



NGLS Child Protection Policy Letter to Congregations

Dear NGLS Congregations,

When we welcome newly baptized members into the body of Christ, we promise to support them and help them grow in the Christian faith. In order to do this, The Northern Great Lakes Synod wants to empower adults to intentionally protect children so they may experience the sacred in a safe space surrounded by safe adults. Churches are by nature, trusting institutions that have traditionally accepted the services of anyone expressing an interest in volunteering. We now know that this leaves our congregations susceptible to children being abused in what should be the safest place in the life of a child.

The NGLS wants to reduce/eliminate abuse in church settings and therefore strongly recommends each congregation adopt and implement their own Child Protection Policy accompanied by regular trainings for staff, volunteers, and congregational leadership. The adoption and implementation of a Child Protection Policy is the responsibility of each church council. It is important to remember that having a Child Protection Policy is only part of the process. Keeping the policy updated and following it are also necessary to better protect our children.

I have attached a Child Protection Policy that was created for the NGLS and can be edited and adapted to your own congregational setting. Having a Child Protection Policy as a living document is an important step in prioritizing child protection. Not only will this be a guide for leaders, but it can also deter potential offenders. We may not always know who they are, but studies tell us that we have both offenders and victims present in our congregations and effective policies and procedures will greatly reduce the risk of abuse.

As you put together your own policies and best practices, feel free to reach out to Stefanie Ehle, NGLS Youth Ministry Coordinator (youthcoordinator@nglsynod.org) or myself with any questions or circumstances you want to talk through.

In Ministry Together,

Bishop Katherine Finegan

Frequently Asked Questions

About Implementing a Child Protection Policy in your Congregation

Q: Why does my congregation need a Child Protection Policy?

A: While talking about child abuse can feel uncomfortable, we believe that the safety and protection of children is more important than our own discomfort. By putting a policy in place, it shows potential predators that your church is alert and willing to protect vulnerable populations.

Q: We don't have many (or any) youth in our congregation. Why should we adopt a policy now?

A: Implementing a Child Protection Policy in your congregation will show that it cares about children and young families and values a safe and welcoming worship space. Doing the work now will prepare your congregation for these difficult situations and prove your commitment to protecting children.

Q: What if my congregation already has a Child Protection Policy?

A: That's great! Child Protection Policies are meant to be living documents that are continually reviewed and updated. If you haven't done so recently, look at your current policy and compare it to the policy that the NGLS has adopted. If there are items that need to be updated or addressed, now is a great time to do that.

Q: How will a Child Protection Policy affect other parts of ministry within my congregation?

A: When creating and adopting a Child Protection Policy for your congregation, you will need to communicate with other ministries that are sponsored by your congregation or that take place in your church building. Share the Child Protection Policy with them and look at any other policies and documents (such as a building use policy) that may need to be updated in this process.

Q: Our congregation already struggles with getting enough volunteers. Do we really need to have volunteers fill out an application before working with youth?

A: Having an application process for volunteers can deter potential abusers from working with youth. Even if your congregation does not run a full background check on every volunteer, the application process gives church leadership the opportunity to call references and screen for potential red flags.