

Safe Haven For Children

A Resource for Congregations

The social upheavals of our time and the growing gap between the rich and poor have been especially damaging to the lives of children and families. As we prepare for the new millennium, we must assure the youngest and most vulnerable members of our world that they have a future.”

—Bishop H. George Anderson
*Report to the 1997 Churchwide Assembly:
Initiatives to Prepare for a New Century*

Who needs a Safe Haven?

There is a child in your community who needs a Safe Haven:

- The child who walks in the shadow of your church at three o'clock in the afternoon on the way from school to an empty home.
- The toddler whose stomach is growling.
- The child who lives with taunts and threats of racism.
- The child who fears the shouts and hitting that may happen that night.
- The child who worries that there will be violence in his school or neighborhood that day.
- The child who does not know Jesus.

Imagine

Is your congregation a Safe Haven for Children?
Imagine . . .

- a child knowing that he can come into your congregation and find safety.
- a child knowing that adults in your congregation can call her by name.
- your congregation becoming acutely aware of the needs of the children and their families in your community.

- your congregation taking risks and making sacrifices to “assure the youngest and most vulnerable members of our world that they have a future.”
- learning from children.
- the mess and the fun and the laughter and the chaos that being a Safe Haven for Children will bring to the life of your congregation.

What does this mean?

When a congregation chooses to make the commitment to be a Safe Haven for all children and their families and caregivers, what does this mean? What will the children be safe from? What will they be safe for? What will our congregation look like if it is a Safe Haven for Children?

This resource is intended to help your congregation as you explore these questions and make or renew your commitment to be a Safe Haven.

Safe Haven for Children: A Resource for Congregations

*Concept developed by the leadership team for
the Help the Children initiative.*

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Contents

Bible Study and Intergenerational Activity	Page 2
Marks of a Safe Haven	Page 3
Action Steps	Page 4
Litany of Commitment	Page 5
Congregational Resolution	Page 6
Covenant	Page 7
Resources	Page 8

Bible basis: Exodus 1:15-2:10

Read aloud the Bible text, or invite participants to read it independently. Continue the Bible study using these discussion questions:

- Describe the “neighborhood” in the story of Exodus 1:15-2:10. What forces, attitudes, and actions threatened the safety and well-being of the Hebrew children and their families?
 - Who made a commitment to being a Safe Haven for the Hebrew children? What risks did those people face in their commitment? How did God reward those who were committed to the safety of the Hebrew children?
 - Look again at Exodus 2:2. The mother of Moses saw that he was “a fine baby.” What happens to us when we see every baby as “a fine baby”?
- In Exodus 2:10, the Pharaoh’s daughter named the baby “Moses” because she “drew him out of the water.” How are we “drawn out of the water” (saved) in Baptism?
 - What forces, attitudes, and actions threaten the safety and well-being of the children and their families in your community? How might your congregation provide safety for children? What risks and challenges will your congregation face?
 - What will your congregation look like if it is a Safe Haven for all children and their families and caregivers?

INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITY

Build a boat



Bring together children, youth, and adults for a Safe Haven activity event. Three generations together is wonderful; five generations is even better. Invite children and their families from your neighborhood.

Supplies needed

Have a wide variety of art supplies available. Choose from the following list, or decide on your own ideas ahead of time. Possible supplies include: paper for drawing or painting, watercolor or tempera paints, paint brushes, containers of water, crayons, fabric and fabric paints, plasticine clay or other play clay, and craft sticks. Be sure to also provide newspaper to protect floors and tables, and bring enough clean-up supplies.

Process

1. Read aloud a children’s book about Noah’s ark, or invite someone to tell the story. The main points should be that the ark, or big boat, was a safe place for people and animals, and that it was God’s idea.
2. Small groups of three or four people of different generations create a boat together. Make sure that each group includes at least one child. Each group can make a boat using any of the art supplies that

are provided. Encourage everyone to use their imaginations and creativity. Announce how much time the groups have to build their boats. (The recommended time is 30 minutes.)

3. As they build their boats, the group members should talk about these questions: What helps you to feel safe? What should a congregation do when learning about a child in a dangerous situation? Encourage groups to really listen to each person, and to draw out responses from the child or the children. (Have a roving photographer or videographer record the boat-building and the people.)
4. When all groups have finished making their boats, display the boats in one place, perhaps on a table or around the baptismal font. No two boats will look exactly the same. There are many creative ways to build a boat, just as there are many creative ways to create a Safe Haven for Children.

Talk together about the conversation that took place during the boat-building process. Have each group report. Conclude by affirming that Safe Havens are God’s idea.



What does a Safe Haven for Children look like? What does it give to a child? What does it feel like to the congregation? What does it say to the community? In Holy Baptism, we make the commitment to “renounce all the forces of evil . . .” (*LBW*, page 123). What are the “forces of evil” that threaten the safety of children in your setting? How can your congregation boldly state its belief in a God who creates, redeems, and sanctifies?

<p>Children are safe from</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical abuse Sexual abuse Emotional abuse Stifling stereotypes Hunger Homelessness Isolation Rejection 	<p>Marks of a Safe Haven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zero toleration of physical violence Zero toleration of sexual abuse Zero toleration of emotional abuse Zero toleration of racism, sexism, ageism Immediate assistance in times of crisis Understands the causes of poverty Advocates politically on behalf of children Allocates resources to create Safe Havens Links with other Safe Havens in the community 	<p>Children won't need to say</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please don't hit me again! Don't touch me there! Stay away! I'm not stupid! Don't call me dumb! I'm hungry! Where will we sleep tonight? Why can't I come in? Don't leave me—come back!
<p>Children are safe to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grow in faith Love God Love their neighbors Give Feel empathy Serve Discover Create Hope Be aware of their community Be aware of the world 	<p>Marks of a Safe Haven</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcoming every child in God's name Child-friendly worship Strong relationships between generations Commitment to teach and learn from children Time is taken to talk with and listen to children Children challenged to grow in faith and service High standards for quality care and education Joy and fun, rather than boredom Encouragement and enthusiasm Strong connections both locally and globally Seeing life through the eyes of a child 	<p>Children who will say</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God loves me! I love Jesus! I love you! Thanks for teaching me. I'm sorry you feel sad. Let me help you. Why? I've got an idea! I'm going to be a . . . when I grow up! What about my friend from school? It's God's world!

Creating a Safe Haven for Children

Seven action steps

Create an action plan integrating these ideas while moving toward a congregational commitment to becoming a Safe Haven for all children, families, and caregivers.

Step one

Adopt a resolution at your next congregational meeting that your congregation will be a Safe Haven for all children and their families. (See “Congregational Resolution” on page 6 in this resource.)

Step two

Affirm your congregation’s covenant with children during a time of worship. (Integrate “Litany of Commitment” from page 5, and “Covenant” from page 7. Customize them as appropriate for your congregation.)

Step three

Notify your synod office to report that your congregation is committed to being a Safe Haven for Children. The number of Safe Haven congregations will be announced at the 1999 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Step four

Encourage leaders of congregational programs and members in your congregation to explore resources, including those listed on page 8.

Step five

Collaborate with other faith communities and service organizations that are working to help children in your community flourish.

Step six

Work with congregational leadership to develop a year-long learning program in which adults can look at the forces, attitudes, and actions that affect the lives of children and their families in your community. Ask people from your community and your congregation to help with this program. Invite them to participate as speakers at adult learning events. For example:

- A pediatrician could talk about health issues facing children.
- A professional educator could talk about safety issues facing schools.
- A law enforcement officer could talk about safety issues facing your community.
- An advocacy person from your church’s synod could talk about ways to advocate for the well-being of all children.

Step seven

Share your congregation’s story. How has your congregation been changed by being a Safe Haven for Children? How are individual members affected? The ELCA will gather stories and models from congregations to share with the wider church.

Reproduce this litany as a bulletin insert to use in a worship service where you affirm your congregation's covenant to be a Safe Haven.



Litany of commitment

LEADER: In a world torn by the social upheavals of poverty and change, we quickly forget the most vulnerable among us.

PEOPLE: God, help the children.

LEADER: We long for children to be free from fear and free to live in faith.

PEOPLE: God, help us to help the children.

LEADER: May our congregation be a Safe Haven for all children.

PEOPLE: May we know the children in our community by name.

LEADER: Use us to give voice to the children in our community and throughout the world.

PEOPLE: To protect them from the ravages of racism, hunger, violence, and poverty.

LEADER: Lord, deepen our commitment that children are central to the life of this congregation.

PEOPLE: Help us to see life through a child's eyes.

LEADER: We know that being a Safe Haven for Children will bring with it challenges for this congregation, that children bring with them a kind of holy chaos.

PEOPLE: God, teach us to celebrate the noise and activity and fun that children bring.

LEADER: Thank you, God, for giving us children.

PEOPLE: May we be a Safe Haven for them. In your most holy name.

ALL: Amen.

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We will...

The commitment to being a Safe Haven for Children is most effective if it begins as an intentional decision made by your congregation. As you take steps toward creating a Safe Haven in your congregation, you might incorporate some of the following language into a resolution to be voted on at your next congregational meeting. You will want to revise or add language to tailor the statement to your congregation and community.

WHEREAS the social upheavals of our time and the growing gap between rich and poor have been especially damaging to the lives of children and families; and

WHEREAS, as we prepare for the new millennium, we must assure the youngest and most vulnerable members of our world that they have a future; and

WHEREAS we long for children to be free from fear and to live in faith;

BE IT RESOLVED THAT this congregation (*insert name of your congregation*) commits itself to be a Safe Haven for all children and their families and caregivers, by:

I. Building Christ-centered, positive, trusting relationships that nurture the healthy growth of children and strengthen families.

II. Using our resources to provide a sanctuary for children.

III. Creating a Gospel-centered, faith-based teaching and learning environment of hospitality that welcomes all children with their families and caregivers.

IV. Developing programs and places that help children to flourish.

V. Collaborating with other faith communities, agencies, and service organizations that work for the well-being of children in our community.

VI. Working with the government for more public measures that support the well-being of children.

VII. Supporting the efforts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to meet the basic needs of children through Lutheran social ministry organizations, as they provide caring services for children, and through the ELCA World Hunger Program, which carries our concerns for children throughout the world.





Covenant to be a

Safe Haven For Children

We, the members of

_____,
(name of congregation)

living out our faith at

(street address)

(city, state, zip)

in the _____ synod of the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,

affirm our commitment to be a Safe Haven for Children.

Knowing that living into this covenant is a lifelong process of

learning and caring,

and

knowing that we work with others in our immediate community,

the wider church and the world to develop programs and places

where children can flourish,

we ask God to help us.



People

- **Synod advocacy staff:** Contact your synod office for names and phone numbers.
- **Synod social ministry organizations:** Contact your synod office for names and phone numbers.

Organizations

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

8765 W. Higgins Rd.
Chicago, IL 60631
1-800-638-3522
www.elca.org

- Women and Children Living in Poverty (ext. 2863)
- Women and Children in Crisis (ext. 2730)
- Division for Higher Education and Schools (ext. 2845)

Children's Defense Fund

25 E. St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
1-202-628-8787

National Institute on Media and the Family

606 24th Ave. S., Suite 606
Minneapolis, MN 55454
1-888-672-5437

Search Institute

700 S. 3rd St., Suite 210
Minneapolis, MN 55415
1-800-888-7828

Youth and Family Institute of Augsburg College

Campus Box 70
2211 Riverside Ave.
Minneapolis, MN 55454-1351
1-612-330-1624

Print resources

The following resources can be ordered by calling Augsburg Fortress at 1-800-328-4648.

Developed by the Division for Congregational Ministries, ELCA

Rising Above At-Risk: A Handbook for Congregations Who Care about Children. This 64-page manual offers help in identifying and dealing effectively with "at risk" children. Features practical preventative congregational actions. Produced by DESCAR (ISBN: 6-0000-2808-3).

Evangelizing through Children's Ministries. An 8-page guide suggesting several ways to build more effective children's ministries in congregations, including pre-schools, schools, and day camps (ISBN: 6-0000-5882-9).

A Guide for Developing Family Ministries in Your Congregation. An 8-page, practical guide for leaders who want to understand and shape a more effective way to reach and involve various kinds of families (ISBN: 6-0000-5883-7).

Take It to Heart: Nurturing Children, Youth, and Families in Faith Community. This resource is a planning tool for congregations that uses an asset-approach as a base for assessing, envisioning, and engaging effective ministry with children, youth, and families. Available through Augsburg Fortress beginning in December 1998.

Augsburg Fortress resources

The Home Altar. This quarterly devotional resource is designed for families to use with their elementary school-age children. Each issue includes Bible readings, activities, prayers, and more. One "Search asset" is highlighted each week. To order, call the Augsburg Fortress subscription order center at 1-800-426-0115, ext. 639.

Raising Nonviolent Children in a Violent World. Dr. Michael Obsatz, family counselor and leader of workshops on raising nonviolent children, identifies 20 skills that parents and children can learn together for self-protection and to relate to others in loving ways (ISBN: 0-8066-3700-5).

Nurturing Faith through the Stages of Life. This reproducible resource shows how people of all ages learn and names implications for congregations nurturing, learning, and growing in Christian faith (ISBN: 0-8066-3717-X).

Fraternal organizations

Contact your congregation's church office for the names and phone numbers of your representatives.

- **Aid Association for Lutherans:** Provides programs and resources to support your work with children and their families and caregivers. Contact your local AAL agent or district representative.
- **Lutheran Brotherhood:** Has programs and resources to support your work with children and their families and care givers. Contact your congregation's Lutheran Brotherhood communicator, or your local Lutheran Brotherhood representative.