

Trinity Lutheran Church  
Grand Rapids, MI

**Abuse Response Policy**  
*Adopted March 2026*

As a congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church boldly proclaims that God, Scripture and the Church condemns all forms of abuse, whether or not physical violence is present.

Trinity will provide a safe and caring environment where all members feel valued and are able to disclose concerns related to mistreatment and abuse. Accusations of abuse will be believed without judgment of the accuser or perpetrator.

Trinity will ensure leaders have education and training on what to do if an incident involving abuse occurs. Our role will be to provide support and referrals to partner agencies that can offer professional assessment, intervention and support.

Trinity will foster a culture of care and abuse prevention.

This policy is applicable to all pastors, employees, and volunteers within Trinity Lutheran Church.

**DEFINITIONS**

Abuse: intentional or unintentional treatment with cruelty or violence. Including, but not limited to physical, sexual, emotional, spiritual, financial, technological, social, or the abuse of power. Includes domestic violence and human trafficking.

Adult: a person at least 18 years of age.

Boundaries Training: A synod sponsored course for rostered leaders in the ELCA. Of particular importance are boundaries related to professional ethics, finances, use of social media, the prevention of sexual misconduct, boundaries concerning gender and harassment, and boundaries concerning racial justice.

Child, youth, adolescent: A person under 18 years of age.

Confidentiality: maintaining that information shared between individuals in a caring relationship is held confidential unless there is an immediate threat to personal safety.

Disclosure: being told by someone that they are being abused in some manner.

Domestic violence: Any behavior that is used to maintain power and control in an intimate relationship. Domestic abuse and dating violence/abuse are often used interchangeably.

Domestic Violence Training: education provided by specialized organizations regarding types of

abuse, symptoms of abuse and ways to respond to abuse.

Vulnerable Adult: an individual age 18 or older who is unable to protect themselves from abuse, neglect or exploitation because of a mental or physical impairment or because of advanced age.

Neglect: Harm to the adult's own health and welfare or harmful conduct by a person responsible for the health and welfare for the adult

## **TRAINING**

All pastors and staff are encouraged to participate in general domestic violence training. Follow up training will occur at regular intervals.

Procedures:

1. Pastors, staff, Stephen Ministers, and lead volunteers will receive a copy of this policy. It is the responsibility of each individual to review and understand the contents; meeting with designated staff for clarification.
2. Trinity will provide training for both staff and volunteers through Safe Haven Ministries (or other reputable Domestic Violence center) to identify types of abuse, symptoms of an abusive relationship and understand how to respond and support those experiencing abuse.
3. Trinity's Pastors, Faith Community Nurse and other designated staff will have specialized training in responding to abuse.
  - a. A current list of members who have received specialized abuse training will be kept by the Faith Community Nurse or Human Resource designee.
4. Pastors and rostered leaders will attend Boundaries Training through the synod as required by the ELCA.

## **RESPONSE**

When abuse is witnessed or disclosed, appropriate action will be taken to maintain safety of the victim, connect to appropriate care, and respect confidentiality.

Procedures

1. If a person reports being actively assaulted or you witness someone in immediate physical danger, call 9-1-1.
2. If abuse of a child is witnessed or disclosed, call 9-1-1 if in immediate danger and then follow the guidelines in Trinity's Child & Youth Protection Policy.
3. If abuse of a vulnerable adult is witnessed and/or abuse, neglect or exploitation of a vulnerable adult is disclosed, a call should be made Michigan Centralized Intake at 1-855-444-3911.

4. In all other circumstances of reported or suspected abuse direction shall be provided to the victim to connect with our local domestic violence agencies for professional help.  
Safe Haven Ministries: 616-452-6664.  
The YWCA: 616-454-9922.
5. If accused is a staff member, council member, or clergy, contact the Congregational President or the Synod Office of the Bishop. (phone numbers listed below)

### Trinity Lutheran Church Reporting Procedures

1. If Adult Protective Services, Child Protective Services or law enforcement need to be contacted, make reports as necessary to the appropriate agencies.
2. Contact the Senior Pastor
3. Document in writing with the date of report, time of report and a brief synopsis of any report to provide to the Senior Pastor. If there were any witnesses, their name and information should also be documented.

#### Additional Considerations:

1. Always believe the accusations of abuse without passing judgment.
2. Ask the victim what they need, do not assume; and respect their choices, even if they are not the ones you would make.
3. Safety for the victim and/or children is the top priority when abuse is disclosed, while respecting confidentiality.

### **EDUCATION AND AWARENESS**

As a way of creating a culture where victims of abuse feel safe coming to the church for support, Trinity Lutheran Church partners with local domestic violence/sexual violence organizations to have an array of educational material available.

#### Procedures:

1. Tear-away bathroom flyers with the local domestic violence hotline are placed in the stalls of the bathrooms.
2. Incorporating healthy relationship building, teen dating violence prevention, boundaries and the responsible use of technology in our youth programs.
3. Teaching about healthy relationships, abusive qualities and building trust is stressed in pre-marital classes.
4. Utilizing Safe Haven training courses for staff, small group ministries and any interested congregation members.
5. Maintaining our Safe Church Certification through Safe Haven Ministries.

## **COMMUNICATION OF POLICY**

This policy will be made available to the congregation in at least the following ways...

1. Published on the church website
2. Linked in the Messenger (as soon as approved or when subsequently revised)
3. Filed electronically in Trinity's shared Policies and Procedures drive that all staff can access.
4. A printed copy will be put in the Policies and Procedures Manual to be located in the main office.

## **MAINTENANCE OF POLICY**

This policy shall be reviewed by the Congregation Council every three (3) years.

## **IMPORTANT CONTACT & RESOURCE INFORMATION**

**For emergencies, call 9-1-1**

Grand Rapids Police Non-Emergency Number 616-456-3400

Trinity Lutheran Church Office 616-949-2510

Senior Pastor x115

Faith Community Nurse x119

Council President Bill Bush (2026-27): 616-822-9255

North/West Lower Michigan Synod Office of the Bishop: 517-321-5066

Adult Protective Services Hotline (24 hour) 855-444-3911

Alzheimer's Support Hotline (24 hour) 800-272-3900 24-Hour

Children's Protective Services (CPS) hotline (24 hours) 855-444-3911

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (24 hour) **988** or 800-273-8255

Men's Resource Center of West Michigan: 616-456-1178

Safe Haven Ministries Domestic Violence Shelter & Support Services (24 hour) 616-452-6664

United Way Michigan (24 hours) **211** or 844-875-9211

YWCA West Central Michigan (24 hour) 616-454-9922