

Child/Youth Protection Guidelines
Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church
1343 Long Lane Road Kutztown, PA 19530

Purpose

- Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church's purpose for establishing these Child/Youth Protection Guidelines, and accompanying procedures, is to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the safety of the youth entrusted to our care.

Statement of Commitment

As a Christian community of faith committed to ministry to and with children and youth, Mt. Zion pledges to conduct all its activities and ministries in such a way that assures the safety and spiritual growth of all children and youth entrusted to its care. It will follow all required safety measures in the selection and recruitment of workers, and it will be responsible in overseeing its ministries and events and in training its staff, so that it is able and equipped to minister to children and youth in Jesus' name. It is the congregation's expectation that all alleged/suspected incidents of child abuse/neglect will be reported and responded to in an appropriate manner, as required by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the precepts of the Christian faith.

Proprietary and Confidentiality

All staff and volunteer records and documentation will be kept confidential and will be stored in a locked file in the church office. The Pastor, Church Secretary, Congregation Council President are the only people authorized to have access to the file. Failure to agree to any of the provisions of this section will result in the applicant being unable to work with Mt. Zion's children and youth.

Procedures

The Congregation Council adopts these minimum guidelines for Mt. Zion's activities and ministries with children and youth. Each children's/youth's organization may adopt more stringent requirements as appropriate.

1. Screening and Recruiting

(Information on clearances can be found at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/default.aspx>)

A. PAID EMPLOYEES:

All individuals fourteen (14) years of age or older who apply for a paid position as an employee with Mt. Zion and who will have direct contact with children will:

1. Complete an appropriate hiring and interview process that was established by the Congregation Council
2. Provide the following clearances prior to employment (with costs to be paid by the congregation if necessary) and maintain clearances as required by Pennsylvania law:
 - a. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance
 - b. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
 - c. FBI Fingerprint Criminal History Clearance, or the current Commonwealth of Pennsylvania requirements, with costs to be paid by the congregation
3. Be the subject of an initial Megan's Law search before hire and future searches when renewing clearances
4. Read and sign a copy of these guidelines
5. Be evaluated for their compliance with these guidelines as part of their annual review

B. VOLUNTEERS:

All individuals eighteen (18) years of age or older who apply for an unpaid position as a volunteer at

Mt. Zion, who will have direct contact with children will:

1. Demonstrate an active relationship with Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church or a local affiliated church for at least six (6) months before being allowed direct contact with children/youth
2. Complete a volunteer application
3. Complete an interview at the discretion of the pastor and/or the Christian Education Committee
4. Provide the following clearances to the church office prior to volunteering and maintain clearances as required by Pennsylvania law:
 - a. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance
 - b. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
5. Be the subject of an initial Megan's Law search when applying to volunteer if clearances are older than two years or if the person is a new resident in Pennsylvania within the past two years.
6. FBI Fingerprint Criminal History Clearance will NOT be required of a volunteer if the following 3 conditions apply:
 - a. the volunteer position is in fact unpaid
 - b. the prospective volunteer has been a Pennsylvania resident for a period of no less than ten (10) years immediately prior to the application for a volunteer position
 - c. the prospective volunteer signs the *Disclosure Statement Application for Volunteers* form affirming that they have not ever perpetrated child abuse and do not have a disqualifying criminal record
7. Have read and signed a copy of these guidelines

C. OCCASIONAL VOLUNTEERS:

Adults who occasionally serve as chaperons for a non-overnight activity or as a driver to an event must:

1. Provide the following clearances to the church office prior to volunteering and maintain clearances as required by Pennsylvania law:
 - a. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal Record Check
 - b. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
2. FBI Fingerprint Background Check will NOT be required of a volunteer if the following 3 conditions apply:
 - a. the volunteer position is in fact unpaid
 - b. the prospective volunteer has been a Pennsylvania resident for a period of no less than ten (10) years immediately prior to the application for a volunteer position
 - c. the prospective volunteer signs the *Disclosure Statement Application for Volunteers* form affirming that they have not ever perpetrated child abuse and do not have a disqualifying criminal record
3. Be the subject of an initial Megan's Law search when applying to volunteer if clearances are older than two years or if the person is a new resident in Pennsylvania within the past two years.
4. Have read and signed a copy of these guidelines

2. Supervision

- A. *"Two adult rule"*: There should be two unrelated adults in each classroom whenever possible. If this is not possible, there should be a roving adult who moves amid the classrooms during the program period.
- B. No person shall help to supervise an age group unless he/she is at least in the 9TH grade.
- C. No person under eighteen (18) years old shall be considered as one of the two adults.
- D. Each room will have a window in the door, or the door will be left open when the room is in use.
- E. Restroom guidelines: All workers supervising children that need assistance should not close stall doors or lock the handicap bathroom doors.
- F. Registration materials for activities in which children/youth are outside of the direct supervision of their parents/guardians shall require signed written permission forms that include pertinent health information in order to participate.

3. Staff Training

- A. Paid staff members must complete training regarding the responsible supervision of children/youth and how to recognize the signs of child abuse/neglect yearly.
- B. While there is no current state required training for volunteers, it is considered best practice that volunteers also complete training regarding the responsible supervision of children/youth and how to recognize the signs of child abuse/neglect.
- C. It is recommended that both paid and volunteer workers with children/youth attend trainings when offered by the church.
- D. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) documents for volunteers and mandated reporters from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services website can be used as one type of training device for staff/volunteers. <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Pages/default.aspx>

4. Responding & Reporting

General Information:

- A. All allegations/suspicions of child abuse will be taken seriously. The congregation's staff and leadership will cooperate with any investigation of the incident by state or local authorities.
- B. Any person who has been investigated for child abuse and received a substantiated or founded determination will not be able to work with children/youth at Mt. Zion.
- C. Buddy Rule: Persons convicted of child abuse who desire to join or re-join Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church may not hold any position - volunteer or paid -- that involves working with children/youth. During church sponsored events, these persons will need to be escorted by an unrelated adult member of the same gender in areas where children/youth may be present. Failure to agree to and to comply with this rule will result in the person not being allowed to participate in church sponsored events and/or removal from the membership rolls of the congregation.

If staff or volunteers suspect abuse:

In the event a Mt. Zion paid or unpaid staff member suspects that a child in his charge has been the victim of abuse, a report will be filed using the following procedure:

- A. Report the alleged/suspected abuse to Childline either electronically at <http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis> or by calling 1-800-932-0313. The Child Protective Services Law was enacted in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1975. This law includes the immediate oral reporting of the suspected child abuse to ChildLine.
- B. The Pastor and the President of the Congregation Council will be notified.

If allegations involve Mt. Zion staff or volunteers:

If an alleged/suspected incident of child abuse occurs, and the alleged perpetrator is a Mt. Zion staff member or volunteer, a report will be filed using the following procedure:

- A. Report the alleged/suspected incident to Childline either electronically at <http://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis> or by calling 1-800-932-0313. The Child Protective Services Law was enacted in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1975. This law includes the immediate oral reporting of the suspected child abuse to ChildLine.
- B. The Pastor and the President of the Congregation Council will be notified.
- C. When an allegation of child abuse is made against a Mt. Zion staff member or volunteer, the bishop and his/her staff liaison for the mission district will be contacted immediately.
- D. The parent or guardian of the child/youth will be notified.
- E. The paid/volunteer worker alleged to be the perpetrator of the abuse or misconduct will immediately be placed on leave from working with children/youth pending the outcome of an investigation.
- F. Our insurance company will be notified.

5. Media requests

- A. All media inquiries regarding alleged child abuse or misconduct will be referred to the Pastor. If the Pastor is absent or is the alleged perpetrator, they will be referred to the President of the Congregation Council.
- B. Guidance and support regarding how to respond to media requests will be sought from the synod and from appropriate legal counsel.

6. Guidelines review

- A. The Congregation Council shall appoint a task force every three years for the purpose of reviewing these guidelines for compliance with current Commonwealth of Pennsylvania laws, best practices regarding ministries with children and youth, and Mt. Zion's unique needs and/or current circumstance.
- B. This task force will report back to the Congregation Council to provide details on any recommended amendments, additions, deletions, and/or changes.
- C. The Congregation Council shall review the task force's report and take appropriate action.

7. Compliance

The Congregation Council or designee will review at least annually the documentation maintained in the staff and volunteer locked file box/cabinet (church office). It will update the list of those who have received clearances as necessary and will ensure that background checks are renewed as specified in these guidelines.

8. Allowances for extraordinary or unforeseen circumstances:

It is impossible to foresee every situation with which the congregation may be faced, or for these Child/Youth Protection Guidelines to address all circumstances. Accordingly, the Congregation Council reserves the right to make appropriate changes or modifications to these Child/Youth Protection Guidelines as the need arises.

Definitions

"Adult" means a person eighteen (18) years of age or older.

"Child" means any person under the age of eighteen (18).

"Children's activities" means any activity or ministry in which children are under supervision of staff persons or volunteers.

"Criminal background check"

1. For paid staff this means: All individuals fourteen (14) years of age or older who apply for a paid position as an employee at Mt. Zion who will have direct contact with children will have submitted the following documents prior to the start of employment and will renew clearances as required by the state.
 - A. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance
 - B. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
 - C. FBI Fingerprint Criminal History Clearance

2. For the following categories of volunteers (teachers, helpers, youth advisers, overnight chaperones, coaches, mentors etc.) this means: All individuals eighteen (18) years of age or older who apply for an unpaid position as a volunteer at Mt. Zion who will have direct contact with children will submit and maintain:
 - A. Pennsylvania State Police Criminal History Clearance
 - B. Pennsylvania Child Abuse History Clearance
 - C. FBI Fingerprint Criminal History Clearance will NOT be required of a volunteer if the following 3 conditions apply:
 - a. the volunteer position is in fact unpaid
 - b. the prospective volunteer has been a Pennsylvania resident for a period of no less than ten (10) years immediately prior to the application for a volunteer position
 - c. the prospective volunteer signs the *Disclosure Statement Application for Volunteers* form affirming that they have never perpetrated child abuse and do not have a disqualifying criminal record

Information on clearances can be found at <https://www.dhs.pa.gov/KeepKidsSafe/Clearances/Pages/default.aspx>

"Direct contact" means that individuals (14 years of age or older) that have routine, regular, and/or ongoing contact, provide care, supervision, guidance, or control of children.

"Helper" means anyone who aids in ministry and is not counted in the "Two adult rule." including youth in ninth grade through 17 years of age.

"Mandated Reporter" is an individual that comes in to contact with the child in the course of employment, volunteering, occupation and practice of a profession or through a regularly scheduled program, activity or service: or

- The mandated reporter is directly responsible for the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child, or is affiliated with an agency, institution, organization or the entity that is directly responsible of the care, supervision, guidance or training of the child; or
- A person makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that an identifiable child is the victim of child abuse; or
- An individual 14 years of age or older makes a specific disclosure to the mandated reporter that the individual has committed child abuse.

- Such persons include, but are not limited to, medical professionals, school administrators, teachers, nurses, social workers, day-care center workers, mental health professionals, law enforcement officers, pastors, church youth workers, clergyman, priest, rabbi, minister, Christian Science practitioner, religious healer or spiritual leader of any regularly established church or other religious organization, including those who volunteer in any of these positions.
- *NOTE- Section 6311.1 (b) include the 'following protections'(1) "Confidential communications made to a member of the clergy are protected under 42 Pa.C.S§5943 (relating to confidential communications to clergymen).*

“Responding to Allegations of Child Abuse”

For purposes of these guidelines, “child abuse” is any action (or lack of action) that endangers or harms a child's physical, psychological, or emotional health and development. Child abuse occurs in different ways and includes the following:

- Physical abuse - any physical injury to a child that is not accidental, such as beating, shaking, burns, and biting.
- Emotional abuse - emotional injury occurs when a child is not nurtured or provided with love and security, such as an environment of constant criticism, belittling and persistent teasing.
- Sexual abuse - any sexual activity between a child and an adult or between a child and another child at least four years older than the victim, including activities such as fondling, exhibitionism, intercourse, incest, and pornography.
- Neglect - depriving a child of their essential needs, such as adequate food, water, shelter, and medical care.

"Staff person" is any person called/employed by the congregation on a full or part-time basis.

"Staff person in charge of a children's activity" means the church staff person responsible for the conduct of this activity. In the case of non-local church programs operating on church property. the duties of the "staff person in charge of the children's activity" shall be carried out by a non-local church lead staff or volunteer.

"Two adult rule" means that there should be two unrelated adults in each classroom whenever possible. If this is not possible, there should be a roving adult who moves amid the classrooms during the program period."

Volunteer" is any unpaid adult who leads/assists in conducting children's activities or has regular and direct contact with children.

"Worker(s) with children" may be paid or volunteer who have responsibility for children or youth on behalf of the congregation.

Updated and Approved by Council: 02/08/2024

Volunteer Application & Agreement

Name: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____ Date of Birth: _____

Phone: Home _____ Cell: _____

The congregation of Mt. Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, and volunteers who participate in church sponsored activities. The following statements reflect our Congregation's commitment to preserving this house of worship as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter, and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

1. No adult who has been convicted of any form of child abuse should volunteer to work with children or youth in any church sponsored activity.
2. All adults volunteering with children or youth of our congregation must have been active members of Mt. Zion or a local affiliated church for at least six (6) months before beginning a volunteer assignment.
3. Adults volunteering with children and youth shall observe all rules/provisions listed in these Child/Youth Protection Guidelines.
4. Adults volunteering with children and youth must attend any required training and educational events provided by this organization to keep them informed of policies and state laws regarding child abuse.
5. Adult volunteers shall report any alleged or suspected incident of child abuse as directed by The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and in addition, they shall report any such incident to the pastor and the Council president.

Please answer each of the following questions by circling "yes" or "no":

1. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe and abide by all guidelines regarding working with children and youth? Yes No
2. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to observe the: "Two adult rule"? Yes No
3. As a volunteer in this congregation, have you abided by the six (6) month rule before beginning a volunteer — assignment? Yes No
4. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to participate in training and education events provided by the congregation related to your volunteer assignment? Yes No
5. As a volunteer in this congregation, do you agree to promptly report abusive or inappropriate behavior?
Yes No

As a volunteer in this congregation, I have read and accepted this Volunteer Agreement. By my signature, I swear/affirm the information that I am providing on this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and that I have read and understand the contents of these Child/Youth Protection Guidelines.

Signature
