



Appendix A

Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable People in Glory Lutheran Church

1. UNDERSTANDING THE NEED

REDUCING THE RISK OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF VULNERABLE PERSONS

The physical and sexual abuse of children has increasingly and properly claimed the attention of our society. In response, it is the commitment of Glory Lutheran Church to provide reasonable protective care to all preschoolers, children, youth and other vulnerable people involved in ministries or programs of Glory Lutheran Church.

Childhood innocence is a gift given by God. Children are naturally trusting. Children readily place their faith in adults who care for them. It is our responsibility as a church to safeguard that trust.

IT CAN HAPPEN IN ANY CHURCH

Incidents of abuse can occur in any church – including Glory Lutheran Church. Churches have traditionally accepted the services of anyone expressing an interest in working as a volunteer with children, youth or other vulnerable persons. Churches are by nature trusting institutions. Asking sensitive questions of those who are giving their time and talent can be seen as intrusive by church leaders. No one wants to offend potential volunteers, especially longtime church members with a history of good service. These realities can make a church susceptible to incidents of abuse. There are few topics that create more emotional turmoil than that of child abuse, especially if it is sexual in nature.

IMPACT

A single incident of abuse can devastate a church. Members become outraged and bewildered. Parents question whether their own children have been victimized. The viability of the church's youth and children's programs is jeopardized. Church leaders face blame and guilt for allowing the incident to happen.

Such incidents often attract media attention – sometimes on a national scale. Television stations conduct live interviews from church property on the evening news. Front page stories hit the local paper. Community residents begin to associate the church with the incident of abuse. However, far more tragic is the emotional trauma to the victim and the victim's family, and the enormous potential legal liability the church faces. If a trial ensues, the issue stays alive in the media for months, sometimes even years.

2. UNDERSTANDING ABUSE

DEFINITIONS

Abuse is characterized as follows:

- It can be physical, emotional or sexual;
- It always involves the misuse of power;
- Misuse of power takes place when people take advantage of the authority or power they have over vulnerable people. Vulnerable people include adults with physical or mental disabilities and children.

Physical abuse is using physical force or action that results, or could result, in injury to a vulnerable person. It is more than reasonable discipline. Sometimes injury is caused by over-discipline. Injuring a child,

youth or other vulnerable person is not acceptable, regardless of differing cultural standards on discipline.

- In 97 per cent of reported cases of physical abuse, parents are the perpetrators.*
- The perpetrator of physical abuse is approximately 1.5 times more likely to be male than female.*

Emotional abuse is a pattern of hurting an individual's feelings to the point of damaging their self-respect. It includes verbal attacks, insults, humiliation or rejection. A child, youth or vulnerable person who is emotionally harmed may demonstrate severe anxiety, depression, withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Sexual abuse occurs when a child, youth or other vulnerable person is used by somebody else for sexual stimulation or gratification. Sexual activity between children or youth may also be sexual abuse if older or more powerful children or youth take sexual advantage of those who are younger or less powerful.

Sexual abuse includes behaviour that involves touching and non-touching aspects. Types of sexual abuse that involve touching include:

- Fondling
- Oral, genital and anal penetration
- Intercourse
- Rape

Types of sexual abuse that do not involve touching include:

- Verbal comments
- Exposure to pornography
- Obscene phone calls, e-mail or other communications
- Exhibitionism
- Allowing children to witness sexual activity

SYMPTOMS OF ABUSE AND MOLESTATION

Church volunteers and staff should be alert to the physical signs of abuse and molestation, as well as to behavioural and verbal signs that a victim may exhibit.

Physical signs may include:

- lacerations and bruises
- nightmares
- irritation, pain or injury to the genital area
- difficulty with urination
- discomfort when sitting
- torn or bloody underclothing
- venereal disease

Behavioural signs may include:

- anxiety when approaching church or nursery area
- nervous or hostile behaviour toward adults
- sexual self-consciousness
- "acting out" sexual behaviour
- withdrawal from church activities and friends

* Wolfe, David. *Child Abuse. Implications for Child Development and Psychopathology*. Newbury Park, California: Sage, 1987. P.20.

Verbal signs may include the following statements:

- I don't like (names a particular person).
- (Particular person) does things to me when we're alone.
- I don't like to be alone with (particular person).
- (Particular person) fooled around with me.

THE EFFECTS OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF VULNERABLE PEOPLE

Child sexual abuse robs children of their childhood and can potentially scar its young victims for life. Too often, in the past, the effects of abuse were minimized or dismissed. Children were viewed as being resilient. Recent research has shown that children can suffer significant pain from even a single abusive incident. Church members must be aware of the pain and long term suffering that can accompany such abuse. Abused children can display a wide range of negative symptoms in the aftermath of abuse. Abuse can result in abnormal fears, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), aggressive behaviour, sexual "acting out," depression and poor self-esteem. Sexually transmitted disease is also a possible outcome.

The degree of damage depends upon several factors including the intensity, duration and frequency of the abuse. In addition, the relationship of the perpetrator to the child matters. If the abuser is a known and trusted authority figure in the child's life, the degree of impact increases dramatically.

Consequences of child sexual abuse can plague victims into adulthood. Outcome studies of adult survivors of child sexual abuse suggest the following effects: sexual dysfunction, eating disorders, substance abuse, promiscuity, disassociation from emotions, and possible perpetration of sexual abuse on others. When church leaders, pastors, and respected congregational volunteers perpetrate the abuse, lifelong religious confusion and deep feelings of enmity toward God and the church can occur.

THE PROFILE OF A CHILD MOLESTER

Who is the typical child molester? Some church leaders assume that molesters are "strangers wearing trench coats" or "dirty old men." These stereotypes are not only inaccurate, but they also contribute dangerously to a false sense of security. Researchers in the field of child sexual abuse currently indicate that no single profile fits the various perpetrators of abuse. Church leaders can become preoccupied screening for stereotypes, while not suspecting the real molester could be an active adult or teen in the church.

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING

If abuse occurs in the church, a respected member will most likely be the molester. Emphasis upon "stranger danger" will leave the church ill prepared. While it's uncomfortable even to consider this, the most likely assailants include Sunday School teachers, religious educators, nursery or preschool volunteers, teachers in a church operated school, camp counselors, Scout leaders, "concerned" adults who volunteer to transport children to church, and clergy. Trusted adults – male or female – can easily mislead children. Most incidents of child sexual abuse take place in the context of an ongoing relationship between the abuser and the child.

- Over 80% of the time, the abuser is someone known to the victim.
- Most abuses take place within the context of an ongoing relationship.
- The typical offender is between the ages of 20 and 30 years.
- 20% of sex offenders begin their activity before the age of 18.
- Child abusers are often married and have children.

3. THE CHURCH'S LEGAL VULNERABILITY

WHY CHURCHES ARE VULNERABLE

Churches have unique features that can make them susceptible to incidents of molestation. This risk increases dramatically for overnight activities.

A. Access

The Boy Scouts, Big Brothers, and similar organizations have instituted comprehensive programs to reduce the risk of child molestation. Child molesters are attracted to an institution in which they have immediate access to potential victims in an atmosphere of complete trust.

B. Need

Most churches struggle to get adequate help for children's and youth programs. Recruiting Sunday School teachers, for example, can become an unending effort. Turnover among volunteers is also high. A willing volunteer provides welcome relief.

Churches need to understand the extent of their liability. Churches are not "guarantors" of the safety and well-being of children. They are not absolutely liable for every injury that occurs on their premises or in the course of their activities. Generally, they are responsible only for those injuries that result from their negligence. Victims of molestation who have sued a church often allege that the church was negligent in not adequately screening applicants or for not providing adequate supervision.

C. The Civil and Legal Liability of the Church

Increasingly and often more dramatically, the church and its personnel (i.e. staff, Council members, officers and pastors) are being held accountable for the acts of individual abusers within the church even though neither the church, nor its leaders were aware of the abuse or condoned it. Churches are being sued in Civil Courts for damages sustained by victims and their families. Those victims and their families are attempting to hold churches accountable by alleging that:

- the church is vicariously liable for the acts of its personnel, be they paid staff or volunteers, regardless of whether the church was itself negligent or even knew of the abuse;
- the church was negligent in its hiring or accepting personnel, whether paid or volunteer;
- the church was negligent in the supervising or monitoring of its personnel or membership.

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