

Policy	St Mark Child Protection Policy	
Supersedes	St Mark Safe Church Policy	
Effective	12 Jan 2020	

St. Mark Lutheran Church (ELCA) Safe Church Policy

Our God, who is our heavenly adoptive parent in baptism, loves us unconditionally and walks with us throughout our lives from conception until death and beyond. God calls us to love, bless, care, and protect all our children. We are entrusted with the sacred responsibility to provide children with a safe home and church, give them voice in need, and fight against the sin of abuse, neglect, and any kind of violence and harm.

“Psalm 36:7

How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings.

Matthew 18:10

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of my Father who is in heaven.”

The church and its property should be safe places where children are welcomed and nurtured in the Christian faith. In order to protect children and youth, the Mission Council of St. Mark Lutheran Church, ELCA, has developed and adopted the following Safe Church Policy.

In addition to protecting children and youth, this policy will help protect volunteers and employees against the possibility of false accusations.

All employees and volunteers who work directly with children are required to be Safe Church trained and to read and sign one copy, and are given a copy of this document for their own files. These documents will be kept on file in the St. Mark office.

Standards

St. Mark Lutheran Church will not tolerate any form of abuse. Those who accept the special responsibility of working with children and youth shall not violate that responsibility by engaging in acts of sexual abuse described in this policy or the laws of Virginia.

Screening

All staff persons and volunteers who work directly with children and/or youth shall be required to give permission for a Virginia Criminal Records Background Check as well as a Virginia Department of Social Services Registry check. Working with children and/or youth at St. Mark Lutheran Church will be contingent on a favorable outcome of these screenings. Cost of these background checks will be borne by St. Mark Lutheran Church. St. Mark Preschool will pay the cost for its staff and volunteers. These screenings must be repeated every five years. Results of the background screenings will be stored securely in the church office along with employee records.

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Training

All staff, volunteers, and members of the mission council will receive training at least every five years on child sexual abuse and its elements and the Safe Church Policy and its requirements. The Safe Church Committee will determine the nature of and schedule for the training based on the congregation's and the pre-school's requirements.

Safe Church Committee

A standing Safe Church Committee will be established consisting as a minimum of a chair person and members representing the mission council, the pre-school, the Sunday school, the youth minister, and the congregation at large. The committee will determine the training regarding prevention of child sexual abuse and the Safe Church policy to be presented and will schedule the training to accommodate the needs of the preschool and the congregation. The committee chair will 1) submit background investigation forms for volunteers and employees to the responsible agency, 2) track the results of the investigations, 2) maintain a roster of approved volunteers and employees, 3) inform volunteers and employees when their background checks and training are due for renewal.

Visual Access

Classrooms and other spaces where children are served will have windows installed in their doors so that there is visual access to the room. These windows shall not be covered. Screens may be installed on the pre-school doors to enable windows to be covered in the event of an active intruder or during intruder drills. The screens must be opened except during intruder drills or to protect children from hostile intruders.

Two Person Rule

Except as provided below, at least two Safe Church-trained workers, at least one of whom is an adult, shall be present at all church activities involving children and/or youth. Activities which meet in a classroom-like setting (e.g. Sunday Church School, Vacation Bible School, Choir Rehearsal) may be supervised by one worker in a classroom where there is visual access to the classroom (e.g. a door with a window, an open door) and there are other workers in the immediate vicinity. Nursery workers and Sunday Church School Teachers of preschool children shall always work in pairs. The second workers may be a youth of at least 6th grade age. The two person rule also applies to the driving of children to St. Mark sponsored activities that occur outside of St. Mark facilities.

The two person rule does not apply to the pre-school. Instead, its staffing levels are in accordance with state licensing requirements which will supplant this section of the Safe Church Policy.

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Three Month Waiting Rule

New members and active non-members shall not be recruited or encouraged to accept positions that work directly with children or youth until they have been members for three months. This has the added benefit of allowing new members to integrate into the congregation before accepting a volunteer position that requires great commitment.

The Pastor can waive this requirement if it can be verified that the applicant has worked with children and/or youth in another congregation, and in good standing, for at least one year.

Supervision

Church volunteers will be supervised by the staff person responsible for that specific area of ministry. Most often that is the Pastor or other program staff person. Employees of the preschool will be supervised by the Director of the Preschool.

Accountability

Anyone who has knowledge or suspicion of child sexual abuse taking place at St. Mark Lutheran Church or during a St. Mark Lutheran Church sponsored event is required to report the abuse to the Department of Social Services and/or the local police. By law, we are all mandated reporters and, therefore, required to contact the proper authorities within 24 hours of the suspected incident. Reports can be submitted anonymously.

After the mandate reporter has completed the required reporting, he/she will inform the pastor of the incident. The pastor will notify a parent of the victim of the incident unless the parent is the suspected abuser. If the suspected abuser is an employee or a volunteer working with children, he/she will be suspended from their position pending the outcome of the investigation. St. Mark will cooperate fully with the governmental authority investigating allegations of abuse.

Providing Community for Sexual Offenders

In keeping with our profound belief that all are welcome in God's church, St. Mark will permit known sexual offenders to attend our worship services and/or adult Sunday school unless this participation is prohibited by state law. The offender will, however, be subject to the following restrictions. The pastor will inform the congregation of the identity of the sexual offender and explain the conditions under which the offender will be allowed to be a part of the St. Mark community. Supervisors will be assigned to the offender to accompany him/her whenever he/she is on St. Mark property. The offender is permitted to attend worship services, special programs such as Lenten studies and services, and adult Sunday school, but must be accompanied at all times by a supervisor. The offender must make arrangements at least one week prior to the event to ensure that a supervisor will be available to accompany him/her. The offender may not hold a position of leadership within St. Mark. The offender may never work with the children or youth. The offender may never enter the space occupied by the pre-school.

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Definitions

For the purposes of the Safe Church Policy, and in keeping with Virginia Department of Social Services, "Sexual Abuse" refers to any interaction between a child and a substantially older person when the child is being used for the sexual stimulation of the older person. The behavior may or may not involve touching. Sexual abuse between a child and an older person is always considered to be forced: a child or youth cannot consent.

A "child" or "youth" is any person considered to be a minor under the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Currently that is anyone under the age of 18. A person who is incompetent is considered to be a "child" irrespective of his/her age.

An "employee" is anyone called to work for the church for salary or wages. A "volunteer" is anyone who provides services for the church and who receives no compensation in the form of salary, wages, or other pecuniary benefits.

I have read and will comply with the standards of this policy.

(Check if required to complete training.) I have completed training. _____

Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Witness Signature _____