



st. john's lutheran church of sweet air

Building Safety Plan

Approved by Council January 17, 2026

OVERVIEW

Mission Statement:

St John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (SJELC) is a body of believers redeemed by Christ who:

- Welcome All
- Tell The Story
- Grow As Disciples

Purpose:

This Building Safety and Emergency Response Plan was developed to help ensure that SJELC is a place where all people are welcomed and feel safe, loved, and valued. The Plan seeks to:

- Protect people gathered at St. John's Church.
- Provide guidance to volunteers and church staff in responding to an emergency situation.
- Increase awareness regarding safety and security among the St John's community.

Awareness:

Threats are situational, no single set of responses fit all threat situations; however, making sure that we are trained and aware of options for responses and can react decisively will save valuable time in an emergency.

Time is important not only in a leader's decision making but in getting others to safety. Studies show that many people in an emergency tend to deny the possible danger presented or are curious and therefore are slow to react. Under the idea of better safe than sorry, in an emergency situation leaders should take all reasonable steps to get all to respond to direction immediately.

SUMMARY FOR USHERS/ STAFF FOR WORSHIP or EVENTS

Safety stations:	Ushers sit in the back pew marked “usher” during worship Media volunteers are sitting at the raised media desks. A greeter is at the welcome desk on Sundays from 9-11:30am
Worship doors:	For Worship, the only doors unlocked for the building are the main glass doors and the sanctuary doors by the wooden ramp.
Evacuation Policy	There are 3 ways to trigger an evacuation: 1. When the fire alarm goes off, everyone must exit the building safely. 2. Manually PULL a Fire Alarm for any emergency for the sake of evacuation due to danger to building or people: fire, gas, active shooter, etc. 3. A leader may announce “<u>evacuate</u>” or “<u>Evacuation Drill</u>” The emergency policy is in this order: walk/run/hide/fight. In an emergency (Fire, smoke, violence) ushers should head to different exits and help people evacuate and head to the BALLFIELD. (For Worship Center remember the side door is recommended). The safe meet-up zone (especially for parents) is the BALLFIELD where children will be led as well.
Seek Shelter Policy	Leaders announcements triggers getting people to seek shelter (inside) Emergency notification on cell phones (weather or danger in community) Announcing “Seek Shelter”
Call 911	“Assistance is needed at St. John’s Lutheran Church 3911 Sweet Air Road Phoenix MD 21131 If an emergency, please don’t hesitate to call 911. Identifying building: chapel, worship center, parsonage etc... NOTE: There’s a landline in the elevator. NOTE: Our parsonage house address is 3909 Sweet Air Road
Evacuation assignments to be posted in bulletin in case of an emergency evacuate to backyard ballfield:	to make sure building “building all clear” (text PL the “all clear” (443.257.1890) Worship Center/ Lobby/restrooms: Ushers Worship Center: Pastor Lisa / Media Mike Bitner back up Fellowship Hall: Pastor Jeremy / back up Media Jay Cuccia Children’s Wing: Megan McBee (backup Brian Hehn) Offices and Music Rooms: Rev. Randy Terry and Brian Horshaw
Alarm Panel management:	Pastor Lisa Arrington, Rev. Randy Terry, Adam Drescher II, Laurie Krieger

Why might an usher or leader signal “Code Red” card from bulletin table or media desk?

Hold up the “Code Red” sign to signal to the pastors there is someone in distress or “a situation” that needs attention but does not require building evacuation.

EX: If an agent or officer comes to the church, how do we respond? If an agent or officer comes to the church campus, an usher or leader should get the pastor or a staff person to come and meet the officer to see about the inquiry. A staff person will request officer to show a badge, identification and signed warrant or documentation. We will work with first responders for the safety of the community.

ADDITIONAL SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES FOR USHERS AND LEADERS

The office will oversee the maintenance and upkeep of all emergency and safety equipment.

- Know where **the fire extinguishers** are located. (Inside the Worship Center and by the Fellowship Hall). Fire extinguishers are an option, but the most vitally important goal is to evacuate people from the building.
- Know the location of the **AED (Automatic External Defibrillator)** by lobby coat closet. We will compile a list of folks who have AED training inside the AED box.
 - Medical people: *Linda Walsh, Doug Koerber, Andy Essel, Jason Day, Sue Currence, Brad Houck, Malik and Josline Kelley, John Kuchar, Cindy Hilbert Rayme, and Jane Hogan to name a few.*
- St John’s staff will be certified in CPR and AED training and crowd management with Baltimore County.
- Know the location of the **orange portable chair** stored under lower-level stairs for an accessibility tool on steps in case of fire.
- Evacuation maps posted on the wall with fire extinguishers and first aid kits marked clearly.
- Know the location of the **bullhorn** located right inside sacristy door on handbell cabinet with deacon robes.
- Know the location of a **green first aid kit**
 - Located in lobby near the water coolers by the women’s restroom, to be utilized during an Evacuation/Relocation
 - This **Green Kit First Aid Kit** includes:
 - Copy of this Building Safety Plan
 - The most current Membership Directory dated.
 - Current staff and church council list with contact information
 - Two (2) Flashlights with spare batteries
 - Notepad and pencils
 - Battery operated radio

GENERAL BUILDING SECURITY PROCEDURES

SJELC shall have the following items and procedures in place:

- Limited access to entryways; exterior doors secured during appropriately assigned times.
- Student checkout and release procedures during official young discipleship events.
- Procedures for reporting “threatening” or “at-risk” member, visitor, or staff behaviors.
- Plans to practice all emergency drills.
- Young Discipleship leaders have phone app Planning Center for check in (children’s ministry and Splash)

FREQUENCY OF DRILLS – ANNUAL MINIMUMS

For pastors, staff, ushers, and volunteer leaders

Fire Drills – Evacuation

Take Shelter/Severe Weather

Internal Run and or Lockdown/Duck and Cover

- **One (1) per year last Sunday in August**

SJELC will work together to:

- Annually review the Emergency Response Plan every August

EMERGENCY PLAN

MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Life-threatening injury or illness, or death:

- Immediately, call **911**
- Our address is **3911 Sweet Air Road Phoenix MD 21131**. Name the room you are in.
- Ask for assistance to do the following:
 - Send someone to retrieve the AED from the Lobby.
 - Seek out any medical personnel in the building.
 - Have someone seek out the Pastor, Usher, or lead volunteer.
- Follow direction from **911**
- Designate someone outside ready to welcome or wave in the first responders.
- If possible, isolate the affected individual. Disperse onlookers and keep others from congregating in the area. We need to clear this area/space for the arrival of the paramedics. It would be helpful to create a calm space for the person in medical need. The room leader might say: “Please wait outside the situation room and we will keep you informed of what is happening or if we need you to assist us in any way.”

- Comfort the victim(s) and offer reassurance that medical attention is on the way.
- If the person is a minor, another leader should contact the parent or guardian as quickly as possible.
- After immediate medical needs have been cared for, remain to assist emergency medical services personnel with pertinent information about the incident.
- Staff/Leader for event should create an official incident report and keep on file with the office.
- For all incidents, contact Pastor, Usher or a lead volunteer.

BOMB THREAT

Procedures upon receiving a bomb threat:

- All bomb threats must be taken seriously. It is the responsibility of local authorities to assess bomb threats to determine credibility.
- Notify Pastors, office administrator, staff members.
- Call **911**, follow law enforcement's direction as to evacuation or other next steps
- Any suspicious devices, packages, etc., should be pointed out to emergency responders. **Do not touch.**
- Once a device is located, emergency responders take responsibility for it.
- Pastor, staff member, a lead volunteer, or an emergency official initiates evacuation procedures.
- Evacuation routes may be specified according to the type of emergency and may need to be changed for safety reasons.
 - Do NOT lock doors when leaving.
 - Staff, volunteer leaders, and teachers take attendance after evacuation. If no attendance sheet or roster is available, use the notepads and pencils in the **Green Kit First Aid Kit** to list all members, visitors, and staff who are present.
- Staff, volunteer leaders, and teachers remain with children until they are safely returned to the church or are released to their parent(s) or another authorized adult.
- **Do not** reenter the church until fire or law enforcement personnel declare the building safe.
- Pastor notifies staff, students and or congregation that the emergency has been terminated and it is safe to reenter the building.

FIRE PROCEDURES

In the event of a fire, smoke from a fire, or detection of a gas odor:

- Notify **911**, the Pastors, office administrator, a staff member, or a lead volunteer, who will

notify building occupants the building is to be evacuated.

- Evacuate members, visitors, and staff to the designated areas.
 - These areas should be a minimum of 100 feet away from the building.
 - Be aware of the arrival of emergency responders. Keep members, visitors, and staff a safe distance from emergency responders and equipment.
- If during worship, emphasis exits in the **front** of the Worship Center to prevent congestion and saving main ramp for those who need full accessibility.
- Follow primary building evacuation routes whenever possible. Follow an alternate route if the primary route is blocked or dangerous.
 - Staff and volunteer leaders take attendance after evacuation. If no attendance sheet or roster is available, use the notepads and pencils in the **Green First Aid Kit** to list all members, visitors, and staff who are present.
 - Report missing members, visitors, or staff to a Pastor or emergency responder immediately.
- **Do not** reenter the church until fire or law enforcement personnel declare the building safe.
- Pastor notifies staff, students and or congregation that the emergency has been terminated and it is safe to reenter the building.

SEVERE WEATHER: **TORNADO/SEVERE THUNDERSTORM**

Tornado/severe thunderstorm WARNING has been issued in an area near the building:

- Monitor emergency alert radio stations and other reporting systems.
- Bring all people inside the building.
- Close windows and doors.
- **Note: for Tornado or inclement weather, we will direct everyone to the lower level hallways and children's theater away from exterior walls and windows.**
 - Staff, volunteer leaders, and teachers take attendance. If no attendance sheet or roster is available, use the notepads and pencils in the **Green Kit First Aid Kit** to list all members, visitors, and staff who are present.
 - Remain in Shelter Area, including after normal dismissal time for any activity, until weather warning expires or emergency personnel have issued an all-clear signal.

SUSPICIOUS PERSON

If Pastor, usher, staff, a volunteer, or a member observe a suspicious person entering or within the building:

- Politely greet the person and identify yourself.

- Consider asking a staff person or another adult to accompany you before approaching the person.
- Ask the person the purpose of his/her visit. If possible, attempt to identify the individual and/or vehicle.
- If the person's purpose is in question, they appear intoxicated, or are acting suspiciously; notify Pastor, a lead staff member, or a lead volunteer. This leader should evacuate the room that the suspicious person is in.
- If the suspicious person does not leave the designated children's area as requested, calling **911** and evacuate the children to the ballfield.

If person refuses to leave:

- Contact law enforcement **911** and give them a full description of the person.
- Back away from intruder if he/she indicates a potential for violence. Allow an avenue of escape. To the extent possible, maintain visual contact.
 - Be aware of intruder's actions at this time (where he/she is located in the building, whether he/she is carrying a weapon or package, etc.).
 - Maintaining visual contact and knowing the location of the intruder is less disruptive than doing a building-wide search later.

WEAPONS

If Pastor, usher, members, visitors, or staff are aware of a weapon brought to the building:

- Immediately notify a Pastor, lead staff member, or a lead volunteer.
- STAY CALM.
- Do not call public attention to a hidden weapon unless it looks like someone is about to use it.
- Our current weapon policy is based on the Department of Human Resources.

Sticker will be placed at main entrances that announces: "no weapons".

The Department of Human Resources does not permit weapons in any of its Maryland government buildings. (COMAR04.05.01.03 B)

Except for official purposes and by authorized personnel, an individual on the property may not carry open or concealed firearms, explosives, incendiary devices, or dangerous or deadly weapons. Exceptions to this policy will be for the following circumstances:

- This weapon policy does not apply to the parsonage property and the lease should be the guiding reference.
- For example: a scout demonstration on firearm safety needs written pre-authorization for approval by the pastor or congregational president.
- A police officer in uniform, acting in their official capacity, and/or who is on official duty and representing their agency. Firearms may be carried as directed by the agency policy of the police officer for wearing and carrying firearms while in uniform.

- A police officer not in uniform, who is acting in their official capacity as a representative of their agency, will display their badge of authority and conform to their agency's policy on wearing and carrying firearms.

1. DEFINITIONS

a. **Weapon:** For the purpose of this policy a “weapon” is defined as any firearm, knife, explosive, or other object (sharp objects, sporting goods, tools, martial arts, and self-defense items) even if manufactured for a nonviolent purpose, that has a potentially violent use, or any “look-a-like” object that resembles an object that has a potentially violent use.

b. **Deadly Weapon:** For the purpose of this policy, a “deadly weapon” is defined as any firearm, loaded or unloaded, or any weapon capable of causing death or great bodily harm. This includes, but is not restricted to: knives, [to include ANY lock blade knife or ANY knife with a total length of over three inches including handle length], daggers, brass knuckles, switchblade knives, butterfly knives, bowie knives, stilettos, butcher knives, pocket knives, or any weapon with which a dangerous cut can be given or dangerous thrusts can be inflicted. Examples include sword canes and any kind of sharp pointed canes, slingshots, bludgeons, or any other weapon which dangerous wounds can be inflicted (nunchucks, pellet guns, BB guns, paintball guns, soft pellet guns, live ammunition or ordnance, or chemicals that when mixed together become explosive.

Pastor, usher, lead staff or lead volunteer:

- Call **911** to report that a weapon is suspected in the building.
- If the suspect is a minor notify the parent(s)/guardian(s) if authorized by law enforcement.

LOCKDOWN PROCEDURES

Lockdown procedures will be used in situations that may result in harm to persons inside the building, such as a shooting, hostage incident, intruder, trespassing, disturbance, or at the discretion of the Pastor, a staff member, or a lead volunteer.

- 2) Notify **911**, and the Pastors,
- 3) Stay Put Lockdown – **if the threat is outside of the building.**
The church may have been notified of a potential threat outside of the building.
- 4) **Hide, Run, Fight Lockdown – The threat/intruder is inside the building.**

Stay Put Lockdown:

- Pastor, Usher or a staff member will order and announce **“This is a Stay Put Lockdown.”**
 - Bring people inside.
 - Lock exterior doors.
 - Staff and volunteer leaders move all members, visitors, and staff into interior rooms (i.e., rooms without windows) within the church building. Clear hallways, restrooms, and other rooms that cannot be secured.
 - Keep students away from windows.

- Report any missing persons to the Pastors, lead staff member, or a lead volunteer.
- Do not allow persons out of the rooms/spaces until the Pastor, lead staff member, or a lead volunteer announces “**All clear.**”
- Run, Hide, Fight situation: staff member, or a lead volunteer will order and announce “**run/hide/flight.**”
- Immediately direct all members, visitors, and staff if possible, safely to run out and away from the building, if not, to move into the nearest classroom or secured space. People that are outside of the building SHOULD NOT enter the building.
- Lock or block classroom doors with tables and other furniture to prevent entry from the outside.
- Lead person in lockdown should call **911**. DO NOT HANG UP. If you can’t talk lay the receiver down to allow law enforcement to hear what is going on.
- DO NOT lock exterior doors.
- Move people away from windows and doors. Turn off lights.
- Instruct people to remain silent.
- Instruct people to silence cell phones.
- Keep out of sight.
- DO NOT discontinue the Lockdown until a first responder, Pastor, Usher, lead staff member, or a lead volunteer announces “**All Clear**” and provides direction on how to proceed next.
 - IGNORE all fire alarms, sprinkler system activation, or other such alerts.
 - DO NOT respond to anyone at the door until “**All Clear**” is announced.

MEDIA PROCEDURE

The Lead Pastor, Church Council President, or their designee, in coordination with assisting agencies, assumes responsibility for issuing public statements during an emergency. All media contacts are to be referred to the Lead Pastor, Church Council President, or their designee.

Media checklist:

- Staff and volunteers relay all factual information to the Lead Pastor, Church Council President, or their designee.
- Establish a media information center away from the affected area. Consider:
 - Media need timely and accurate information. However, protect the privacy of members, visitors, and staff when necessary and justified.
 - Media will want to be close enough to shoot video footage and photographs, but they should not be allowed to hinder responders.
- Before holding a news conference, brief the participants and coordinate

information.

- Determine the message you want to convey. Create key messages in print (such as a press release or documenting for internal communications) for target audiences: members, visitors, and the community.
 - Emphasize the safety of members, visitors, and staff.
 - Engage media to help distribute important public information. Explain how the emergency is being handled.
 - Respect privacy of victims and families of victims. Do not release names to media.
- Update media regularly. DO NOT say “No comment.” Ask other agencies to assist with media.
 - Maintain log of all telephone inquiries for future reference.
 - Remember that nothing is “off the record.”

POST-CRISIS INTERVENTION

- Assess the situation to determine the need for post-crisis interventions for staff, members, children, and all others who may be impacted by the traumatic event. If required, provide professional post-crisis briefings and interventions for staff, students, and families as appropriate.
- Re-establish normal routine as quickly as possible.
- Provide ongoing support as necessary for staff and members and their families.
 - Monitor and support staff.
 - Identify and monitor anyone who is at-risk.
 - Provide resources for individual crisis or grief counseling, if necessary.
 - Conduct outreach to families.
 - Provide follow-up referral for assessment and treatment if necessary.