

SUBJECT: Safe Church  
P&P 2.6

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## **INTRODUCTION**

As a faith community, Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church (“Church”) is committed to providing a safe environment for our children, youth, members, and staff so that we can “*create opportunities for all people to become devoted followers of Christ.*” We do this through our ALC Safe Church Policy, which shall be referred to as the “Policy” within this document. The purpose of this policy is to establish the procedures and elements of a program that will foster a safe environment and prevent abuse from occurring in any Church related ministry.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **I. Church Personnel Screening and Orientation**

There are three steps involved with completing the ALC Safe Church Screening and Orientation Process: Application and Background Check, Memorandum of Understanding, and Orientation Training.

For the purposes of this policy, “Church Personnel” refers to all paid and volunteer personnel of Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church & School, 18 years and older, whether lay or clergy, who are qualified by fulfilling the requirements of the Policy in order to serve in positions of leadership for any youth and children’s ministry activity. These requirements must be completed prior to serving in any youth and children’s ministry activity. (Note: One time exceptions to this can be made for those serving in the capacity of ‘one-time helper’ or ‘guest speaker’ where they are constantly under the supervision of Church Personnel and are never alone with youth.)

#### **A. Application and Background Check**

All Church Personnel who seeks to serve in any capacity with Children or Youth ministry at the Church will complete the ALC Safe Church Application. Prior to starting service in ministry activities with Children or Youth, the applicant must have completed the Application, and cleared the background checks from the LiveScan fingerprinting process and Protect My Ministry electronic check.

#### **B. Memorandum of Understanding**

1. Church Personnel must review this policy and indicate understanding and agreement to uphold the expectations and Standards of Behavior described in this policy via signing the Memorandum of Understanding.
2. The Memorandum of Understanding will be returned with the Application and retained within the Church office.

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

3. All Church Personnel will be expected to complete a new Memorandum of Understanding annually.

### **C. Orientation Training**

Church Personnel will attend a training and procedures orientation session prior to serving to familiarize them with the Policy.

### **II. Confidentiality**

All Church Staff involved with handling screening records shall maintain confidentiality and shall have signed a Confidentiality Statement to this effect. Confidentiality means that:

- Information is not shared from the Application forms, references, or background records checks with anyone other than Church Staff responsible for supervising the Church Personnel.
- All paperwork related to the Safe Church Program is treated as confidential. While the results of the background records checks are legally public information, as a courtesy, they will be treated as confidential. If someone asks for the results of a check, they will be advised as to how they might get the information from the Department of Justice.

### **III. If Inappropriate Behavior is Suspected**

If any Church Personnel is suspected of inappropriate behavior (ie. physical, sexual, emotional or verbal abuse, threats or intimidation) or there is any situation that does not seem to be following the expectations described in this policy, the person identifying the behavior or situation shall report it immediately to one of the Safe Church Policy Stewards for investigation. If one is a mandated reporter under California *Penal Code* Sections 11164 *et seq.*, the reporting required by this policy is intended to be in addition to, not instead of, such legally mandatory reporting obligations.

### **IV. Safe Church Policy Stewards**

There shall be a group of at least three Church Personnel, recommended by Church Staff and affirmed by the Church Council as 'Safe Church Policy Stewards' who will have the following responsibilities on behalf of the Church:

- Own this policy and review it on an annual frequency to make certain that it reflects the expectations of the Church.
- Individually serve as confidants who may receive notification of suspected inappropriate behavior as noted in section III above.
- As a group, the Safe Church Stewards shall investigate any notifications received and take commensurate action to address and prevent any situations of abuse.

### **V. Emergency Procedure:**

In the event of an emergency during Church programming on Church property, the following procedures apply (from ALS Handbook updated 9/4/18 2018-19)

ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

- In the event of an emergency / natural disaster, the entire campus will be evacuated to the secured school parking lot or other designated location or shelter in place.
- All ALS classrooms (also used for ALC Sunday School) have a red backpack containing emergency supplies. All rooms have a crowbar for moving large objects.
- A command center, first aid station and temporary restrooms will be established at the evacuation site.
- Blankets, food, water, AM/FM radio with batteries, flashlights and the list of recommended emergency/disaster supplies are located in the storage bin on the property behind the garden.

**What happens in an emergency?**

1. When parents and/or authorized legal guardians arrive to collect their children they must provide identification before the child will be released. NO ADULT IS TO LEAVE THE CHURCH WITH A CHILD UNLESS THE CHILD HAS BEEN SIGNED OUT AT THE EMERGENCY OPERATION CENTER (EOC).
2. Children may be picked up at the location designated by the EOC as the PICKUP POINT.
3. Parents will be asked to keep clear of all access roads and parking lots so that emergency vehicles can arrive safely and easily.
4. Should children need to be evacuated from the campus, they will be taken to the nearest available safe location in accordance with emergency personnel direction.

**VI. STANDARDS OF BEHAVIOR**

1. **Adult Leadership to Student Ratio Guideline:** The following chart outlines minimal levels of adult supervision recommended for all children and youth ministry activities.

Age Group	# Children / Youth	# Church Personnel
Little Lambs (2 y) - Kindergarten	Up to 10 Above 10	At least two Church Personnel (at least one must be an adult) One additional Church Personnel for each 5 additional children
1 <sup>st</sup> - 6 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Up to 15 Above 15	At least two Church Personnel (at least one must be an adult) One additional Church Personnel for each 5 additional children
7 <sup>th</sup> - 8 <sup>th</sup> Grade 9 <sup>th</sup> - 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade	Up to 20 Above 20	Youth activities can occur with one adult Church Personnel. At least one additional Church Personnel shall be present for groups over 20.

2. **Rule of Three:** A Church Personnel (regardless of person’s age) should never be alone with a child or youth. A one-time Helper may assist a Church Personnel in an

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

activity to achieve the requirements of 'rule of three.' Example: a leader and two children/youth, two adults and a child/ youth. The allowable exception to this Rule of Three is that Church Staff may provide private consultation to Youth when conducted in a room with a window in the door and with another adult in the general area.

3. **Open Door Policy:** Parents and guardians are always informed of and welcome to attend classes, rehearsals, practices, programs, meetings, and events.
4. **No Secret Activities:** All aspects of church programs are open to observation by parents and church members. No Church Personnel or Helpers who work with children and youth will conduct secret activities or ask that activities be kept secret.
5. **Discipline:** Discipline used in church activities shall be constructive, respectful and reflect Christian values.
  - Physical (e.g., spanking, hitting, slapping, or any form of physical punishment), sexual or emotional punishment is not permitted.
  - Verbal reprimands shall not include destructive criticism, insults or shouting.
  - Never deny basic necessities, such as food, clothing, shelter or medical care.
  - Church Personnel participating in any activity with children or youth are encouraged to listen to the child or youth, communicate expectations of appropriate behavior, use time-outs or give alternate choices.
6. **Private Consultations:** Any meetings between A Church Staff member and a youth shall occur in a room with a window in the door and when another adult is in the general area.
7. **Four Year Separation Rule:** When using young adults as primary leaders, there shall be a four-year separation in age between these leaders and those they are supervising or leading.
8. **Transportation:** Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families or families may delegate to Church designated transportation when provided (e.g. the Church bus). When taking Church designated transportation, an approval form signed by the parent / guardian needs to be signed and on file with the Church, copies of these approved forms must be present during activities requiring transportation. During events, drivers shall avoid dropping off or picking up youth without prior written approval from the parent or guardian.
9. **Respect of Privacy:** Church Personnel need to respect the privacy of youth and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. Situations requiring privacy include using rest rooms, changing clothes and taking showers. If an adult accompanies a small child to the bathroom, the outer door of the bathroom will be propped open. If an adult accompanies a child into the stall of the restroom, two adults should be present. Adult

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

leaders and staff must wear pajamas or similar clothing when sleeping and swimming suits when swimming.

10. **Youth Group Activities:** All participants are to stay with the group, while the activity is in progress unless specifically given permission or directed by the group leader. If/when the youth break into separate groups for any reason, participants should stay with their groups of at least three or more. Setting boundaries is the responsibility of the adults.
11. **Start / End of Activity:** When participants are gathering or leaving, the activity leader needs to make certain that the 'rule of three' is upheld at all times.
12. **Overnights:** When an activity/trip involves overnights, all activities shall be conducted where adult supervision is present. A minimum of two adult leaders will be present at an overnight activity.
  - If youth participants include males and females, the adult leaders should be males and females. Should these adults be husband and wife, a third adult advisor is suggested.
  - One youth shall not sleep alone in a tent, bedroom, or hotel room with one adult, unless the adult is their parent. When youth and adults share a tent, bedroom, or hotel room, there should be at least three individuals per room. An adult must not occupy the same bed as a youth unless it is the youth's parent or legal guardian.
  - Males and females will sleep in separate areas. If separate rooms are not available, a barrier will be established and have separate access to bathroom facilities. When separate shower facilities are not available, separate shower schedules for males and females will be established. There must be gender appropriate chaperones in each area.
  - Parents will be advised of the names of the adult leaders for any youth-related trips and will be notified of any changes in adult leadership via email, phone, or text.
  - Housing: When private homes are used for overnight events, the Church Staff will make final approval of all adults involved. At least two youth will be assigned to each home.
13. **Nursery:** The ALC nursery will have an identification system that links each child and his/her parent(s) or legal guardian(s) so that no unauthorized person may take the child without consent of the parents or legal guardians. The nursery will have two adults or one adult and one youth on duty at all times of operation.
14. **No Sexual Activity:** No sexual contact is permitted between adults and youth or between youth and youth. Sexual comments or jokes, the showing of sexual pornographic material, the exposure of sexual parts of the body or other sexually

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

abusive behaviors are prohibited.

15. **No Dating:** Church Personnel will not date or be romantically involved with children or youth.
16. **No Hazing and Harassment:** Physical or verbal hazing, harassment, and initiations of a demoralizing nature or potentially harmful (physically or mentally) are prohibited at all church activities. This includes the use of put-downs and excessive teasing.
17. **No Drugs, Alcohol, Tobacco, e-cigarettes, Vaping:** The use of tobacco, alcohol, e-cigarettes, vaping, or any illicit drugs or over-the-counter or prescription drugs not used for their intended purpose, (except for wine used in communion) shall not be used by any youth while participating in any congregation sponsored youth event. Use of such products will result in the offending youth being removed from the activity and sent home. Parents will be notified of the offense.
18. **Visitors On-site:** During any children / youth activities, the Church Personnel leading the activity shall be aware of who is visiting any space where children / youth are present. Visitors must check in with an authorized person in charge. If someone looks out of place, it is required to ask who they are and how they are related to the activity and inform the Church Personnel in charge of the activity to greet the visitor and make certain the Safe Church Policy is upheld.
19. **Reporting Responsibilities:** Any inappropriate conduct or suspected violation of these standards shall be reported to a Safe Policy Steward. If unsure whether or not the suspected case would violate the standards outlined here, one must err on the side of caution and report the suspicion immediately.

### **GUIDANCE ON APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE AFFECTION**

Christian ministries are committed to creating and promoting a positive, nurturing environment for our children's and youth ministries that protect our children and youth from abuse and our Church Personnel from misunderstandings. When creating safe boundaries for children and youth, it is important to establish what types of affection are appropriate and inappropriate; otherwise that decision is left to each individual. Stating which behaviors are appropriate and inappropriate allows Church Personnel to comfortably show positive affection in ministry, and yet identify individuals who are not maintaining safe boundaries with children or youth.

The following guidelines are to be carefully followed by all Church Personnel working around or with children or youth.

#### **Appropriate Affection**

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

Love and affection are part of church life and ministry. There are many ways to demonstrate affection while maintaining positive and safe boundaries with children and youth. A good guide to follow is to allow the child to initiate any show of affection. Some positive and appropriate forms of affection are listed below:

- Brief hugs. Preferred hugs are side-to-side hugs, one-arm hugs and a-frame hugs.
- Pats on the shoulder or back
- Handshakes
- “High-Fives” and hand slapping
- “Fist bumps”
- Verbal praise
- Touching hands, faces, shoulders and arms of children or youth
- Arms around shoulders
- Holding hands while walking with small children
- Sitting beside small children
- Kneeling or bending down for huddles with small children
- Holding hands during prayer
- Pats on the head when culturally appropriate (for example, this gesture should typically be avoided in some Asian communities.)

### **Inappropriate Affection**

The following forms of affection are considered inappropriate with children and youth in ministry settings because many of them are the behaviors that child molesters use to groom children or youth and their parents for later molestation or can be, in and of themselves, sexual abuse.

- Inappropriate or lengthy embraces
- Kisses
- Holding children over three years old on the lap
- Any sexualized touching; Touching bottoms, chests or genital areas other than for appropriate diapering or toileting of infants and toddlers.
- Showing affection in isolated areas such as bedrooms, closets, staff-only areas or other private rooms.
- Occupying a bed with a child or youth
- Touching knees or legs of children or youth
- Wrestling with children or youth
- Tickling children or youth
- Piggyback rides
- Any type of massage given by a child or youth to an adult
- Any type of massage given by an adult to a child or youth
- Any form of unwanted affection or physical contact
- Comments or compliments (spoken, written, or electronic) that relate to physique or body development. Examples would be, “You sure are developing,” or “You look really hot in those jeans”
- Snapping bras or giving wedgies or similar touch of underwear

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

- Giving gifts or money to individual children or youth
- Private meals with individual children or youth
- Private 1 to 1 email, texting, or written communications with children or youth.
- Private scheduled meetings, outings or events just with child or youth

### **DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA**

Digital communications include all forms of communicating by smart phone or computer e.g. texting, e-mail, Snapchat, and use of any form of social media. Social media are a collection of online platforms and tools that people use to share content, profiles, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media itself, facilitating conversations and interactions online between groups of people.

It is important to be mindful of the facts that 1) digital communications last forever and 2) digital communications can end up anywhere and in anyone's possession beyond the people intended to receive the message.

**Social Media Posts:** Social media, by its very definition is a public forum. There is no privacy in social media, even with the use of security settings. Think before you post. Would you say this in a room filled with congregation members? With youth? Be aware of unintended consequences interpretation posts.

**Texting / email / digital messages:** Digital communications such as text messaging and email can be an efficient and effective way in communicating with youth. Similar to in person communication, the 'rule of three' is a best practice to apply for digital communications for Church Personnel. Volunteers must not use 1 to 1 digital communication with any child / youth.

**“Friending:”** Friending youth is a powerful ministry tool when used appropriately. When adults “friend” people under age 18 they should also request to “friend” their parents. Involving parents in this decision is important. An example of this request: *“I would like to request to be your child’s friend on Facebook and/or Twitter. I prefer “friending” both youth and their parents as part of my practice to promote transparency and appropriate adult – youth relationships. I encourage you to monitor all of your child’s social media practice. I am happy to support you in navigating social media with your youth.”* This practice promotes the safety of children and youth while providing good accountability with the adults who work with youth.

**Facebook Groups or Pages:** Consider communities that gather on Facebook in the same way you would a community gathered in a room or a home. Facebook pages

## ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

associated with ALC ministries shall be monitored by Church Staff to make certain that expectations set forth in the Safe Church Policy are upheld.

### GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Abuse:** This includes all improper treatment of children, youth, or persons of diminished mental capacity. Abuse used in this document includes, but is not limited to the following types:

**Physical abuse:** non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child or youth.

**Verbal abuse:** the use of words to cause harm to the person being spoken to. Verbal abuse may consist of shouting, insulting, intimidating, threatening, shaming, demeaning, or derogatory language, among other forms of communication.

**Sexual abuse:** any contact or interaction between a child or youth and another person when the child or youth is being exploited for sexual gratification of such person, regardless of whether the exploitation involves touching by the person, and regardless of whether the child or youth consents to the exploitation. Or any conduct which violates a California criminal statute on child or youth abuse.

**Emotional abuse:** mental or emotional injury to a child or youth that results in an observable and material impairment in the child or youth's growth, development or psychological functioning.

**Adult:** Anyone from 18 years old and up.

**Application:** The document used to collect personal information of prospective Church Personnel prior to starting service in ministry activities with Children or Youth

**Child:** Anyone from birth through sixth grade graduation (after sixth grade graduation they are considered a 'Youth')

**Church Personnel:** includes all paid and volunteer personnel of Ascension Evangelical Lutheran Church & School, whether lay or clergy. For the purposes of these guidelines, the following are included in the definition of Church Personnel when they are functioning in their respective roles for the church:

1. **Rostered leadership:** whether stipendiary, non-stipendiary, who are engaged in ministry or service to the church.
2. **Paid personnel:** whether employed in areas of ministry or other kinds of services by the Church. For example: Choir Director, Youth Leader, Music Ministry Leader.
3. **Service providers:** those who contract their services to the Church and those who do not contract their services such speakers or presenters.

ASCENSION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

4. **Volunteers:** including any persons who enter into or offer him or her selves for a church related service, or who actually assists with or performs a service, whether or not they have been selected or assigned to do so. Examples include but are not limited to: Sunday school teachers and helpers, Vacation Bible School teachers and helpers, chaperones at youth gatherings and youth events.
5. **Helpers:** One time exceptions to fulfilling pre-requisite requirements of this policy can be made for those serving in the capacity of 'one-time helper' where they are constantly under the supervision of qualified Church Personnel and are never alone with youth. It is expected that persons who desire to serve in youth and children's ministry activities complete the requirements of this policy and become Church Personnel.

**Neglect:** the failure to provide for a child or youth's basic needs or the failure to protect a child or youth from harm.

**Pornographic Images:** sexually suggestive images of youth or children. Any image, which violates a California criminal statute on child and youth pornography or abuse.

**Youth:** Anyone from 7th grade (after sixth grade graduation) through age 18.

REVISION	DESCRIPTION	APPROVED	DATE
--	Initial Release		06/15/2016
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