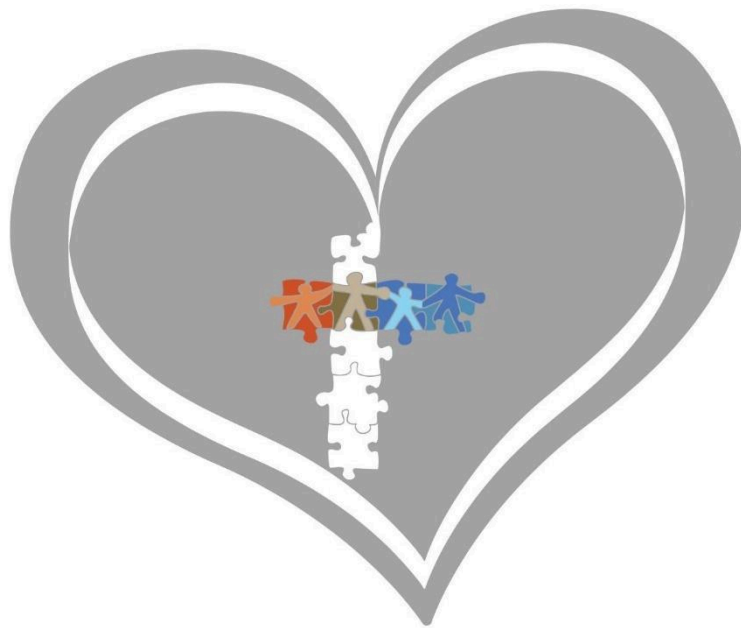


Pacific Southwest District School Ministries

Early Childhood Cabinet



Guiding Principles for Early Childhood Ministry

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The Early Childhood Cabinet has prepared this document in support of
early childhood ministries and educators in the
Pacific Southwest District – Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

Revised – January 2024

Mission and Ministry Statement

It is the position of the Pacific Southwest District – LCMS Early Childhood Cabinet that early childhood centers are an integral part of the church's total mission and ministry.

The early childhood program is a vital evangelism arm of the congregation. It is an appealing and valued entry point for community families who may have no contact with the church. As such, Lutheran early childhood centers are often the first introduction to the Christian faith for un-churched families and a re-entry point for those who have fallen away from the church.

The ministry of early childhood education is not only to the children but also to their families, extended families, and communities. The Holy Spirit works as the children and families in the caring environment of a Lutheran early childhood center are exposed to the Gospel in Word and action. Many families are moved to continue in the Lutheran schools and to become involved in the congregation. All families are ministered to in the name of Jesus and brought into contact with His saving Word.

The purpose of early childhood ministry, along with all educational ministries of the church, is the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) – to preach the Gospel to all nations. By the power of the Holy Spirit, congregational leaders and members work with the early childhood staff to accomplish this purpose - encouraging and facilitating faith formation, baptism, and church membership, as well as including all early childhood families as part of the congregation's circle of care.

Mission

The mission of the Early Childhood Ministry of the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod is to support, encourage, and facilitate early childhood educators to effectively serve young children, their families, congregations, and communities through developmentally appropriate Christ-centered ministries that transform lives and make the Great Commission real.

Vision

Our vision for ministry is to respond to the needs of the early childhood community, advocate for young children, celebrate the uniqueness of each child of God, and engage in intentional ministry to young children and their families so that children and their families grow in personal faith and knowledge.

Early Childhood Philosophy

We believe the young child:

- Is a unique and special gift from God whose individuality is celebrated.
- Learns best about God's world through observation, experimentation, exploration, play, and sensory experiences.
- Thrives when cared for and nurtured in an early childhood program where all their developmental needs are met in a Christ-centered, age-appropriate, play-based, and child-focused environment.

Deuteronomy 6:5-7: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."

We believe early childhood educators:

- Are called by God to joyfully serve Him in early childhood ministry, demonstrating a passion for young children, their families, and teaching.
- Are qualified professionals in their appearance, attitude, and demeanor, adhering to state and local licensing regulations and serving as advocates for young children, families, and early childhood education.
- Promote a spirit of unity with the entire church/school staff, putting the best construction on the actions of fellow church workers (positive intent), being careful not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16), and resolving disagreements in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of confession and absolution as a model for reconciliation (Matthew 5 and 18).
- Serve as partners in ministry with pastors, lay leaders, governing boards, congregational members, volunteers, co-workers, parents, and the Pacific Southwest District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.
- Plan and implement a warm and loving Christ-centered, developmentally appropriate environment where young children can develop to their fullest potential spiritually, physically, cognitively, socially, emotionally, and creatively.
- Receive and continue Lutheran training to effectively minister to young children and their families, modeling Jesus' love, grace, and forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:15: "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ."

Faith Nurture

In partnership with our congregations, the Pacific Southwest District aims to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with people of all ages, including the youngest children in our congregations and communities. To that end, our early childhood centers are committed to nurturing faith development in young children by creating an environment where faith is modeled and taught. Paul tells us in Romans 10:17, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the Word of Christ."

The Pacific Southwest District's Early Childhood Cabinet strongly encourages that our administrators, teachers, and staff of our early childhood centers be supported, encouraged, and held accountable to modeling a Christian lifestyle and continue to seek God's will and purpose for their life through daily prayer, personal and group Bible study, and corporate worship.

Finally, the Early Childhood Cabinet encourages pastors and their congregations to support and encourage their early childhood center staff to become trained in the faith development of young children and the teachings of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod by providing and funding professional development opportunities such as Colloquy and similar programs provided by the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and Pacific Southwest District.

Financial Support Position Statement

Early childhood education is a mission arm of the church and is of great value to the congregation's growth and ministry to families. Those church workers who labor in this field deserve the utmost spiritual and financial support.

Early childhood educators are professionally trained and committed to their ministry. They are entitled to appropriate compensation reflecting their education and experience.

Care of the Worker:

It is the position of the Pacific Southwest District-LCMS and the Pacific Southwest District Early Childhood Cabinet that early childhood personnel should be included on the same salary schedule as other educators serving in the district (according to education and years of experience), using the same base salary amount, in compliance with the Pacific Southwest District salary guidelines (matrix). They should, likewise, receive the same benefits. Adjusting the base upward to reflect your area's cost of living and market value may be necessary.

Care of the Program:

The welfare of the children and the quality of instruction should determine staffing. It is not in the best interest of children or the ministry to hire part-time employees merely to minimize benefits.

As an integral part of the church's mission and ministry to young children and their families, the early childhood center should receive financial support as a part of the congregation's budgeted commitment, including the following:

- Continuing education (college courses, conferences, workshops)
- Colloquy and other Lutheran teaching coursework
- Lutheran Education Association/professional organization membership.

Professional Growth Statement

The purpose of early childhood ministries operated by congregations in the Pacific Southwest District-LCMS is to reach out with the loving arms of Jesus to young children and their families. Christ-centered, caring early childhood educators are vital to a quality program.

Professional growth is necessary to ensure a quality staff and must be valued and encouraged, and should emphasize the following Core Values of PSD School Ministries:

Christ-centered
Spirit Filled
Ministry Minded
Servant-hearted.

The Early Childhood Cabinet recommends that continued education be both prayerfully encouraged and financially supported by the sponsoring congregation. Certification, additional early childhood coursework, and Lutheran, Biblically-based teaching should be celebrated.

Consideration should be given to establishing a policy that would encourage and assure the continuing effectiveness of staff in the areas of ministry, appropriate practice, and curriculum. Such a policy would include:

- Expectations in the areas of Lutheran thought and methods through Colloquy and other Lutheran training and early childhood development course work, degree completion through Concordia, conference and in-service attendance
- Goal setting and evaluation
- Plans and policy for funding
- A district-based salary scale that acknowledges additional coursework.

Assistance, support, and encouragement from the congregation validate the educator's role in sharing the Good News of salvation and the importance of early childhood ministry.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Early childhood educators and centers are committed to providing a quality environment in which young children learn and grow. This commitment includes respecting the uniqueness of each child as a gift of God while also validating the child's ethnicity and cultural heritage. An outgrowth of this respect, value, and care is trust. A trusting environment is safe, reliable, and developmentally appropriate, laying the foundation for faith formation, social and emotional development, and physical and cognitive growth.

Developmentally appropriate practice engages children and encourages exploration, discovery, and mastery of concepts through hands-on activities. The curriculum provides daily problem-solving opportunities and supports language and literacy development through print-rich environments and free exploration of writing and drawing material. Creativity and self-expression are encouraged through open-ended experiences. The planned environment supports all growth areas: physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual. Activities are child-directed and teacher-facilitated. Schedules are not rushed and allow adequate time for children to become actively involved in play-based learning.

Research confirms that young children learn best when ideas and concepts are presented in playful situations. Play allows children to involve all of their senses in building knowledge, thus creating multiple pathways to be formed within the brain. Multiple pathways provide children with a more robust and more flexible system of retrieval and application of information. Play builds a firm foundation for faith and knowledge. Social skills are built through group play. This type of play provides cooperative learning experiences that enable children to share ideas, build relationships, negotiate, and build appropriate means of dealing with emotions. In our Lutheran early childhood centers, the children can experience grace, love, and forgiveness as they interact with their teachers and peers.

In a Christ-centered environment where developmentally appropriate practice is implemented, children are nurtured to become self-directed and enthusiastic learners, effective communicators, problem solvers, clear and creative thinkers, and church and community contributors. They are enabled to live the abundant life God has prepared for them - secure in His love and strength.

Code of Ethics and Behavior

Accountability

Ultimately, the preschool staff and volunteers are accountable to Christ, our Lord and Savior. The preschool staff and volunteers report directly to the preschool director. Staff and volunteers work as a team with all other church and school personnel to create a learning environment that carries out the mission of our ministry to _____.

Union of religious belief amongst preschool staff and volunteers and a shared commitment toward behavior that exemplifies this belief is required to successfully and effectively carry out the mission of our ministry. Staff members and volunteers represent the religious beliefs of the church and school as identified in Scripture and expressed in our Statement of Faith, the Lutheran Confessions, and the applicable resolutions of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (LCMS) in convention. All preschool staff and volunteers are expected to adhere to and abide by the following set of Ethics and Behavior. (See also Social Media Policy.)

We believe...

[Brief Statement of LCMS Doctrinal Position - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod](#)

[The Lutheran Confessions - The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod \(lcms.org\)](#)
[LCMS Document Library](#)

Recognizing that we have a right, responsibility, and calling not only to prepare people for life in this world but to "make people wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (1 Tim. 3:15), we desire to adhere to the highest Christian and professional ethical standards as staff and volunteers. To that end, we are committed to the following principles:

Principle I:

Commitment to the Lord and His Church

Staff and volunteers are dedicated to serving the Lord, and they recognize the school is one of many ministries of His Church.

In fulfillment of the obligation to the Lord and His Church, staff and volunteers:

- Are regular and faithful in worship attendance.
- Serve in additional capacities beyond teaching in the school, as outlined in the job description.
- Promote a spirit of unity among the various ministries of the church, supporting and building them up positively by their participation, communication, and attitude; refraining from negative behavior, talk, gossip, or communications at all times and in all circumstances; praying to the Lord on their behalf; and understanding that they represent the ministry staff of the church and school also.
- Are regular in their study of God's Word.

Principle II:

Commitment to the student

Staff and volunteers strive to help all children realize their God-given potential and their worth as one of His children, making each child's welfare, as informed by the standards and beliefs of the LCMS, the primary basis for all decisions and actions (Mark 9:37).

In fulfillment of the obligation to the student, staff and volunteers:

- Present a daily living model of the Christian faith, listening, affirming, providing positive, constructive feedback to others, and avoiding negative comments and gossip.
- Nurture and protect students physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- Build secure, responsive, Christ-centered relationships with students.
- Encourage students to become independent. (Proverbs 22:6)
- Daily use the LCMS curriculum for faith development or other director/administration approved developmentally approved curriculum in alignment with LCMS teachings.
- Treat students fairly and honestly (Micah 6:8).
- Respect student privacy and confidentiality except where prohibited by law.

Principle III:

Commitment to the families

Staff and volunteers recognize that ministry extends beyond the classroom doors to the homes of its individual students and will be honest in their dealings (Hebrews 13:18), keep the families' confidentiality entrusted to them except where prohibited by law (Ephesians 4:29), and accept and respect all people (Galatians 3:26-28).

In fulfillment of the obligation to families, staff and volunteers:

- Show respect for parental authority and choice in decisions regarding students, making school leadership aware if these choices do not align with LCMS teachings.
- Encourage and equip parents in their God-given duty to train their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6).
- Extend personal invitations to school families for worship and significant functions at the church.
- Keep parents informed of student progress and daily happenings at the school.
- Except where prohibited by law, respect family privacy and confidentiality by refraining from sharing sensitive family information with anyone other than the Preschool Director or school leadership.

Principle IV:

Commitment to the profession

Staff and volunteers are committed to the Lutheran school teaching profession and are dedicated to upholding professional standards (Titus 2:7-8).

In fulfillment of the obligation to the teaching profession, staff and volunteers:

- Model a life of faith and good stewardship of time, talents, and treasures as God has given them, using them appropriately.
- Present a professional appearance in dress (in conformance with one's biological sex; see *Synodical Resolution 11-03A (2019)*; *CTCR Statement on Gender Identity Sept 5, 2014* (*Genesis 5:1-2*).
- Conduct oneself with a professional demeanor, avoiding losing one's temper and exploding with rage, resorting to passive-aggressive behavior or other negative behavior, but instead speaking truthfully and avoiding deceit of all kinds.
- See themselves as life-long learners, not "finished products," both professionally and spiritually, and are committed to taking all appropriate opportunities to grow and increase in capabilities.
- Keep abreast of best practices and research in education.
- Teach to the adopted and articulated standards of the school.
- Promote a spirit of unity with the entire church/school staff, putting the best construction on the actions of fellow church workers (positive intent), being careful

not to bear false witness (Exodus 20:16), and resolve any disagreements consistent with dispute resolution policies outlined in the employee handbook (Matthew 5 and 18).

- Speak well of the school ministry in the community, always respectful, building up all students, parents, congregational members, and fellow staff members with all their words and actions.

In summary, we expect basic, respectful Christian behavior and relationships from our staff members and volunteers. Therefore, as a condition of employment, the staff and volunteers agree to refrain from negative speech or behavior that would adversely affect staff, student, parental, or congregational relationships and the furtherance of our ministries. Adherence to these basic principles of ethics, behavior, and guidelines by all staff and volunteers is expected and is a necessary condition of employment.

No employee or volunteer may, in a way that may affect the school, promote beliefs contrary to those of the LCMS, nor live personal lives in such a way that otherwise weakens the LCMS Christian atmosphere at the school. These standards of belief are articulated in Scripture and are interpreted by the Statement of Faith of the LCMS, the Lutheran Confessions, and the applicable resolutions of the LCMS in convention, all of which are incorporated into this policy by reference. Failure to adhere to the conduct and behavior expressed here is subject to discipline by the school, up to and including termination of employment or removal from volunteer roles.

As a member of the LCMS, the church takes firm stands on matters of moral conduct. For instance, the LCMS affirms the sanctity of human life, including the life of an unborn child; the importance of a stable family life and fidelity in marriage; God's created order of male and female in biological gender identity as determined at birth; and abstention from illegal drugs. The LCMS opposes a homosexual lifestyle and cohabitation or sexual relations outside the marital relationship. These are only examples of the church's positions on a number of contemporary questions of conduct and morals. An employee/volunteer may not promote beliefs contrary to the church as articulated in the Statement of Faith, Lutheran Confessions, and applicable resolutions of the LCMS in convention.

All employees and volunteers are expected to lead personal lives that do not violate the teachings and beliefs of the LCMS on matters of personal conduct so that all employees may, in their daily lives, give witness to a lifestyle that supports our mission as an LCMS Christian institution. Any employee who fails to comply with LCMS teachings in connection with their employment or conducts their life in a way that is inimical to those teachings may be terminated from employment.

LCMS doctrine and practice are derived from the Christian Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the applicable resolutions of the LCMS in convention. Applicants, employees, or volunteers who are unfamiliar with LCMS beliefs and teachings on any subject should inquire about them from the Pastor.

I understand and hereby agree to follow and adhere to this system of ethics and behavior while serving as an employee or volunteer at _____.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Social Media Policy for Staff and Volunteers of _____ Lutheran Church

"When you talk, do not say harmful things, but say what people need-- words that will help others become stronger. Then what you say will do good to those who listen to you." Ephesians 4:29 (NCV)

_____ Lutheran Church generally views creating or contributing to social media (websites, blogs, message boards, social media, etc.) by staff in a positive light. In fact, these tools can be a blessing for ministry when appropriately used. They can increase communication about life and ministry and build or maintain relational connections. We further recognize the desire by many on staff to be a part of the exchange of ideas and social connection that these resources bring not only for those that are a part of _____ but also with the broader church and community.

As a part of the ministry team at _____, you will be seen as a representative of _____ and its ministry. While you may view your blog or social media page as an extension of your personal life, others may also associate you and the views you express with the ministry of _____. Because of this, we require all staff and volunteers, both paid and non-paid, to follow the social media policies listed below.

In general, social media tools are neutral by nature: they can be used in both a positive and a negative way. However, in keeping with our commitment to children's safety and well-being, along with their rights to confidentiality and privacy, centers should consider policy clarification and implementation in the following three specific areas regarding the use of social media policy.

- 1. The first area addresses the need to protect the children and preserve their privacy. This area involves the potential risk of posting recognizable pictures and names of students online. The Parent Handbook should include a specific policy regarding posting children's pictures that applies to staff and families. This policy includes 'explicit permission' for the use of any child's picture, including those that may be used in promotional materials.*
- 2. The second area addresses social media. Each school must establish a policy for staff regarding 'friending or following' school families who are not related to them. This policy aims to emphasize the "professional nature" of the teacher-child-family relationship. Some schools take advantage of the popularity of social media sites by creating school or classroom pages. This approach can provide easy access for staff and families to share information and to build community. However, there must be clear expectations regarding who can post, what can be shared, and the manner in which controversial issues will be handled if they arise.*
- 3. The final area addresses the use of smartphone cameras. While there is considerable value in having the ability to document children's activities and development using smartphone cameras, there are also considerable risks in having that information on the staff's personal devices.*

One specific area of potential liability is using personal smartphones to take pictures of the children in your center. A suggested policy would include the following parameters:

- Personal smartphones may be used during instructional time to take pictures of the children in your program for the specific purposes of documenting developmental growth to be used in the child's portfolio;

- Personal smartphones may be used during instructional time to share classroom and school activities with parents on a private social media format (private class or school Facebook pages, Instagram, etc.).
- Personal phones may be used to take pictures for the school/center's marketing and advertising purposes. **However, no photo of a child may be published without the express written consent of a custodial parent on file with the school/center.**
- **In all the above cases, photos must be deleted from smartphones once the pictures have been printed or posted for their specific purpose. Children's photos may not remain on any school, volunteer, or staff member's personal smartphone.**

NOTE - The PSD School Ministries and EC Cabinet recommendation is for the center/school to provide tablets, cameras, and other devices for classroom use.

NOTE – An additional related issue is the use of personal cell phones from a Licensing perspective. Licensing has determined that cell phone use by a teacher, for both calls and taking photos, can be considered a 'lack of proper supervision.' The basis for this interpretation is that if the teacher is involved in a call or taking pictures of one or more children, her attention to the group in her care is compromised. Staff and volunteers must ensure that there is additional staffing coverage for all students in their care if they are taking photos, which takes them out of the staffing supervision ratio even momentarily. Therefore, PSD School Ministries and EC Cabinet are recommending the following policy be put into place regarding personal cell phone use.

Students deserve your full attention. Cell phones must not be visible at any time in the presence of students except in responding to a school-related emergency or crisis, when attending a school-related field trip, or when being used to take photos consistent with the provisions above. Cell phone usage for personal use should only occur during designated staff/volunteer breaks, lunches, and prep periods. Personal cell phone usage at these designated times must always be outside of the view of students. Violation of this policy will lead to write-up and or termination.

Additionally, the expectations for staff and volunteers hosting a website or blog are as follows:

- Content or behavior on staff and volunteer blogs, social media, etc., is no different from staff and volunteer expected conduct or behavior in public. Any behavior that is in conflict with the mission, values, or expected employee conduct of the organization is grounds for discipline up to and including termination.
- **Harassment and discrimination by others associated with the school/center extends to the social media space. If you are ever concerned about any interaction you have with others online, especially those connected to _____, let your team leader know immediately.** If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in social media, please speak with your team or ministry leader. If you have concerns about the conduct of other staff or ministry leaders on social media, please talk first with them and then, if necessary, with your team or ministry leader.
- **Include a disclaimer.** Only the school/center and its designated leaders can speak on behalf of the school/center. Blogs, websites, or social media accounts that identify you as being an employee/volunteer of _____ must disclaim that the content on your site does not represent the school/center. Therefore, you should include on your blog, website, or social media site the following disclaimer (or some reasonable version thereof): *The posts and other content on this site are my own personal opinions. They are not approved by _____*

Lutheran Church, nor do they necessarily reflect the values or teachings of _____. (If you have questions or concerns, please talk to your ministry leader.)

- **Maintain confidentiality.** Staff and volunteers of the school/center are expected to maintain the confidentiality of all sensitive information they have access to in the course of their duties, including personal information about employees, students, and families. Staff and volunteers are prohibited from sharing or disclosing sensitive information on their blogs, websites, or social media accounts. Ask permission from others at _____ before including things they have said or the results of meetings, especially those that are meant to be for private or internal use only.
- **Ensure you have express written permission for content.** Similar to the smartphone/photo policy above, pictures of students, activities, etc., should not be posted on anyone's personal blog, website, or social media accounts without express written permission. This includes content that WILL BE public but has not yet been released.
- **When you post your personal opinions or repost the opinions of others, remember that those on church staff are to be "above reproach" (1 Timothy 3:2).** In general, social or political opinions may be shared, but only in a manner that exhibits the utmost respect for all views, including those that are not your own. Language should reflect the fact that you represent _____ and, more importantly, Jesus! (Please see the employee handbook and code of ethics and behavior for more information on conduct outside of work for staff and volunteers that can violate the conduct policies of employment.)
- **Refer press inquiries.** All media inquiries received on an employee or volunteer's blog, website, or social media accounts regarding the center/school should be immediately referred to your Team Leader or the Senior Pastor.

Helpful tips for staff and volunteers:

- **Use good judgment.** Remember that what you write is both permanent and public. You should always assume that what you write will be read by those you serve in ministry, your boss, your family, other church members and leaders, and the attorney of the person who doesn't like you. Always ask yourself if you are comfortable with ANYONE reading what you have written. Be careful that what you write will not hinder the work God has called you to do now and in the future.
- **Never post when you are angry, upset, tired, or compromised in any way.** Think twice before you "hit send," and then think a third time. Remember, it cannot reliably be taken back once it is out there.

Finally, please remember that any action you take, even if that action is during your personal time and in the "virtual world," can be grounds for a temporary or permanent change in your ministry responsibilities at _____ Lutheran Church.

Please also keep in mind that technology changes rapidly and, as a result, these policies will need to be changed occasionally.

We ask staff to use good judgment when using social media, even if specific actions are not covered by these policies and the principles they express.

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____