

New Hope Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy and Guidelines



Developed by:

New Hope Lutheran Church Child Protection Task Force

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Table of Contents

I.	Introduction	3
II.	Definitions	4
III.	Preventative Measures	5
IV.	Employee Screening Procedures	6
V.	Employee Hiring Procedure	7
VI.	Volunteer Selection Guidelines	7
VII.	Employee and Volunteer Safeguards	8
VIII.	Educational Opportunities	9
IX.	Reporting Child Abuse	10
X.	Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse	11
XI.	Implementation	14
XII.	Closing	14

(Volunteer Application, continued)

1. Are you presently the subject of any investigation involving an allegation of physical or sexual abuse of a child or a vulnerable adult?
 No Yes (please explain)

2. Have you ever been convicted of physical or sexual abuse of a child or vulnerable adult?
 No Yes (please explain)

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize my references or churches listed in this application to give you any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for children or youth work. In consideration of the receipt and evaluation of this application by New Hope Lutheran Church, I hereby release any individual, church, youth organization, charity, employer, reference, or any other person or organization, including record custodians, both collectively and individually, from any and all liability for damages of whatever kind or nature which may at any time result to me, my heirs, or family, on account of compliance or any attempts to comply, with this authorization. I waive any right that I may have to inspect any information provided about me by any person or organization identified by me in this application.

Should my application be accepted, I agree to be bound by the Bylaws and policies of New Hope, and to refrain from unscriptural conduct in the performance of my services on behalf of the church.

I further state that I HAVE CAREFULLY READ THE FOREGOING RELEASE AND KNOW THE CONTENTS THEREOF AND I SIGN THIS RELEASE AS MY OWN FREE ACT. This is a legally binding agreement which I have read and understand.

Applicant's signature:

_____ Date: _____

Witness:

_____ Date: _____

Additional information from front page:

New Hope Lutheran Church Volunteer Application

Name	Social Security #	Date of Birth
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Address	City/State/Zip
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Phone Number(s) Home	Work
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Previous Church Membership:

Church Name Pastor

Address	City/State/Zip
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Phone Number

Experience - Please list previous relevant experience:

Organization	Address	City/State/Zip
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Position	Supervisor	Phone
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Description of duties or activities:

Organization	Address	City/State/Zip
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Position	Supervisor	Phone
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Description of duties or activities:

References — list 3 to include 1 professional, not former employers or relatives:

Name	Address	City/State/Zip
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Phone	Relationship
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Name	Address	City/State/Zip
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Phone	Relationship
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Name	Address	City/State/Zip
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Phone	Relationship
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New Hope Lutheran Church Child Protection Policy

I. Introduction

The church recognizes that there is a growing problem of child abuse in our society and has designed this policy to address the issue. It is the church’s goal to provide a safe, caring and trusting atmosphere, where children can learn and grow. Through the implementation of our policy, we hope to heighten awareness and reduce the risk of child abuse, whether it be physical or sexual. It is also our intent to protect youth workers against false accusations.

The church feels that it is essential to educate all members of the congregation and any others who may be hired to work with our children. Our policy includes the following:

- sequential steps to be followed for hiring individuals and acquiring volunteers to work with children
- provision of educational programs for adults and children that deal with the nature, impact, and detection of abuse
- steps for reporting suspected child abuse
- steps for protecting the rights of all parties involved
- timeline for implementation and periodic review procedures

Any incident that compromises a child’s well being will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately, consistent with Maryland Public Law. New Hope will utilize resources within the congregation, those of the appropriate government agencies and other concerned organizations for educational purposes and for ensuring the protection of all parties involved in an allegation.

II. Definitions

Child - Anyone under the age of 18 years or a vulnerable adult.

Vulnerable Adult - Any adult over the age of 18 years who is physically and/or mentally disabled and participates in a situation where he/she could be taken advantage of physically or sexually.

Volunteer - A nonpaid person whose activities include, but are not limited to, teaching, supervising or assisting children in programs and activities.

Paid Volunteer - A volunteer who works less than 20 hours per week in activities similar to an unpaid volunteer, This would include, but not be limited to baby sitters and other hourly employees.

Abuse - The physical or mental injury of a child by any parent or other person who has permanent or temporary care or custody or responsibility for supervision of a child, or by any household or family member, under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is significantly harmed or at risk of being significantly harmed; or sexual abuse of a child, whether physical injuries are sustained or not. Any sexual contact with or exploitation between an adult or caregiver and a child even if the victim gives consent.

Negligent Selection - A failure to exercise reasonable care in the hiring of either paid employees or volunteer workers.

Negligent Supervision - A failure to exercise reasonable care in the supervision of either paid employees or volunteer workers.

Perpetrator - A person who commits an act of child abuse.

Policy - A rule which describes or structures the proper working behavior of a church staff member or volunteer.

New Hope Lutheran Church Employee Abuse Awareness Agreement

I have read and understand New Hope's **Child Protection Policy** and support the efforts of the congregation to make this church a safe place for children. To this end, I agree with and pledge to abide by the following statements:

1. Adult survivors of childhood sexual or physical abuse need the love and acceptance of this church family. If I have such a history I will discuss my desire to work with children or youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to employment.
2. I am aware of situations in which I am putting myself at risk of being accused of inappropriate actions or putting a child at risk of being abused. In addition, I will take measures to avoid such situations, such as having more than one adult present whenever feasible or providing visual access to the room. I will participate in abuse awareness education opportunities the church provides.
3. I will keep cognizant of the activities of children and adults in the church, follow established reporting procedures and cooperate in resolving any alleged incident of abuse that may arise.
4. I will provide three (3) character references and previous church membership information before being approved for working with children. References will be kept on file. I will not regard this as an insult, but welcome it in order to help keep New Hope a safe place for children.

My signature on this form indicates my agreement with the **Child Protection Policy** and the above statements, and my pledge to abide by them. If this is my first year of employment at New Hope, the names and addresses of those references and previous church information are on my attached *Employee Application*.

Signature

Date

Witness

Date

New Hope Lutheran Church Community Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement

New Hope Lutheran Church recognizes that there is a growing problem of child abuse in our society and has designated a policy to address the issue. It is the church's goal to provide a safe, caring and trusting atmosphere, free from any type of abuse, in which children can learn and grow.

To assure the safety and well-being of our children and volunteer workers, adults should be aware of the risks involved when working with children. If any incident arises that compromises a child's well-being, it will be taken seriously and dealt with appropriately.

As a community volunteer, I agree that I have not been involved in an allegation of child abuse in the past year. I have received and read the **Child Protection Policy**.

Signature

Date

III. Preventative Measures

1. Building Modifications Recommended

- a. Install windows in all classroom and nursery doors.
- b. Install a changing table in the nursery.

2. Program Supervision Guidelines

- a. Assign at least 2 adults or 1 adult and 1 teen (13 or older) to each classroom.
- b. Assign 1 substitute teacher to be available if one of the two is missing.
- c. If a substitute teacher cannot be found the class must be cancelled or combined with another.
- d. Release children under 6 only to a parent or designated adult.
- e. Obtain written parental permission for transportation by someone other than parents.
- f. Lead classes for children or youth (i.e. 1st Communion) with a teacher and an approved volunteer or parent in attendance as an observer or participant.
- g. Supervise all middle and high school activities with two adults at all times.

New Hope Lutheran Church Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement

3. Bathroom Procedures during Activities

- a. Ask parents to take children to the bathroom prior to leaving them under the church's supervision.
- b. When escorting a child to the bathroom alone, prop or hold the main door open.
- c. Have older children use the buddy system when using the bathroom.

IV. Employee Screening Procedures

1. A resume will be submitted and reviewed. If the applicant qualifies they will receive a copy of the **Child Protection Policy**, an *Employee Application* (available in office) and an *Employee Abuse Awareness Agreement* (available in office).
2. Schedule interview.
3. Interview applicant and obtain signed forms with witnesses' signatures.
4. The interview will include a discussion of the **Child Protection Policy** to ensure that the applicant has an understanding of the information.
5. Contact references using the Employee Reference Questionnaire.
6. File all forms (available in office).
7. Provide information to the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator to conduct background check.
8. The committee which finds applicants will be responsible for seeing that the above procedure occurs with the chosen candidate for the position.

I have read and understand New Hopes **Child Protection Policy** and support the efforts of the congregation to make this church a safe place for children. To this end, I agree with and pledge to abide by the following statements:

1. I will not work with children or youth until I have been an active worshipping participant of New Hope for a minimum of six months prior to being accepted for such a position.
2. If I have been involved in an allegation of child abuse within the past year, I will refrain from youth activities until the allegation is resolved.
3. If I have been convicted of either sexual or physical abuse I will not volunteer my services in any church sponsored activity or program for children, or youth. If I have been so convicted, I will volunteer for other areas of service in the church. I agree to disclose all previous criminal convictions involving physical or sexual child abuse.
4. If I am a survivor of childhood sexual or physical abuse I will need the love and acceptance of this church family, therefore I will discuss my desire to work with children or youth with one of the pastoral staff prior to engaging in any volunteer work.
5. I am aware of situations in which I am putting myself at risk of being accused of inappropriate actions or putting a child at risk of being abused. In addition, I will take measures to avoid such situations, such as having more than one adult present whenever feasible or providing visual access to the room. I will participate in abuse awareness education opportunities the church provides.
6. I will keep cognizant of the activities of children and adults in the church, follow established reporting procedures and cooperate in resolving any alleged incident of abuse that may arise.
7. I will provide two character references and previous church membership information before being approved for working with children. References will be kept on file. I will not regard this as an insult, but welcome it in order to help keep New Hope a safe place for children.

My signature on this form indicates my agreement with the **Child Protection Policy** and the above statements, and my pledge to abide by them. If this is my first year to volunteer at New Hope, the names and addresses of those references and previous church information are on my attached *Volunteer Application*.

Signature

Date

Witness

15

Date

4. Anyone currently under investigation for child abuse will refrain from directly working with youth until the issue is resolved.

XI. Implementation

The Human Resources Committee has overall responsibility for administering this policy in accordance with the church's bylaws. The Council will review the policy as presented by the Human Resources Committee each year during the July meeting to ensure continued effectiveness and appropriateness.

XII. Closing

We hope and pray that child abuse never occurs at New Hope Lutheran Church. We also hope and pray that the seemingly epidemic proportions with which child abuse is penetrating our society are severely reduced and that, someday, child abuse may be completely eradicated. If New Hope is confronted with any incidents of child abuse, legal action will be taken and attention given towards providing the proper healing measures to those affected. This will require a deep faith, and will provide a challenge to our Christian commitment to love and forgive one another. May our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, give us courage and strength to deal with the issue of child abuse.

Attached Sample Forms:

1. Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement
2. Community Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement
3. Employee Abuse Awareness Agreement

V. Employee Hiring Procedure

1. When all references have been checked and background check pending, the applicant of choice will be notified.
2. All newly hired employees will be informed that any and all accusations of abuse will be taken seriously and investigated by the proper authorities, both within and outside the church.
3. Program Supervision Guidelines contained in this policy will be reviewed with employee.
4. Background checks and finger printing should be completed within 90 days of hire. Unfavorable results may result in termination.
5. Contracts and letters of call will stipulate Sect. V., item 4.
6. Background checks and finger printing will be repeated every five years.

**All employees under the age of 16 must have a work permit in their employee file.*

VI. Volunteer Selection Guidelines

1. Prior to consideration for volunteering, the applicant must be an active worshipping participant of the New Hope congregation for a minimum of six months.
2. A copy of the **Child Protection Policy** will be shared with all prospective volunteers.
3. The Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement (see attached) will be read, signed, dated and witnessed annually.
4. The Volunteer Application (see attached) will be completed.
5. The application will be evaluated and references checked by the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator.

6. Community volunteers (e.g. LOGOS, VBS, etc.) will be asked to follow New Hope's **Child Protection Policy** and sign the Community Volunteer Abuse Awareness Agreement (see attached) at the beginning of each activity session.
7. Paid Volunteers must follow all Employee application guidelines with the exception of the need for a detailed background check and finger printing. An employment application must be completed, the Abuse Awareness agreement must be signed, and three personal references must be provided.

VII. Employee and Volunteer Safeguards

1. All information gathered on applications, interviews and through references will remain confidential. Information will be stored in a locked file cabinet.
2. In the event that an individual falsely represents himself/herself on any of the **Child Protection Policy** forms, the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator will be notified. The Administrator will then inform the Human Resources Committee and the pastor(s) who will take appropriate actions. (Such actions could include, but are not limited to, removal from working with children until the matter is settled, counseling, or contacting appropriate authorities.)
3. Any suspected charges of abuse will be shared only with the proper authorities and the pastor(s), **Child Protection Policy** Administrator, president of Church Council, and/or the chairperson of the Human Resources Committee as needed.
4. The reporter's identity will be kept in strict confidence.

- g. Contacts with the media will only be made by a person designated as the spokesperson for the church. If appropriate, a spokesperson will be selected by the Congregation Council and will handle all contacts with the media and the congregation concerning the matter in a discrete, informed and diplomatic way. The designated spokesperson will also be responsible for preparing and releasing a statement that includes the information that New Hope has a Child Abuse Prevention Policy in place and takes every reasonable precaution to prevent any abuse from occurring. In light of the sensitive and serious nature of any allegation of abuse, please refer all media contacts to the designated spokesperson.

- h. The Human Resources Committee will document all the steps which are taken in response to the incident. The Human Resources Committee will prepare a written record promptly recording the date, times, participants and content of any meetings, discussions and telephone contacts concerning the investigation.

2. In the event that an individual has checked yes to either section on the employee or volunteer application referring to being the subject of an investigation or being convicted of physical or sexual abuse, the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator will require the individual to supply a copy of the letter from Social Services stating the findings of their investigation. Upon receipt of the letter the Human Resources Committee and pastor(s) will make a decision upon the appropriateness of that individual working with youth in the church.
3. An individual currently working with youth in the church is obligated to inform the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator as soon as any allegation is made against them. When the issue is resolved, the individual must supply a copy of the letter from Social Services stating the findings of their investigation. Upon receipt of the letter the Human Resources Committee and pastor(s) will make a decision upon the appropriateness of that individual working with youth in the church.

- a. The Finance Committee Chairperson will contact the insurance carrier immediately and will request that the carrier make a determination whether it will provide legal representation. If no legal representation is provided, a determination must be made by the Church Council whether to obtain the services of an attorney for the congregation.
- b. Full cooperation must be given to the state and local authorities. In-depth investigation should be left to professionals who are familiar with such cases. The Police Department and the Social Services Agency will be provided with a copy of this policy.
- c. If appropriate, contact denomination officials and seek their assistance. During the course of the investigation and after the allegations have been resolved, consider asking the church leaders to bring in professional assistance to help the congregation address any lingering effects of the incident.
- d. Follow the advice and recommendations of the investigating authorities about whether any other persons within the church, such as parents of other children, should be notified of the allegations of abuse.
- e. Offer pastoral support and counseling if the parents desire that assistance.
- f. The accused person must be treated with dignity and support. If the accused is a church worker, he or she will be relieved temporarily of all duties until the authorities have completed the investigation. If the person is a paid employee, he or she will be placed on administrative leave until the allegations are resolved.

VIII. Educational Opportunities

New Hope is dedicated to the educational process concerning child abuse and will provide the following:

- a. At least, once a year the Education Committee will contract a community speaker or present a film that addresses the issues of child abuse. This program will be held during the Sunday adult forum.
- b. The Human Resources Committee will ensure that a presentation is made to each New Member Orientation. This presentation will make people aware of New Hope's **Child Protection Policy**.
- c. Presentations of the **Child Protection Policy** will be made in the fall during all Sunday School, Youth Group, and Logos beginning teacher meetings. At this time, teachers and other volunteers will be asked to make initial application or renew their agreement as outlines in Section VI. The Human Resources Committee will see that this happens.
- d. When classes begin in the fall, each teacher will speak briefly to students about the ownership of their bodies and who they can talk to if they have a problem. Teachers will be provided the appropriate information by the Education Committee to cover with his/her class. The Education Committee will make teachers aware of this responsibility.
- e. The Human Resources Committee will ensure that a report on the **Child Protection Policy** is made once a year in November at a congregational meeting.
- f. The Human Resources Committee will see that the newsletter contains information on child abuse protection two times per year.
- g. One Sunday in April will be designated, "Day for the Children." The importance of their protection will be stressed, The Human Resources Committee will see that this happens.

IX. Reporting Child Abuse

1. Resolve all doubts in favor of reporting. If you are really unsure whether the suspected abuse has occurred, call and discuss the case anonymously with a representative of the State Department of Social Services (410) 461-0282. However, if you are advised that a report need not be filed, be sure to obtain the representative's name and make a record of the call.
2. *What is my responsibility if suspect child abuse has occurred?* Everyone has a legal (as well as moral) responsibility to contact law enforcement or Social Services personnel if they have reason to believe that a child has been subjected to abuse. We ask that oral reports to the authorities be made as soon as possible and that a written report be made to the local department within forty-eight hours.
3. *Who do I tell, within the church, that I suspect abuse has occurred?* Unless you suspect that child abuse has occurred on church property or during a church sponsored activity, you do not need to report your concerns to anyone within the church congregation. You do, however, need to report your suspicions to Social Services or the Howard County Police. If you suspect abuse has occurred during a church sponsored activity, it is important that you also contact a pastor in addition to notifying the proper authorities. If, for any reason, you are uncomfortable discussing your concerns with a pastor, you may talk to the president of the Congregation Council, the church's Director of Youth Programs, the **Child Protection Policy** Administrator, or the chairperson of the Human Resources Committee.

Because of the highly sensitive nature of the allegations of abuse, we ask that you cooperate fully with the investigation by the authorities. Please do not discuss your suspicions with others within the church except as provided for in this policy.

4. *What if I need advice or counseling for my own behavior?* We strongly encourage anyone who has a concern about whether his or her own actions may be inappropriate to seek professional assistance. The state law says that a pastor is not required to report abuse if such a report would disclose any confidential communication under canon law, church doctrine or practice. According to Visions and Expectations, section III (ELCA document): "This church expects that its ordained ministers will honor and respect privileged communication, particularly within the context of individual confession and absolution, and will not disclose such communication except with the express permission of the person who has confided it or if the person is perceived to intend great harm to self or others."
5. *If I report suspected child abuse, can I be sued?* Any person who, in good faith, makes or participates in making a report of abuse or neglect or participates in an investigation or a resulting judicial proceeding is given immunity from civil liability or criminal penalty under Maryland law.

X. Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse

1. The congregation of New Hope Lutheran Church recognizes that all allegations of child abuse must be taken seriously. At the same time, we are aware that situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for people's privacy and confidentiality.

When the church is notified by Social Services or local law enforcement officials that they have received a report of child abuse within the congregation, the following steps will be taken: