

**Child Protection Policy of
Salem Evangelical Lutheran Church, Catonsville, Maryland (June, 2021)**

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CHILD PROTECTION POLICY OF SALEM EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

A. Mission Statement Regarding This Child Protection Policy (CPP)

In Baptism, parents and sponsors promise to help baptized children live in the covenant of Baptism and in communion with the Church. Parents and sponsors promise faithfully to bring children to the services of God's house, to teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the Ten Commandments, to place in their hands the Holy Scriptures and to provide for their instruction in the Christian faith. The purpose of this congregation's ministry with children and youth is to support parents in fulfilling these responsibilities and to invite into participation those children and youth who have not yet been baptized. This congregation assembles weekly around Word and Sacrament. This community of faith provides opportunities for children and youth to learn about Christian faith, to develop an identity as part of the Christian community, and to serve others, following the example of our Lord Jesus.

This congregation's ministry with children and youth begins by striving to provide a safe environment and to provide caring and effective leaders. In an effort to promote this safe environment, the congregation binds itself to the Child Protection Policy described in this document. To protect the safety of our children and youth, employees and volunteers will be screened as to their acceptability for working with children and youth. They will be required to subscribe to our "One Approved Adult/One Approved Youth Rule," (stated on page 5) and they will follow the guidelines set forth in this Child Protection Policy. Application forms to become an Approved Adult are located in the Appendix of this document. The Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC) is committed to implementing and following this Child Protection Policy.

B. Definitions

Section I - Child Protective Services Definitions

According to Maryland Child Protective Services, child abuse includes any of the following:

- Physical injury *not necessarily visible* of a child under circumstances that indicate that a child's health or welfare is harmed or at substantial risk of being harmed.
- The failure to give proper care and attention to a child including leaving a child unattended where the child's health or welfare is harmed or a child is placed in substantial risk of harm.
- An act or acts involving sexual molestation or exploitation whether physical injuries are sustained or not.
- Identifiable and substantial impairment of a child's mental or physiological ability to function.
- Finding credible evidence that has not been satisfactorily refuted that physical abuse, neglect or sexual abuse occurred.

The definition of child sexual abuse or exploitation is:

"The employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of any child to engage in any sexually explicit conduct or any simulation of any sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of producing any visual depiction, including photographing, videotaping, computer, depicting or filming, of any sexually explicit conduct or the rape, sexual assault, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, molestation, incest, indecent exposure, prostitution, statutory sexual assault, or other form of sexual exploitation of children."

"Sexual abuse" refers to any interaction between a child and an adult when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the adult or of a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching.

Sexual abuse and harassment can include the following:

- Verbal sexual suggestions, innuendoes, or jokes
- Leering or ogling
- Intrusive touching, including pats, squeezes, hugs, pinches, kissing, brushing against someone's body
- The use of pornography
- Sexual assault or attempted sexual assault

Section II - Child Protection Policy Definitions

An **Approved Adult** is anyone over 18 years of age who has satisfied all the requirements of the Child Protection Policy and the application procedure for Approved Adults. An Approved Adult can be a volunteer or an employee of the congregation. Approved Adults include:

- Sunday school teachers
- Vacation Bible school teachers
- Children's leaders
- Mentors
- Children's choir directors
- Youth group leaders and parents involved in youth group activities
- Adults who are Approved Adults at other congregations or affiliations (ex. Mar Lu Ridge)
- Other adults who have satisfied all the requirements of Approved Adults, such as nursery volunteers

An **Approved Youth** is a volunteer age 14-18, or in school grades 9-12, who has satisfied all the requirements of the Child Protection Policy and the application procedure for Approved Youth. Such a person should work under the supervision of one Approved Adult.

A **child** (or youth) is any person considered a minor under the laws of Maryland, that is, a person who is under 18 years of age. A person who is incompetent is considered to be a child under this Policy irrespective of his/her age (vulnerable adult).

A **mentor** is an adult representative of the congregation giving support/guidance/counseling to youth.

A **pastor** refers to the regularly called, ordained rostered leader to that congregation. In the absence of a called pastor, the Congregation Council shall appoint another called/hired staff person as the main point of contact until a called pastor assumes his/her duties in the congregation. The pastor may also appoint such a staff person to serve in their place as preferred.

Social media is forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and micro blogging) through which users create online communities to share information. Ideas, personal messages, and other content (such as videos)

A **volunteer** is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or benefits.

A **youth volunteer** is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or benefits, and is under 18 years of age. Such a person should work under the supervision of one Approved Adult.

Bullying refers to intentional conduct, including verbal, physical, or written conduct, or an intentional electronic communication that creates a hostile church environment.

A **Legal Background Check** is an internet search of an individual in the Maryland Judiciary Case Search and/or Maryland Sex Offender Registry.

A **Mandatory Reporter** is an employee or a volunteer of any age or an Approved Adult/Youth who witnesses or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child involved in a childcare program or activity has been abused by anyone (including the child's family, guardians, an Approved Adult/Youth, or volunteer)

Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC) is the committee responsible for updating and administering this policy. Additional information about the committee is defined in sections J and K.

C. Approved Adult/Youth Criteria

1. Approved Adults have:

- provided positive personal references;
- participated in church activities and maintained an active church membership in this congregation for six months or more OR receive approval from at least two of the following:
 - Salem Pastor
 - Council president
 - Chair of Child Protection Policy Committee;
- successfully completed the application and Personal Interview, which did not reveal information of concern to the interviewer(s).

2. Approved Youth have:

- provided positive personal references from an unrelated adult;
- participated in church activities and maintained an active church membership in this congregation for six months or more;
- successfully completed the application and Personal Interview, which did not reveal information of concern to the interviewer(s).

Failure to comply with the process or above criteria is grounds for disapproval.

D. Application Process to Becoming an Approved Adult/Youth

This congregation requires that adults complete the following application process in order to become an Approved Adult/Youth.

1. Complete the Approved Adult/Youth application form (see Appendix).

*NOTE: All current adults working with children in our congregation will receive Approved Adult status upon their submission of the Approved Adult Application and signature of the Approved Child Protection Covenant.

2. Give church officials the written authorization to obtain a background check (see Appendix). New background checks are required for all applicants in paid positions. Previous checks from other sources deemed acceptable at the discretion of the Child Protection Policy Committee are valid for this process.

3. Have maintained an active membership in the congregation for the past six months (or been approved by two officials as stipulated in Section C, subsection 1) and continue to be an active member (or volunteer) after being accepted as an Approved Adult/Youth.

4. Be prepared to act in a volunteer capacity working with the children and youth of the congregation when called upon.

5. Attend a congregation-authorized training session as defined by the CPPC. Any fees associated with the training session will be paid by the CPPC.

6. Sign a Child Protection Covenant acknowledging that the applicant has read and understood the Child Protection Policy and agrees to comply with it.

7. Attend a Personal Interview with the Pastor and /or person(s) designated by the Pastor to determine eligibility for Approved Adult status.

Applications and related papers will be locked in a confidential file under the jurisdiction of the Pastor.

E. Forms

All forms necessary for becoming an Approved Adult in a paid or non-paid capacity, as well as permission slips for events not held at the church and incident reports are located in Appendix A. A brief description of each form follows.

1. Approved Adult/Youth Application

To be completed by all church members desiring to become an Approved Adult/Youth. Completed forms should be returned marked "Confidential" in a sealed envelope to the Pastor or CPPC Chair. The application includes signature of the "Disclosure of Information" form.

2. Child Protection Covenant

To be signed by all church members desiring to become an Approved Adult and returned with the application, in a sealed envelope marked "Confidential" to the Pastor or CPPC Chair.

This covenant is an outline of those obligations of an Approved Adult representing the congregation on any social networking site such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, or similar sites. All approved adults agree to comply with using their own name on all Social Networks, and to understand that at all times that they are to represent the congregation's ministry and ensure that their postings will be appropriate to the mission. All confidential and sensitive information will be kept private and will not be posted. Should any Approved Adult have a concern about the proper nature of a posting, they agree to consult with their supervisor and/or leadership before posting.

3. Request for Background Check

To be completed by all individuals in a paid position requiring Approved Adult status. Completed forms should be returned in a sealed envelope marked “Confidential” to the Pastor or CPPC Chair.

4. Personal Interview Form

To be completed by the Pastor and/or designee during the Personal Interview of the church member desiring to become an Approved Adult. This form is signed by the applicant and the Pastor and placed in the applicant’s file following the interview.

5. Permission Slip

Permission slips are to be completed by the parent or guardian of the child and returned to the appropriate Approved Adult sponsoring the event.

6. Incident Report Form

Used to report suspected incidents of alleged misconduct to the proper authorities.

F. Appropriate Behavioral Guidelines

To ensure that a nurturing Christian environment for children and youth is maintained within the congregation, to protect children and youth who participate in activities sponsored by the church from sexual and/or physical abuse, and to protect the congregation’s members from false allegations of abuse, the congregation has adopted the following policy:

1. Child Abuse Prohibited: Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation’s children and youth shall not violate that responsibility by causing physical injury, which is non-accidental; mental injury, which is non-accidental; sexual abuse or serious physical neglect of children.

2. Sexual Abuse Prohibited: Those who accept the special responsibility of working with the congregation’s children shall not violate that responsibility by having any interaction with a child where the child is being used for sexual stimulation of the adult or a third person. The behavior may or may not involve touching.

3. One Approved Adult/One Approved Youth Rule: Two Approved Adults or One Approved Adult and One Approved Youth should be present during any children’s church activity. Where possible, doors should be left open or a window should allow easy observation of the room.

4. Empty Room Policy: After an activity, check rooms to ensure that all participants have vacated the room. This will prevent situations where abuse might occur.

5. Building Supervision: Children who are not in the custody of a parent or guardian should not be left unsupervised in a room or moving throughout the building or the church property.

6. Expressions of Affection: True expressions of affection toward children can be a manifestation of Christ’s love for all of us. A kind word of encouragement to a child or a pat on the back can be a small but significant act for both the adult and the child. That being said, adults must use caution and common sense when physically expressing affection toward children.

- Respect a child's refusal of affection.
- Never make a child feel uncomfortable.
- Be aware of appropriate hand placement. A child or an observer could misinterpret a pat on the bottom or a bear hug.
- Note that a body-to-body embrace, a touch on private areas (those areas covered by a bathing suit), or any type of kiss is inappropriate.

7. Social Media – Best Practices for Online Presence: We live in a digital age, and many of the young people and their parents with whom we work have a presence in online communities (Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Tumbler, etc...). We encourage our team to also be present in these communities. However, it is equally important to remember that the pages and materials that we post to those pages are viewed by our young people and need to be consistent with the ministry we do with them. Our pages should not have inappropriate postings, photos, etc. on them.

We also will occasionally come across content on social networking sites that the young people and/or volunteers in our programs post that might be considered inappropriate. If we do, and if in our judgment it will jeopardize the relational ministry we might do with that young person, it is our best practice to contact them about the appropriateness of that posting.

It is also important to note that with regard to information posted or sent online, our general practices on confidentiality apply. Our best practice for an adult presence on Social Media is to not friend request a young person, but upon accepting a friend request from a young person, they will abide by the guidelines stated above.

Relationships with young people, whether hosted with Social Media or not, are precious and therefore should be handled in the same appropriate manner.

8. Digital Communication: Digital technology has also expanded the opportunity for personal connections within the congregation. That includes text and Facebook messages, e-mails, video conferencing, etc. When necessary for a pastor or youth ministry representative to communicate with a youth in a digital format, the following guidelines must be followed:

- Written consent will be obtained from the child's parent or guardian prior to engaging in digital contact. This can be general permission to communicate with the child in a digital format and does not have to be obtained for each contact. However, a copy of the permission must be on record.
- Written correspondence (texts, emails, etc.) will be accessible and saved to document the nature of these exchanges.

These requirements support appropriate relationships between young people and adults in our congregation while including parental discretion and direction. It also recognizes that the confidentiality of pastoral care conversations is critical and should be preserved unless the well-being of the child is questioned.

9. Permission Slips: Children and youth not accompanied by a parent or guardian must have permission to participate in any overnight activity or any activity that takes place away from church grounds. That permission must be in writing, signed by a parent or guardian. It must identify the activity in which the child and youth will be participating. The Permission slips will list Approved Adults who will serve as chaperons. (See Appendix A.)

The Pastor and/or person(s) designated by the Pastor may waive the requirement for permission slips where a permission slip serves no useful purpose (for example when a child is accompanied by his or her parent or guardian to the activity).

10. Overnight Rule: Additional adult chaperons who are not Approved Adults must have a Legal Background Check on file before participating in overnight activities. Overnight activities involving children shall be chaperoned by at least two Approved Adults (Approved Youth are not appropriate for overnight activities). If the event involves children of both genders, then there should be at least one (preferably two) Approved Adults of each gender.

11. Transportation of Children: When children and youth are transported for church activities they shall be transported in groups with at least one Approved Adult in each vehicle. Children must be transported according to Maryland State law requirements including appropriate child safety restraints.

12. Personal Vehicle Transportation: To transport children in a personal vehicle, the driver must be 18 years of age or older.

13. Church Nursery Guidelines: In order to ensure the safety of all children in the care of the Approved Adult/Youth in the Nursery School during worship services, the following policies will be adhered to:

- Only children in kindergarten or younger may be left in the nursery (unless special circumstances are granted).
- Children will not be left in the nursery before the Approved Adult is present.
- A "sign in" sheet must be completed with the name of the child and the person who will be attending church.
- There will be a process for notifying the parent/guardian during worship if there is an emergency involving the child or if the child needs to use the bathroom. Only the parent/guardian of the child will accompany a child to the bathroom or change diapers. Parents should therefore encourage their child to go to the bathroom prior to being left in the nursery.
- The parent/guardian must remain in the church building while the child is in the nursery.
- Children will not be dropped off in the nursery if they have a fever, vomiting, diarrhea, severe cold symptoms, eye or skin infections, etc.

G. Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

An employee or a volunteer of any age or an Approved Adult who witnesses or has reasonable cause to suspect that a child involved in a childcare program or activity has been abused by anyone (including the child's family, guardians, an Approved Adult, or volunteer) is a Mandatory Reporter and must report such knowledge or reasonable suspicions in the following steps:

1. Call the Maryland Child Protective Services within 24 hours as required by law. The employee, volunteer or Approved Adult will report such knowledge or reasonable suspicions directly to the State of Maryland Child Protective Services for Baltimore County (410-853-3000). This should be completed in consultation with the Pastor.
2. Thereafter, the person also should promptly notify the Pastor, Congregational Council President and/or the CPPC Chairperson of his or her report to the State of Maryland Child Protective Services.
3. The Pastor and/or chairperson of the CPPC must forward the "Report of Suspected Child Abuse" to the Maryland Child Protective Services to:
 - Department of Social Services Child Protective Services
 - Drumcastle Government Center
 - 6401 York Rd.
 - Baltimore, MD 21212
 - Fax: 410-853-3955
 They may not make an independent determination of whether or not to forward the report of suspected child abuse. They shall notify the person who made the report as to the date the report was forwarded to the Maryland Child Protective Services.
4. The Pastor, Council President and/or chairperson of the CPPC will notify each other that a report has been filed. Distribution and viewing of the report will be limited to these three parties.
5. The congregation will cooperate fully with government authorities investigating allegations of abuse. The initiative for investigating alleged abuse resides with the Maryland Child Protective Services and should not be carried out by the congregation.
6. The Pastor and/or the Congregation Council president shall notify the Office of the Synodical Bishop immediately about any report to the Maryland Child Protective Services about suspected child abuse.

All allegations of child abuse or serious physical neglect will be taken seriously by the pastor(s), Congregation Council, and the Child Protection Policy Committee Chair. All reporting steps taken will be documented, including a log of phone calls, personal visits, and written reports. Whenever possible there should be at least the Pastor and a Congregation Council president involved so that there can be verification of the reporting activity.

H. Response to the Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse

- i. The Pastor or Congregation Council president will notify parents or the persons suspected of the abuse. The phone call or visit will be documented.
- ii. The Pastor or Congregation Council president who reported the alleged child abuse to Maryland Child Protective Services will provide to the Congregation Council a written report and all the steps taken afterwards.
- iii. The Pastor or Congregation Council president will notify the congregation's insurance broker and/or carrier when the reporting procedures have been initiated. The phone call or written report will be documented. If the original notice is by phone, a letter memorializing that report will also be sent to the insurance broker and/or carrier.
- iv. The Pastor or Congregation Council president will determine whether the congregation should engage legal counsel in consultation with the insurance carrier.
- v. The Pastor or Congregation Council president will authorize the Pastor or one of the Council members to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only the authorized person or persons can speak for the congregation to the news media, government agencies, attorneys, or others.
- vi. All other steps taken to respond to an allegation of child abuse or neglect will be approved in advance by the Pastor or Congregation Council president and will as far as possible be documented by them.
- vii. There are times when allegations of abuse prove to be unsubstantiated and without merit. The Pastor or Congregation Council president should work to insure the confidentiality of the allegations and take measures to protect the reputation and standing of the individual in the life of the church and the community.

I. Confidentiality

Church leadership must respect the confidentiality of information which they have acquired in the course of abuse accusation and investigations. Therefore, the Pastor, Council President, and lay volunteers in the church should:

- Discuss the nature of confidentiality and its limitations at the beginning of volunteer opportunities, with assurance that confidentiality will be respected.
- Disclose confidential information only for compelling professional reasons or as required by law.
- Exercise great care to limit the content of shared information when disclosure is necessary.
- Safeguard the confidentiality of information maintained in notes and files or by electronic means.

J. The Child Protection Policy Committee (CPPC)

The CPPC shall consist of at least six members, with two year staggered terms, including the Pastor and Congregation Council President. The Pastor and Congregation Council President will appoint members with the approval of the Congregation Council. The CPPC chair shall be elected by the committee or appointed under the care of the Pastor.

K. The Responsibilities of the Child Protection Policy Committee

1. Review and make recommendations to the congregation for revising congregation policy regarding the safety of our children.
2. Provide training for all staff and volunteers working with the children regarding child abuse (physical and sexual) and congregation policy. Training should be presented prior to work with children.
3. Accept all applications of church members desiring to become an Approved Adult/Youth.
4. Delegate to the chair of the Child Protection Policy Committee and the Pastor the task of reviewing all applications.
5. Obtain a Legal Background Check for all applicants.
6. Submit a list of qualified candidates for Personal Interviews. Standard Personal Interview forms will be completed by the interviewer and will be included in the personnel file for each candidate.
7. Monitor Approved Adults/Youths to ensure that policies are being followed.
8. Keep a file of all permission slips, which will be stored in the congregation office. Permission slips will be kept for three years following the event. If an incident of abuse is reported relating to an event, the permission slips for that event will be maintained indefinitely.
9. Keep Congregation Council apprised of all activities of the committee.
10. Submit periodic educational statements regarding the activities of the committee for publication in the church newsletter. Have a posted list of Approved Adults and Youths as a reference.
11. Determine appropriate disciplinary action or disqualification in response to a violation or violations of the Child Protection Policy.
12. Obtain a Maryland State Police Criminal Background Check for paid positions who are also Approved Adults.

L. Creating a Safe Church Environment

In addition to creating a church where Approved Adults are trained to keep children safe from abuse, the church should be a place which is safe and hospitable for children of all ages throughout the facility. Among the many areas to consider, the following are suggestions of ways to create a safe and healthy church environment:

- Toys and books for younger children, whether in nursery or Sunday school classrooms or in activity bags for use during worship, should be safe, clean, and age appropriate.

- Cleaning supplies and other harmful chemicals should be kept in higher cabinets which are secured with child-proof latches. Similarly, rooms which can be unsafe for children, such as workrooms, basements, cleaning closets, boiler/HVAC rooms, and balconies should be kept closed at all times.
- Electrical outlets should be properly child-proofed in the nursery and classrooms.
- Care should be taken when making decisions about furniture and accessories throughout the building.

M. Violations of Child Protection Policy

Persons who admit to or plead guilty to or are convicted in a court of law of any form of physical or sexual abuse of a child will be immediately, permanently, and completely disqualified by the Child Protection Policy Committee from working with children in the congregation.

- Persons who admit to the Child Protection Policy Committee any type of physical or sexual abuse of a child but who have not appeared in a court of law will be disqualified from working with children in the congregation.
- The Child Protection Policy Committee and Congregation Council shall disqualify any person from working with children in the congregation while allegations of sexual or physical abuse are being investigated.
- The Child Protection Policy Committee can temporarily or permanently disqualify any person(s) from working with children as the committee deems appropriate.
- Alleged violations of the policy, other than abuse, shall be immediately reported to the Child Protection Policy Committee chair who will report it to the Pastor and the president of Congregation Council, if deemed appropriate.
- The alleged violations of the policy will be investigated by the Child Protection Policy Committee that shall meet with the person(s) involved. If the person(s) is found to be in isolation of the policy the Child Protection Policy Committee will determine what disqualification or disciplinary action, if any, is necessary.
- The Child Protection Policy Committee can temporarily or permanently disqualify any person(s) from working with children as the committee deems appropriate.
- The Child Protection Policy Committee will maintain a list of temporarily or permanently disqualified persons in the Committee's work documents that are confidential and maintained in a locked cabinet.