

# HTLC CHILD SAFETY POLICY

June 8, 2010

WHEREAS Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (HTLC) is committed to being a safe haven for all children and their families and caregivers by: building Christ-centered, positive, trusting relationships that nurture the healthy growth of children and strengthen families, using our resources to provide a sanctuary for children, creating a Gospel-centered, faith-based teaching and learning environment and hospitality that welcomes all children with their families and caregivers, developing programs that help children flourish, and collaborating with other faith communities, agencies and service organizations that work for the well-being of children in our community.<sup>1</sup>

BE IT RESOLVED THAT HTLC ADOPT THE FOLLOWING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES:

## Section 1. Employee and Volunteer Screening

1.1 No one who has been attending HTLC for less than 6 months shall be allowed to volunteer with children/youth, with the exception of staff interns.

1.2 Employees and volunteers should be subject to the same background screening for criminal convictions relating to child abuse in Washington State and other states on a yearly basis. We should continue to do the WATCH screening, as that is a free service. In addition, we should pay for Lexis/Nexis or a similar service to do a more extensive search of national criminal records on an annual basis. We estimate this will cost \$750/year. The Congregation Secretary shall be responsible for conducting the screenings for the HTLC office staff, and shall direct the HTLC office staff to conduct the screenings for all other covered persons.

1.3 The persons who will be subject to screening are: all staff of HTLC, Sunday School teachers, the Nursery Coordinator and adult substitute coordinators working in the Nursery, all adult members of the Christian Education and Youth Committees, all adult VBS Counselors and any adult who is a chaperone on any overnight trip sponsored by HTLC.

1.4 The above-mentioned staff and volunteers shall fill out a background check authorization form which will be developed in the implementation stage. The form will include all necessary information for the screening, including photo identification of the applicant and consent for HTLC to perform the search annually. The Congregation Secretary shall be responsible for collecting the forms from the HTLC office staff annually, and shall direct the HTLC office staff to collect the forms from other staff members annually. The Chair of the Christian Education Committee shall be responsible for collecting and submitting all volunteer forms to the office staff annually.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *Safe Haven for Children: A Resource for Congregations*. © Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

1.5 At hire, references shall be required of staff, but not of volunteers. References shall be checked by HTLC office staff and the results reviewed by the Senior Pastor. Any reference checks of pastoral candidates will be conducted by the Call Committee as part of the call process.

1.6 If screening reveals a past conviction of a crime or crimes against children, the staff or volunteer with the conviction shall not be allowed to work with the youth or children of HTLC.

1.7 If screening reveals a conviction for any other crime, the Senior Pastor along with the President and Vice President of the Church Council shall determine what, if any, restrictions shall be placed on the staff or volunteer with the conviction. If screening reveals a conviction on the part of a Pastor, the Church Council shall determine what steps should be taken.

## **Section 2. Education of Staff, Volunteers, Children & Parents/Guardians; Responses to Reports of Abuse**

2.1 Full-time staff and the Nursery Coordinator should have current First Aid and CPR training. Any volunteer working with children or youth shall be encouraged to obtain First Aid and CPR training.

2.2 All persons subject to screening shall be trained to do the following if, in connection with their paid or volunteer work for HTLC, they become aware of information indicating an incident of child abuse has occurred or may have occurred:

(a) If there is a risk of immediate danger to a child, the person shall take appropriate steps to address the danger, which may include calling 911 and/or Child Protective Services.

(b) The person shall immediately report the information regarding abuse or potential abuse to at least **two** of the "Report Recipients" identified below. (The Chair of the Christian Education Committee shall ensure that current lists of the Report Recipients and their contact information are readily available.)

(c) The person shall **not** report the information to anyone else. This includes that the person shall **not** report the information to the child's parents or guardians. The decision of when and how to report the information to the child's parents/guardians shall be made by the Report Recipients. The purpose of this policy is that decisions regarding follow up and response will be made by individuals who have been trained in the proper procedures for responding to

and reporting incidents of possible child abuse, who will make those decisions in consultation with appropriate child protective or law enforcement officials.

(d) In the unlikely event that the person is not able to promptly locate a Report Recipient, the person shall discuss with law enforcement or Child Protective Services whether the child's parent or guardian should be informed of the situation at that time, and shall follow the advice the person receives from law enforcement or Child Protective Services.

(e) After providing the information to the Report Recipients, if the person reasonably believes that the Report Recipients have not properly and timely followed up on the information provided, the person shall report that concern, on a confidential basis, to the full Church Council.

2.3 The "Report Recipients" under this policy are the Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, President of the Church Council, Vice President of the Church Council, and any current member of the Mutual Ministries Committee. All Report Recipients shall be trained in the proper procedures for responding to and reporting incidents of possible child abuse. The Report Recipients who actually receive the report of possible child abuse shall be responsible for appropriately handling the report. Handling the report shall include:

(a) immediately, but in any case within 48 hours, consulting with Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement officials, as appropriate,

(b) ensuring that the parents/guardians of the alleged child victim are advised of the situation as soon as possible, subject only to any delay that may be requested by child protective or law enforcement officials,

(c) reporting back to the person who made the report, to confirm to that person that the report has been appropriately responded to, and

(d) preparing an Incident Report using a form to be developed by the Child Safety Task Force.

2.4 All volunteers and staff shall receive a copy of HTLC's written policy on child safety as part of their training each year. Such training shall be offered by the Christian Education Committee.

2.5 A copy of HTLC's written policies and procedures on child safety shall be made available to any parent/guardian or member of the congregation upon request. Copies shall be maintained in the church office.

2.6 The Christian Education Committee shall conduct the above training and shall offer safety courses to educate parents/guardians, staff and volunteers. The Christian Education Committee shall also be responsible for arranging the training of the Report Recipients referenced in paragraph 2.3 above, with regard to the proper procedures for responding to and reporting incidents of possible child abuse.

2.7 The Chair of the Christian Education Committee shall ensure that the training described above is provided.

### **Section 3. Supervision of Children, Junior VBS Counselors/Sunday School Helpers**

#### **3.1 Ratios for on-site and off-site programs and activities shall strive to meet the guidelines for state licensed facilities as follows:**

Adult/child ratios for on-site programs (based on WAC 170-295-2090)

(a) Nursery: 1:7 with no more than 2 infants (0-11 mo.)

(b) Pre-School/Pre-K Sunday School class: 1:10

(c) School age Sunday School classes: 1:15

3.2 Adult chaperone/child ratios for off-site activities 1:7 if children are under age 12; 1:15 if over 12. Children aged 12-18 shall not be considered adult chaperones for off-site activities.

3.3 The Nursery Coordinator or substitute should call (via cell phone or other means) either the Director of Youth & Family Ministry or the Christian Education Chair in case of emergency or if additional staff is required in the Nursery.

3.4 If the Nursery Coordinator or trained substitute is not available to staff the Nursery, the Nursery shall be locked. The Nursery Coordinator shall maintain a list of trained and screened substitutes to call in the event of illness or vacation.

3.5 The Nursery Coordinator or trained substitute shall remain in the Nursery while children are present. Sunday School teachers shall remain with their class while class is in session. They should call (via cell phone or other means) either the Director of Youth & Family Ministry or the Christian Education Chair in case of an emergency in their classroom.

3.6 Parents/guardians shall be expected to remain in the church building while their children are in the Nursery and shall be encouraged to remain in the building while their children are attending Sunday School.

#### **3.7 Toilet break procedures**

(a) Toilet-trained children in the Nursery shall use the bathroom in the Nursery only.

- (b) The Nursery Coordinator shall notify parents/guardians of the need for a diaper change while the child is in the Nursery. Parents/guardians only shall change their child's diaper.
- (c) Pre-school/Pre-K Sunday School children shall be accompanied to the bathroom by a screened adult or by their own parent/guardian.
- (d) School-age Sunday School and Confirmation children shall use the buddy system to the bathroom, drinking fountain or anywhere else in church where they are away from their Sunday School teacher, VBS counselor, parent/guardian or other adult supervisor.

**3.8 Supervision of Junior VBS Counselors/Sunday School Helpers**

- (a) Adolescents aged 12-18 may become a Junior VBS Counselor/Sunday School Helper.
- (b) Junior VBS Counselors/Sunday School Helpers shall be supervised by trained adult volunteers, adult counselors or HTLC staff.
- (c) Junior VBS Counselors/Sunday School Helpers shall not accompany pre-school/pre-K children to the bathroom unless they are related to the child(ren) by blood or marriage, in which case they may accompany such child(ren).
- d. Junior VBS Counselors/Sunday School Helpers may provide supervision of school-age children (ages 5-11) to the bathroom, but only in groups of 2 or more.

**Section 4. Miscellaneous**

4.1 **Policy on use of photographs/video of children:** photographs and video of children (including those placed on the HTLC web site) shall not identify the children by any name, with the exception of photographs taken for the HTLC directory. HTLC will not release photographs or videos of any child to newspapers or television without the express written permission of the child's parent/guardian.

4.2 **Use of HTLC rooms for youth instruction:** all rooms used for Nursery and Sunday School instruction shall have windows and be in highly visible, centrally located and well-lighted areas of the church. The Christian Education Chair shall make unannounced checks of Sunday School classrooms and other rooms used for youth instruction. The downstairs rooms, other than the Fellowship Hall, should not be used for Sunday School instruction, but may be used for instruction or activities involving confirmation age children and older.

4.2 **Basement Rooms:** HTLC's basement rooms shall be locked when not in use.

**4.3 Persons with History of Abusing Children:** If a member or other person regularly attending HTLC has a history of abusing children, that person shall covenant not to be present at HTLC at any time without a screened adult companion. Anyone with knowledge that a member or regularly attending person has a history of abusing children shall report such knowledge to **two** of the following: the Senior Pastor, the Associate Pastor, President of the Church Council, Vice President of the Church Council, or a current member of the Mutual Ministries Committee.

**4.4 Prevention of Peer Harassment:** the Director of Youth & Family Ministry shall periodically include group conversations about avoiding inappropriate touch, humor and embarrassing comments with adolescents aged 12-18.