such acts as angry fault finding, humiliating and belittling a child for mistakes or failures, and deliberate inattention to a child's emotional needs.
- **Neglect** is not providing food, clothing, shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, education, supervision, or other basic necessities.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

According to California's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, only specially trained individuals, including "child care custodians," are required to report suspected child abuse.

Because volunteers are not child care custodians as defined in the Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Act, **volunteers are not mandated reporters.**

However, any individual who has reason to suspect abuse, or is aware of a potentially unsafe condition that could lead to abuse, should immediately report that information to any of the following: the Senior Pastor, the Teaching Pastor, the Director of Youth Ministries, or the Director of Child & Family Ministries. The individual may be asked to complete a written report describing the basis for his or her concern.

A review of the reported abuse or potentially unsafe condition will be conducted by the following: The Senior Pastor, the direct supervisor of the area of ministry involved, the staff member to whom the report was initially made (if not one of the above), and a member of the Personnel/Finance Committee or other council member designated by the Council President. These individuals may consult with others, including legal counsel, as needed.

The outcome of their decision will be documented and kept in a locked file in the Senior Pastor's office.

Record Keeping

The following materials will be kept on file for all persons covered by the Safe Community Policy:

- Child/Youth Worker Registration forms, including documentation of interview and references
- Documentation of training, for primary workers
- Results of criminal records check, for primary workers

Security of Records

Records on child/youth workers will be kept in a locked file in the Senior Pastor's office. They will be available only to direct supervisors of the program areas *on a need-to-know basis*. Access is only with permission of the Senior Pastor, who is our "Custodian of Records."

Responsibility for Maintaining Records

Direct Supervisor of Program Areas -

Each direct supervisor of program areas covered by the Safe Community Policy will do the following:

- For each child/youth worker under his or her supervision, collect and compile the materials to be kept on file (with the exception of results of the criminal records check) and give these to the Custodian of Records for filing.
- When requested, provide the Personnel/Finance Committee with a list of all child/youth workers under his or her supervision.

Policy Compliance

The chairperson of the Personnel/Finance Committee will conduct an annual audit on or before January 15 to ensure that all responsible personnel are compliant with this policy.

Questions and Answers

People Covered

Who should go through the Safe Community Program? All adults and youth who work with children and youth on an ongoing basis should take part in the program.

What about the one-time volunteer? People do not need to go through the process if: (1) they are working with youth or children on a one-time basis; and (2) a staff member or volunteer who has gone through the process is also present. Volunteers who have not gone through the Safe Community program should not be put in situations where they will work alone with children and without supervision.

What if volunteers or staff say they have had background checks and/or youth protection

training as part of their jobs or experience in other programs? Results of criminal records checks are confidential and, therefore, cannot be shared among agencies. The potential worker must authorize another criminal records check for his/her work at Hope. Youth protection training, however, may be transferable, subject to the approval of Hope's trainer.

The Process

Why do we have to do a Criminal Records Check on volunteers?

We require the Criminal Records Check because it provides essential information about the applicant's background. We also require it because it protects the congregation. Here's how.

- It's easy - it takes only a moment of the volunteer's time to authorize the check and the Department of Justice performs it at no cost for non-profit organizations.
- Requiring a Criminal Records Check is a powerful deterrent to the career abuser.
- Career abusers look for places where they can have easy access to children. With so many other community organizations doing careful screening, churches without screening policies may be at an increased risk.

Why do we need to fingerprint workers?

The fingerprints are just another form of identification on the form that authorizes the Criminal Records Check. They say that the name you signed to the authorization form is really you. The Department of Justice destroys the authorization form, including fingerprints, within six months after the requested information is sent to Hope. Fingerprints do not remain on file at the Department of Justice.

How much time should we give staff/volunteers to complete the program? Ideally, individuals would not work with children until they attend

the training and their records have been received and assessed. However, due to scheduling realities, this might not be possible. Hope will schedule training opportunities such that workers may attend within six months of the time they begin their work.

What about retraining? A condensed retraining will be part of each ministry's annual orientation program. A full, two-hour training event will be scheduled each fall for new workers, and at other times throughout the year, as needed. All workers shall attend the full, two-hour training every other year.

Child/Youth Worker Registration
Hope Lutheran Church Child & Youth Ministries

Thank you for your interest in working with the young people of Hope Lutheran Church. Your involvement is vital to a successful child and youth ministry. This form will help us to get to know you better so that together we will be able to give our young people the best possible experience in their faith journey now and throughout their lives. We pray that God will lead and guide us in our ministry together. Thank you for your participation.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Place of Employment: _____

Health/accident Insurance & Policy # _____

Emergency Contact - Name: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Please list all present or previous work, either paid or volunteer, involving youth. Identify the institution and type of work. _____

Do you have any medical training (CPR, lifeguard, first aid, EMT, etc)? _____

Are there any physical conditions that would limit your activities in working with youth? _____

In general, with what age youth do you prefer to work? _____

Please list any gifts, training, education, interests, hobbies, etc., that relate to your interest in youth ministry.

Include any you feel you could share with young people _____

Are you a member of Hope Lutheran Church? _____ Another church? _____

Are you a part of any committees, organizations within Hope? _____

Please describe briefly any church involvement over the past few years _____

Do you belong to any organizations, groups within the community? _____

Personal Information

Interest Inventory

Child/Youth Worker Registration
Hope Lutheran Church Child & Youth Ministries

Name: _____

Have you ever been charged with or convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse, or been the subject of a complaint to any employer, government, or other agency, organization, or person, charging sexual abuse, misconduct, or harassment?

Have you ever been convicted of any crime other than a minor traffic violation?

Studies have shown that individuals who abuse children have often been abused themselves as children. If you were abused as a child, or have ever been an abuser or the partner of an abuser, or have been involved in any way in an abusive situation, and are concerned that these experiences might impact your care of children, please share this with the program director or one of the pastors. Our pastors will help you or will refer you to professional help in the community.

Your comments: _____

Because leaders of children and/or youth are role models, smoking and the possession and/or use of alcohol is inappropriate while supervising minors. Thus, if you smoke or drink, even occasionally, would you be willing to agree that you would abstain from any use of tobacco or alcohol while in the presence of children and youth in church sponsored or related activities? Yes _____ No _____

Your comments: _____

Please provide the names, addresses, and phone numbers of two contacts (preferably agencies or organizations) which are acquainted with your work with children.

All the information I have provided in the process of applying to work with the children/youth of Hope Lutheran Church is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. I voluntarily and knowingly authorize any person named herein as a contact to give to the staff or Hope Lutheran Church any information they may have regarding my character and fitness for working with children and youth. I voluntarily release and agree to hold harmless from liability (a) all such agents, that provide information in connection with this form, and (b) Hope Lutheran Church and its officers, employees and volunteers in connection with the verification of any information provided in this form.

I have read and understood the information contained in Hope Lutheran Church's Safe Community Policy, and will comply with the procedures and policies described.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Request For Criminal Records Check And Authorization
Hope Lutheran Church Child and Youth Ministries

I hereby request the _____ Police Department and/or the Department of Justice of the State of California to release any information which pertains to any record of convictions contained in its files or in any criminal file maintained on me whether local, state, or national. I hereby release and agree to hold harmless (a) said Police Department and (b) Hope Lutheran Church, its officers, employees, and volunteers, from any and all liability resulting from such disclosure.

Signature

Print name

Print maiden name if applicable

Print all aliases

Date of birth

Place of birth

Social Security Number (if required by Police Department)

Record sent to:

Name _____

Address _____