

## **Protection Guidelines for Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults For Congregations of the Central States Synod – ELCA**

In baptism we promise to support and pray for the baptized in their new life in Christ and through baptism we are entrusted with great responsibilities to live together as God's faithful people. In it is vital to our ministry with families, outreach to our neighbors, and our testimony to the wider church and world that the church takes seriously its responsibility to protect its children and the adults who care for them so all may flourish physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Because congregations are influential institutions in their communities, it is important for each congregation to have guidelines in place to protect their children, youth, the vulnerable and adults from abuse of any kind in order to create a safe place for all who participate in the life of the congregation.

At the synod assembly in June of 2015, a resolution was adopted that encourages each congregation to:

- Appoint a task force to establish a protection policy
- Train those who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults to practice this policy
- Review this policy on a regular basis and seek out ways to support families, educating all members regarding this policy

The resources below are offered to assist congregations in this important work.

### **Suggested Process for Developing Protection Guidelines**

1. Council appoints a task force. Consideration should be given to having individuals on the task force who represent different populations within the congregation, such as volunteers who work with children and youth, those who care for vulnerable adults, etc.
2. The task force studies sample policies, including suggested guidelines from the synod (see below), hosts forums that invite congregational participation and input (explaining the reason for the work of the task force) and develops a draft.
3. The draft is shared with council, staff, parents, and other members of the congregation.
4. Council approves policy
5. Policy is given out to all staff and volunteers, posted on the website, and publicized throughout the congregation.
6. Begin implementing the policy, which should identify who is responsible for oversight of the policy.

**Protection Policy Guidelines** (This is not an exhaustive list, but different things that might be considered in developing a protection policy.)

### **Introduction**

1. Purpose and reason for the guidelines
2. Definitions (such as different kinds of abuse and individuals protected under this policy)
3. Indicate who is responsible for implementing and maintaining the policy

## **General Rules**

1. Staff and volunteers: All staff and volunteers working with children, youth and vulnerable adults shall read and abide by the protection policies. Background checks are encouraged for all staff and volunteers working with children, youth, and vulnerable adults.
2. Two Adults Rule: A minimum of two adults should be present at all church sponsored youth or children's activities. Adults should be a minimum of five years older than the youth participating.
3. Six-month Rule : All adult volunteers are required to be members or regular attenders for a minimum of six months prior to working with children and youth
4. Permission slips should be obtained when an event is overnight or involves leaving the church property
5. Touch: Physical punishment will not be administered to any youth or child. Sexual contact in any form is prohibited.
6. Standards of conduct regarding electronic communication between adults and children, educating children and adults about the use of social media and posting of pictures and personal information (ELCA resource: Social Media and Congregations)

## **Classrooms and Physical space**

1. Visibility: Window blinds and doors should remain open.
2. Monitoring Hallways: Always have a "floater" volunteer, parent, staff who will ensure that children are safe outside the classroom

## **Overnights**

1. Sleeping Arrangements: Sleeping arrangements should be divided by gender. At no time will youth and adults share the same bed.
2. All overnight should have a minimum of two adults of different genders.

## **Driving**

1. Drivers for all church sponsored activities shall be over 21, have a valid driver's license, and carry their own automotive insurance
2. All participants must wear seatbelts when riding in automotive vehicles

## **Reporting rule**

1. Incidents of suspect abuse will be reported immediately;
2. Any suspicious behavior such as adults spending considerable time with one child will also be reported (include specific people to whom suspicious behavior should be reported)
3. Specify how the information be handled; what to say to whom and what not to say; ought to considered

## **Training**

1. Determine who and how much training will be required
2. Different sources for training include:
  - a. Church insurance companies
  - b. Individuals in the congregation and/or community can provide training workshops
  - c. On-line training through companies such as Safe Gatherings

**Convicted sex offenders** – there is information on the ELCA website which gives guidelines when a sex offender joins the congregation.

**Sample Protection Guidelines**

1. Messiah Lutheran in Springfield
2. Need some from smaller congregations