

## **Saron Lutheran Church Policy for Protecting Children and Youth in Church Activities**

(Adapted from Reducing the Risk of Child Sexual Abuse in Your Church, published by Church Law and Tax Report, from Youth Protection Guidelines: Training for Volunteer Leaders and Parents of the Boy Scouts of America and from the Policy and Procedure Manual of Youth and Young Adult Ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Milwaukee).

### **Introduction:**

On Jan 13, 1998, the Church Council adopted the following policies and procedures to help keep our church a safe sanctuary for our children and youth. Fortunately, this is not initiated in response to problems within Saron, but it is prompted by awareness of problems in other churches that have allowed for the abuse of children by paid and unpaid child and youth workers in the church, as well as by other minors. The advice of experts has shaped our response and assures us that what helps protect our children and youth also helps protect our church from unfounded charges and legal liability. In no way will we allow these policies and procedures to interfere with our service of Christ; they will enhance it.

The following policies shall be followed by all professional and lay people in their work for Saron Lutheran Church

### **Screening of Lay and Professional Workers (“Leaders”)**

Lay and professional child and youth activity leaders must go through a standardized screening procedure, overseen by the Mutual Ministry committee for church council approval, who reserves the right to verify information regarding background and history of activities with minors, as well as doing a check on legal history. This includes people working in youth activities, Confirmation, music and educational activities, such as Sunday School, as well as the nursery. No one will be accepted who has had a criminal sexual or physical abuse violation. Leaders shall be informed of the rules they are required to follow in their activities with minors and shall be required to sign that they will faithfully follow these requirements.

### **History of Sexual Misconduct**

Any adult who has been convicted of sexual misconduct or abuse may not participate in any capacity in Saron programs for children or youth.

### **C. Two-deep Leadership**

Two adult leaders must be present at each activity with minors. Exceptions are to be approved by the Mutual Ministry committee. Activities will be held in rooms with a window in the door or with the door opened. All activities are subject to monitoring by staff or appointed personnel.

### **D. Individual Consultation**

Individual consultation between adults other than pastoral staff and minors must be done within the two-deep framework. In situations that require personal conferences, mentoring or counseling, this should be conducted in the church offices with at least one other approved leader present in the area (though not necessarily in the office.) As a rule, the counseling should be as public as possible, without sacrificing effectiveness.

Unplanned individual contact on outings (such as for counseling purposes) must be done in view of another adult or minor. Planned individual contact outside the church building must occur only in public places and with the prior consent of the minor and parent or guardian. Examples would be a ride home, or a conversation over a soft drink between an adult and minor.

### **Respect of Privacy**

Adult leaders need to respect the privacy of minors in situations such as use of rest rooms, changing into swimming suits, or taking showers on overnight outings, and intrude only insofar as health and safety require. They also need to protect their own privacy in similar situations.

### **F. Separate Accommodations**

A minimum of two adults should be present at an overnight activity. If participants are both male and female, the adults should be male and female. If these conditions cannot be met, the event should be canceled. On other outings that require that an adult share the room with a minor (such as ELCA gatherings) the minors and parents or guardians shall give prior consent. The adult should avoid occupying the same bed as a minor, with the exception of a parent or guardian.

### **G. Housing**

When private homes are used for overnight events, the program staff member will use the standardized screening procedure for all adults involved as hosts, hostesses and chaperons. At no time may only one child or youth dwell in one home.

### **No Secret Activities**

There are no “secret” activities or organizations recognized by Saron. All aspects of the church program are open to observation by parents and congregational leaders. Confidentiality or secrecy is not a privilege of adult leaders while involved in church activities with youth, but a privilege of the youth.

### **Transportation**

Transportation to and from events is the responsibility of the families. During events, drivers should avoid dropping off or picking up minors without being accompanied by another adult. Any deviations should have the prior consent of the parent. The Mutual Ministry shall set standards for who is permitted to drive during events.

### **Constructive Discipline**

Discipline used in church activities should be constructive and reflect Christian values. Corporal punishment is never permitted. (Refer to Discipline Policy.)

### **K. Hazing Prohibited**

Physical hazing and initiations are prohibited and may not be included as part of any Saron activity

### **No Sexualizing**

During Saron sponsored events no sexual behavior is permitted with and among Saron minors. Other behaviors which are abusive, but do not involve physical contact, are also prohibited. Examples are sexual comments, the showing of sexual material and the exposure of sexual parts of the minor’s body and/or the adult’s body.

**Gifts**

Leaders shall not give personal gifts or money to individual children or youth without first notifying the parents and direct supervisor. Gifts to entire classes are acceptable.

**N. Nursery**

The nursery is required to have two leaders at all times of operation.

**Reporting of Violations of These Rules**

Persons covered by these rules are required to notify the Supervisor and/or Mutual Ministry of any violations of these rules.

**Mandatory Reporting of Abuse**

According to Wisconsin State Law, Section 48.98, those having cause to suspect that a minor, seen in the course of professional responsibility (including church professionals) has or will be the victim of abuse or neglect, must report the case immediately (not more than 24 hours after cause) by telephone or personal visit to the local county child welfare agency, the office of the county sheriff or the city police department. Concern for the alleged victim, good judgment and open communication are the standards surrounding the reporting of an alleged case of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. Keep calm, stay with the participant and know that you don't have to deal with the victim or information alone. Any person who reports an incident in good faith is immune from either civil or criminal liability. All reports are treated with confidentiality by the adults.

Changes in this policy are made by the approval of the Church Council upon recommendation of the Mutual Ministry committee.

Variance from this policy can only be permitted when written consent is given by the Mutual Ministry Committee for deviation from a specific guideline for identified reasons.

Program staff are responsible for screening and registering people working in their program area, informing them of these guidelines and are responsible for these policies being followed in their area. The Mutual Ministry Committee is responsible for the Program Staff following these rules. The Mutual Ministry Committee is responsible to the Church Council for compliance of these rules.

Adult leaders are liable for disciplinary action for not following these guidelines, even if no abuse can be established

These policies shall go into effect on September 1, 1998. As of that time, all adult participants in Saron's activities involving minors shall go through the application and screening process.

(Revised June 9, 1998, by Church Council action.)

