St. Luke's Youth (SLY) Safe Sanctuaries Policy

Part I. Creating a Safe Team

A. Volunteer Background Checks

All volunteers in a program involving children and youth under the age of 18 (e.g., children's teachers, child care workers, preschool teachers and aides, youth leaders, etc.) will be asked to fill out a volunteer application as appropriate and agree to a criminal record background check. Where appropriate, St. Luke's United Methodist Church also may require a valid state driver's license, other photographic identification and/or fingerprinting to confirm identity. No one who has had a child abuse conviction or who has ever had such a conviction expunged, or who refuses to complete this screening form, will be permitted to work with children at St. Luke's United Methodist Church. All completed screening forms and criminal record checks shall be secured along with any other personnel records for use by management personnel on an official business need to know basis. Additionally, each ministry (Children's & Youth) will require an application for any volunteer who does not have one on file or is volunteering for the first time in that ministry area. The screening forms are good for both children and youth ministries.

B. Training

All approved volunteers will be required to read St. Luke's United Methodist Church's Child Abuse Prevention Policy and Safe Sanctuary Procedures and sign an affidavit indicating that they have read and understand the policy and agree to abide by it. Anyone failing to sign this statement will be contacted. If the teacher or worker does not sign the statement after being contacted, that person will not be permitted to serve until the policy has been read and the form signed. Such persons also will be required to attend one training session related to the church's abuse policy during the course of their first year of service following the adoption of this policy. These group training sessions will be offered by the church through the Family Ministry departments conducted by Clergy or paid staff members, and held at least once throughout the year. Individual one-on-one training sessions with staff will also be offered.

C. Volunteer Age Restrictions

Volunteers under the age of 18 will be allowed to serve with an adult and will be asked to provide 2 personal references. Volunteers for youth ministry events must be at least 5 years older than the oldest youth participant.

Part II. Creating a Safe Gathering

A. Two Deep Rule

All youth gatherings will be chaperoned by at least two un-related adults. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteers to permit such an effort. In certain situations an assigned adult "roamer" who is free to enter and exit classrooms at will, may serve as the second person. If an adult needs to leave a class or activity with a youth, that person should inform another adult. Other church-sponsored or community groups of youth who meet at the church should have two or more leaders present whenever possible.

B. Boundaries for Liability

Volunteer liability for youth will not begin more than 15 minutes before a gathering and parents/guardians/youth are asked not to arrive earlier than that, or asked to stay to maintain liability for their youth up until 15 minutes before the gathering. If the parent/guardian is later than 15 minutes past the end of a gathering, the youth director should be alerted and efforts made to contact the parent/guardian. Should late pickup result in a one-on-one situation, the youth and adult should move to an open space to wait (such as outside). Late pickup longer than thirty minutes, unless discussed beforehand or as the result of an emergency, will result in an incident report. Youth who drive themselves may not enter the gathering premises until 15 minutes before the gathering, and will be asked to leave the premises 15 minutes after the end of the gathering. Outside of these boundaries, SLY leaders are not liable for the youth.

C. Open Gatherings

Classrooms or gatherings may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents, or other volunteer church workers. Windows on the classroom doors should not be obstructed. Brief observations of classrooms of children/youth may be conducted by children's/youth ministry staff, or pastoral staff during Sunday School hours and youth gatherings.

D. Rules, Discipline, & Cheerleading

Defined boundaries and positive expectations help to create a conducive environment for youth fellowship. The SLY rules are designed to set boundaries for youth during gatherings, and to create an opportunity for youth to practice moving beyond lists of rules to critically think about the sorts of behavior rules are meant to guide us toward.

Our general youth gathering rules are as follows:

1. Be respectful to one another.
2. Be respectful to yourself.
3. Be respectful to the adults and their responsibility to keep you safe.
4. Be respectful to the spaces and supplies that make SLY possible.

In addition to boundaries, youth deserve a safe space to fail. Discipline in our youth ministry is meant to guide youth back to the expectations, not punish them for missteps. An easy way to remember our discipline procedure is as follows:

1. Remind: gently remind the youth about the expectations
2. Redirect: redirect the youth to a more appropriate activity
3. Reset: step aside with the youth to check in with them
4. Reach Out: reach out to the guardian to address behavior

It is important that reminders be good-humored, and that when possible, they invite the youth to quickly reflect on the behavior. Reminders should never embarrass a youth in front of the group. Redirection works best when it removes the youth from a location that they aren't succeeding in, removes an item they are struggling with, or separates them from someone they aren't functioning with. It is also helpful to redirect physical energy to something physical. Resets should always remain within the guidelines for safe sanctuaries, but out of ear shot of other youth when possible. Resets do not only give the youth a minute to step away

from their behavior and regulate themselves, but should check in with the youth. A lot of behavioral issues are driven by stress. If a behavior continues beyond one or two resets, the volunteer should report to the youth director who will then touch base with the parent/guardian of the youth for the purpose of partnering with them to support the youth and address the behavior.

Just as important as discipline, is cheerleading. Because we are creating a behavioral learning environment, encouraging the behavior you want to see is a big deal. Cheerlead youth when you see them being kind, respectful, courageous, empathetic, helpful, etcetera.

D. Zero Tolerance Issues

There are two categories of behavior which do not fall under the above discipline guidelines. For these two issues, SLY has a zero tolerance policy, meaning if a youth is involved in the behavior they are to be immediately removed from the situation, the parent/guardian contacted, and asked to pause their attendance of youth events. Should these issues arise, the youth director should be notified immediately. Volunteers will not usually have to handle the conversation with the parent/guardian or assess when a youth can return to events. The youth director will assess a return to youth activities in conjunction with the parent/guardian and a clergy member. These two issues are:

1. Bullying
2. Illegal Activities

E. Bathroom Procedures

Youth do not have to ask to use the bathroom, but should let a leader know if they are leaving the room or area to go to the bathroom. When possible, encourage youth to use the restroom one at a time. If a youth is gone longer than 15 minutes, send another youth to check on them. Volunteers should avoid using multistall restrooms at the same time as youth. If there is a behavioral issue that needs to be addressed in a bathroom, the volunteer should stand outside the bathroom unless someone is being harmed physically.

F. Supervision, First Aid, & Forms

Volunteers should provide adequate adult supervision of all activities. A well-stocked first-aid kit will be available at all times. Volunteers should not provide medication, even over-the-counter items, unless they have medical release forms signed by the parent/guardian granting that permission. The director will maintain emergency contact and release forms that are updated each year, and required before a youth may attend any off-site or overnight event. For serious injuries (broken bones, convulsions, fainting, etcetera) at the church:

- Keep calm and keep the injured person as calm as possible. Speak calmly and direct other youth to give them space.
- Do not move the injured child and do not leave them.
- Send a fellow leader or a pair of youth to find the director or other church staff member.
- The staff person will contact the parents, the church executive administrator, and 911 if necessary.
- If a child needs to be transported to the hospital and the parents cannot be notified in time, a staff person will accompany the child to the hospital.
- A staff person will follow up with the parents as needed.
- All leaders involved in the emergency should complete an incident report immediately following the emergency.

Should the need arise, there are 2 portable AED devices in the church building. One is located downstairs just next to the central stairs across from the Superintendent's Station and the other one is located upstairs just outside of the Sanctuary next to the coat rack. If needed for a child, pediatric pads are located next to the AED device. When the unit is opened it automatically begins to lead the user through step by step instructions. All nursery, preschool, and family ministry staff maintain CPR certification.

G. Sign-in & Sign-out

A leader should be designated to take attendance as youth arrive. Attendance should include youth name and rough time of arrival. Once a youth is on the premises for a gathering, within the liability window, they need parent/guardian permission to leave early. They cannot be physically kept from leaving, but if a youth leaves without parent/guardian permission during a gathering, the parent/guardian should be alerted immediately. Once a gathering ends, a rough departure time should be added to the attendance as each youth leaves. A SLY leader should watch over youth as they walk to vehicles.

H. Emergency Procedures

1. Fire Alarm: Whenever the alarm sounds, always assume that it is an emergency, NOT a false alarm, or a drill. During Sunday School hours, youth are to assist in evacuating the nursery to the back yard and remain in the back yard until everyone has been counted. A head count should be performed once everyone is outside of the building to ensure everyone is present. Everyone should be at least 100 feet from the building. Everyone is to remain outside until an all clear is given by a staff representative. Routes are posted by the doors - familiarize yourself with the routes from the youth room, sanctuary, fellowship hall, and other frequented areas.
2. Lockdown: If an emergency situation warrants a lockdown, strobes by the Superintendent Station, Church Office and Sanctuary will flash and a high-pitched alarm will sound. Leaders should move youth into the nearest classroom and cover the window in the door of said classroom with the foam board located on the back of the door. Keep youth calm and quiet until you are instructed otherwise by a staff person or emergency personnel. If exiting the building is a safe possibility, Christ Lutheran Church next door is a designated gathering location.

Part III. Creating Safe Relationships

A. The Rule of Three

SLY volunteers should avoid being one-on-one with a youth when possible. The Rule of Three states that there is always at least two youth with one adult, or at least two unrelated adults with one youth. If a one-on-one discussion is needed, the adult is encouraged to have that discussion in an open, visible space where they can be easily seen (but not necessarily heard) by others. They should also alert another adult to the occurrence of such a conversation beforehand if possible.

B. Texting & Social Media

We want youth to be able to ask questions and have discussions with their trusted adult leaders, but also acknowledge that texting and social media are murky areas in need of boundaries. Adult leaders should avoid individually texting youth when possible and reasonable. If an adult leader does text with a youth, they are expected to keep texting with individual youth to appropriate topics, to not delete these conversations for one year, and to be aware that, should a safety concern arise from a parent, youth, or another leader, they may be asked to report this conversation. No youth is ever expected to text individually with any adult leaders. Youth may request to have a parent, friend, or additional adult leader included should a text conversation be necessary. Parents may request to always be included in a text conversation with their youth. (There will be a place to indicate these preferences on the medical release form.) Appropriate topics are limited to things like logistics and details related to youth gatherings, questions and concerns regarding topics or activities from a youth gathering, prayer requests, invitations to youth events, or checking in on youth who have been absent. Any conversation more serious than an exchange of logistics and details should be initiated by the youth. If a youth texts a leader in a way that is inappropriate, the director should be notified, an incident report filed, and the parent/guardian contacted by the director. Leaders should not message youth on social media platforms, send them friend requests, or accept friend requests from them.

C. Mandated Reporting & Child Abuse Allegations

Any and every allegation of child abuse will be treated seriously. St. Luke's staff are considered mandated reporters - legally required to report suspected child abuse or neglect. Mandatory reporters must call the Colorado Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline (844-CO-4-Kids) within 24 hours if they know or suspect child abuse or neglect. All children's/youth ministry volunteers are expected to abide by mandated reporter requirements. You can read more about the signs/symptoms of abuse here. Any reports made should also be reported to the director so that an incident report can be filled out as well, and the director can help you make the call if wanted.

Should there be an allegation of child abuse occurring at St. Luke's United Methodist Church or at church-sponsored activities, the matter should be reported immediately to the director of children's or youth ministries (depending in which ministry the alleged event occurred) who will then notify a Lead Minister and the Staff Parish Relations Committee Chairperson (unless the allegation involves a clergy person, in which case the matter should be also be reported to the District Superintendent or the presiding Bishop.) Together, these individuals shall ensure that an appropriate investigation is commenced and that the following procedures are followed:

1. Immediately begin documenting all procedures observed in the handling of the allegation. Use documentation form (in church office).
2. Immediately notify government authorities of the allegation. It is advisable to have the complainant present with the reporter at this time.
3. Immediately notify the parent/guardian. A member of the investigating team should have first hand knowledge that the parents are aware of the issue.
4. Immediately notify the District Superintendent.
5. If the accused has assigned duties within the life of the church, that person must be temporarily relieved of his/her duties until the investigation is concluded. Pay will be determined by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee.
6. It is appropriate to show care and comfort for the alleged victim. This should be the pastoral objective from the moment the allegation is received or otherwise made known.

7. Observe confidentiality for both the alleged victim and the accused. If the media is involved, a Lead Pastor will be the person in charge of media communication.

Part IV. Creating a Safe Trip

A. Vehicle Procedures

There are many activities that will involve taking the youth somewhere in vehicles. Most often, this will be in the church buses, but will occasionally include smaller personal vehicles. The Rule of Three should always be maintained in vehicles. All drivers must undergo a driving background check before driving youth for church events. Youth must all be in a seat of their own with a seatbelt. All youth in each vehicle must be counted and all drivers must confirm counts before leaving the location. Youth must then be counted again upon arrival at the next location to confirm no one was left behind. If traveling further than one hour from the church, each vehicle should contain the emergency contact/medical release forms for the youth in that vehicle.

B. Sleeping Procedures

Some youth events will involve sleeping. Youth must have separate sleeping spots (sleeping bag, air mattress, mat, etc.) and may not share a bed with anyone. If adults are in sleeping areas with the youth, there will be at least two unrelated adults in each sleeping area. Sleeping arrangements may fall into one of two camps depending on the space. The first is male youth and at least two male adults in one area/room, and female youth and at least two female adults in another area/room. The second is all youth in one large space with male youth on one side and female youth on the other, with adults (at least two) near the middle. Non-binary, transgender, or otherwise gender non-conforming youth are encouraged to sleep with the group they feel safest in after discussing it with a SLY leader (alternate sleeping arrangements may be discussed if the youth does not feel comfortable in either group). On rare occasions, youth may stay in hotel style lodging. In this case, every youth must have their own bed. There will be no rooms in which there is a youth and an adult, unless it is a youth and their parent/guardian. If possible, have everyone on one floor or hall. It is encouraged that adult rooms be near building exits. For all events involving sleep, clear expectations should be communicated for "lights out" - a time after which all youth are expected to remain in their sleeping area unless using the restroom.

C. Trip Bathroom Procedures

Volunteers should avoid using multistall restrooms at the same time as youth. Ideally, a separate bathroom will be designated as an adult bathroom. Shower times should be divided into known windows, divided between youth and volunteers so that volunteers are not showering during the same time block as youth. Any change of clothing should be done in a closed bathroom stall, not in shared spaces or outside of a stall in shared bathrooms - this applies for volunteers and youth.