

***Child and Youth Protection Policies***  
***St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Manhattan, KS***  
***Approved by St. Luke's Church Council on June 21st, 2016***  
***Effective as of July 1st, 2016***

**Introduction**

St. Luke's Lutheran Church is committed to providing a safe, nurturing environment for children and youth participating in ministry activities. The Bible clearly communicates the high value that God places on children. In Mark 10:14 Jesus says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth; anyone who will not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." And He took the children in His arms, put His hands on them and blessed them." At St. Luke's, we desire to bring children and youth to Jesus in a safe, nurturing environment where the love of God can be seen and felt.

In order to do all we can to protect the children and youth in our care, we place a high priority on the careful recruitment, screening, placement, and ongoing supervision/training of all staff and volunteers, teachers, caregivers, and leaders who serve in our children's and youth ministries. Therefore, we establish this Child and Youth Protection Policy, which shall be in effect church-wide (with the exception of the Early Learning Center which operates under its own policies) upon approval by Council as of the date Council designates. This policy is only a basic policy, not comprehensive; under the oversight of Council, each ministry Board remains free to enact further measures for its areas of jurisdiction at its discretion.

**Waiting Period** Volunteers in children or youth ministry will attend St. Luke's for a minimum of 6 months prior to volunteering in children or youth ministry. This waiting period allows potential volunteers to become an active part of the church and begin to understand the church's mission, vision and values. It also gives ministry leaders time to become acquainted with a potential volunteer, allowing a better match of ministry opportunity to volunteer interest and ability.

Waiting Period Exceptions (normal screening procedures still apply):

- 1) Volunteers who would like to assist "behind the scenes" with no direct contact with children/youth (e.g. cooking, setup, tear down, administrative work) may begin volunteering in these areas without a waiting period at the discretion of the appropriate children/youth ministry board.
  
- 2) Volunteers who have current volunteer experience within a church setting with children or youth who have begun attending St. Luke's for various reasons, including moving to the Manhattan area or attending college in Manhattan, may begin volunteering with children/youth without a waiting period at the discretion of the appropriate children/youth board.

**Initial Volunteer Screening Procedures**

Safety of children and youth is a priority of St. Luke's. As a result, great care must be taken to ensure that those placed in positions of trust, leadership and responsibility with children/youth are prepared and suited for such work. Children and youth volunteers who are 18 and older must complete the following screening process prior to working with children/youth.

1) Background Checks: Potential volunteers will undergo a national background check by a provider approved by St. Luke's Church Council. Called staff will conduct the background check on each volunteer in confidentiality, and will report to the appropriate board whether each volunteer has or has not passed their background check, without disclosing details. Volunteers will be screened based on national recommendations for youth serving volunteer; convictions for the following crimes will prompt a determination that an applicant does not meet the criteria to serve with children/youth at St. Luke's Lutheran Church:

R1. Any felony (any crime punishable by confinement greater than one year)

a. Defined on the basis of exposure for the offense for which the defendant was convicted, pled guilty or pled nolo contendere. If pled down, then the crime to which the defendant ultimately pled.

b. Defined as all crimes punishable by greater than one year in jail or prison, regardless of how characterized by jurisdiction. If range, alternate sentencing, or indeterminate sentencing, outer range greater than one year.

R2. Any lesser crime involving force or threat of force against a person

R3. Any lesser crime in which sexual relations are an element, including "victimless" crimes of a sexual nature e.g. pornography

R4. Any lesser crime involving controlled substances (not paraphernalia or alcohol)

R5. Any lesser crime involving cruelty to animals

R6. Any lesser crime involving a minor

[ drawn from Recommended Guidelines© established by National Council of Youth Sports]

2) Volunteers will complete initial and ongoing training as designated by the Boards and/or Council. Church ministry Boards have the responsibility of ensuring that each and every volunteer is properly screened and trained.

3) Volunteers who do not meet the background check criteria or a volunteer with an area of concern identified from the screening process will not be approved to serve in children's/youth ministry. This includes any volunteer who may be deemed to pose a threat to children or youth. St. Luke's maintains the right to decline potential volunteers or to terminate any current volunteer's participation in St. Luke's ministries or programs at any time for any reason. Acceptance by one Board for service in one area of ministry does not automatically constitute acceptance by all St. Luke's church Boards for service in all areas of ministry, but each ministry board retains power and responsibility to accept, reject, discipline, train, dismiss or accept the resignation of any volunteer in any ministry under its own jurisdiction at its own discretion. Council shall have the final say in any matter.

4) Screening exceptions:

Youth Volunteers – Children's Ministry Board uses youth volunteers under the age of 18. St. Luke's recognizes that having youth volunteering with children can be valuable to both the youth and the children being ministered to. Youth may be used in certain capacities with two screened adults.

Criminal History – St. Luke's believes that redemption is possible and that in some cases an individual who has had a history of criminal activity may be appropriate to work with children. However, no registered sex offender will be eligible to serve as an employee or volunteer with children or youth at St. Luke's Lutheran Church due to insurance requirements; no exceptions will be made.

If a volunteer discloses a criminal history in their questionnaire or personal interview and a staff person would still like to use them as a volunteer with children/youth the following steps should be taken: a) disclosed history should be verified with the background check and fully documented; b) two references (one may be from within St. Luke's) should be collected with favorable recommendations; c) a specific supervision plan should be developed and documented for the individual; d) the exception to this policy will be reviewed and approved by the appropriate children's/youth ministry boards and by St. Luke's Church Council.

5) If there is need for paper documentation, it will be secured in the church's office, otherwise it will be accesable through our online provider by Called Staff . The ministry Boards, called staff and/or paid staff shall furnish all such documentation and records in a timely manner.

6) The Called Staff shall work with the ministry boards to ensure implementation of and compliance with this policy, and proper training of accepted volunteers. The Called Staff shall work with the Boards to ensure that periodic background checks of continuing volunteers are conducted in a timely fashion as required by this Policy.

### **Safety and Supervision of Children and Youth**

Once children and youth ministry volunteers have been placed in areas of ministry, the following practices will be used to ensure the safety and security of children and youth under our supervision. The guiding principle for these guidelines is transparency in activities, programs, and individual situations with children/youth. Parents/legal guardians are welcome to attend or even participate in activities, as may be appropriate, as observers with their child(ren) without needing to be screened and approved as volunteers beforehand, provided the supervision and direction of those activities remains with the screened adult volunteers approved and designated by the appropriate Board. Parents participating in any child/youth events as chaperones must be screened and approved by the appropriate Board beforehand as with any

#### Children's Ministry (Infant– 5th grade):

– A minimum of two (2) screened adults will be present at every function or program involving children and sponsored by St. Luke's, including each classroom, vehicle, or other enclosed area. Youth volunteers should be assigned to classrooms where they are the third volunteer whenever possible. If this is not possible, the youth volunteer's parent should be made aware that the youth is serving as the second "adult" in a classroom. The youth volunteer and adult supervisor should adhere to all policies in place to protect youth and children since the youth volunteer is still a minor. For classes, events or activities that include a larger number of children, adult volunteers should be increased according to the needs of the group. Ministry staff will be responsible for monitoring how many volunteers are needed.

- In the event that only one screened adult is present for Sunday School or BASIC class the teachers must notify another lead teacher and, if possible, leave the classroom door open.
- Children will be accompanied to the bathroom by a teacher. Teachers will check the bathroom before children enter to ensure that no adults are in the bathroom. Teachers will remain near the bathroom door while the child is in the bathroom. Generally, teachers will not enter a bathroom stall to assist a child. Assistance will not be provided to children over the age of 5. Parents should be asked if potty trained children 5 and younger need assistance, and how much. Teachers need to maintain classroom adult to child ratios if leaving the room is required for a child to go to the restroom. Teachers may use trained adults to help.
- Nursery care will be provided by at least one trained and screened adult. The top half of the nursery door must remain open at all times. Trained staff should inquire if a parent wants to change their child's diaper themselves.
- Volunteers and staff should maintain appropriate boundaries with children and refrain from any behavior that could be considered inappropriate contact with children as taught in training or as determined by church authorities.
- Activities and conversations with children should occur in non-private areas. Activities should be observable and able to be easily interrupted.

Youth Ministry (6th grade – 12th grade):

St. Luke's recognizes that youth ministry is based on building relationships. This may lend itself to mentoring type relationships. St. Luke's encourages these relationships to be built with transparency and openness. The following policies should be maintained to increase this transparency:

- A minimum of two (2) screened adults or one (1) screened adult with 2 or more youth will be present at every function or program involving youth and sponsored by St. Luke's, including classrooms and other venues. For classes, events or activities that include a larger number of youth, adult volunteers should be increased to a ratio of 1 screened adult per each five youth. At least two (2) screened adults or one (1) adult with 2 or more youth must remain with youth until all youth in their care have been picked up by an approved parent or have obtained other parent-approved transportation. In the case that only one screened adult is present during pick up both adult and youth will move to the most visible and public place.
- Adults should maintain appropriate boundaries with youth and refrain from any behavior that could be considered inappropriate contact with youth as taught in training or as determined by church authorities.
- Activities and conversations with youth should occur in non-private areas. Activities and conversations should be observable and able to be easily interrupted.
- Phone conversations and electronic communications should take place with as much transparency and openness as possible. Youth often choose to communicate with leaders via phone, e-mail, and texting. Whenever possible the youth's parent should be informed and give consent for this communication to take place. Parents will be included in private text and e-mail conversations between screened adults and their children; this provision does not apply to group reminders and announcements.

- Adult leaders will generally not be alone with youth in a vehicle. Adults transporting youth need to have at least 2 youth with the adult leader or at least 2 adults with the youth in the vehicle. Exception: In last-minute situations a parent may give an adult leader verbal permission to transport a youth to or from a St. Luke's sponsored activity without a third person present in the vehicle. This should not become routine transportation for youth.
- Permission and emergency contact information must be obtained for a youth to participate in any activities off-site. Emergency contact information must be completed for all youth attending any youth ministry programs.
- For ministry events which include an overnight (e.g. camping trip, missions trip, conference), adults will not be alone with youth in a room or tent. At least two adults and one youth or one adult and at least two youth will be present in a room or tent. Adults and children should be of the same gender. Parents/legal guardians may, at their discretion, room with their own child(ren).
- In compliance with Kansas District's Youth Protection Policy "If both boys and girls participate in an event, there shall be at least one (1) male and one (1) female sponsors."

### **Ongoing Screening and Training of volunteers**

Volunteers will be asked to complete a new background screen every 2 years and to self-report any changes in their status that could affect their ability to volunteer prior to assuming their volunteer responsibilities.

St. Luke's will provide ongoing communication and training to volunteers regarding child/youth safety and protection policies. Ongoing training will include review of child/youth safety and protection policies as well as ways to keep children/youth safe. This will be accomplished through regular ministry meetings/trainings and supervision as well as through electronic communications. Ministry Boards will be responsible for this ongoing training, working with the Called Worker.

### **Review and Revision of this Policy**

Any ministry board of St. Luke's may bring this policy up to Council for review or revision at will.