

**CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER
CHESTNUT HILL, MASSACHUSETTS**

SAFE CHURCH POLICY

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This policy was adopted by the vestry on June 11, 2002.

Copies will be given to: Adults who work with children and youth, parents who register their children for church school, Youth Group parents, vestry members, and all church employees.

Additional copies will be available in the church office and narthex.

We hope that all adults in the parish will take an active role in implementing this policy.

SECTION 1.

Introduction

Setting the Theological Context

The goals of this policy are very much rooted in the concept of covenant that is central to our faith. As Christians, we have, through our Baptismal Covenant, entered into a relationship of mutual respect, trust, and commitment with God and each other. As part of this covenant we agree, with God's help, to seek and serve Christ in all persons, strive for justice and peace, and respect the dignity of every human being.

By making our churches safe for all who enter them and by working to establish and maintain integrity in relationships, we honor our covenant relationships with God and each other. We affirm the positive role of human sexuality in people's lives but we are called to prevent child abuse and sexual misconduct in the church, intervene when cases arise, actively seek justice for all involved, and promote healing from any harm that has been done.

SECTION 2. Child Abuse Reporting Protocol

The Church of the Redeemer is committed to providing a Christ-centered community to ensure a safe environment for children and teens. Safe surroundings make the occurrence of abuse less likely, enable a more nurturing place, and offer a greater possibility for effective teaching.

However, those who work with minors need to acknowledge the occurrence and damaging consequences of child abuse. Child abuse is a criminal offense in Massachusetts and must be reported to the appropriate authorities. Massachusetts law does require that clergy report abuse. The Diocese also mandates that clergy report. It is never a private matter to be handled by families or in parishes. The Rector has the ultimate responsibility for reporting suspected cases of child abuse to the appropriate authorities and for managing the pastoral issues arising around each case.

At the Church of the Redeemer, a response team will be established to handle reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. The team will consist of the Rector, the Assistant Rector, the wardens and a professional consultant experienced with issues of abuse and neglect. The vestry shall approve the appointment of two professional consultants so that one will be available at all times. Upon receiving a report, the Rector will seek counsel with team members concerning the appropriate reporting and action for the welfare of the child or teen. The Rector and advisors will decide the nature of the follow up with the minor and/or the accused.

Should a person serving in a church-related capacity be informed of or have reasonable suspicion of the abuse or neglect of a child or teen, the following protocol will be followed:

1. The information should be communicated immediately (that day) to the Rector or Assistant Rector. In the absence of the clergy, the report should be made to a warden.
2. Within 24 hours, the response team will meet with the person who reported the possibility of abuse or neglect. The team and the reporter will review the information. If there is reasonable cause to believe a child or teen has been abused or neglected, a member of the team will notify the appropriate authorities that same day by telephone, and in writing within 48 hours. This same member or another member will inform the parents of the minor that there are concerns for the child's well-being and that the appropriate authorities have been notified, unless the team decides that notifying the parents might further endanger the child or teen. The nature of follow-up with the child by the church will be decided at the meeting.
3. If the team and the reporter decide there is not reasonable cause to notify the appropriate authorities, other recommendations will be formulated and implemented. If any person present at such a meeting continues to believe there is reasonable cause to notify the authorities, he or she should do so, in spite of the group recommendation.

4. All information discussed is to be held confidential by the team and the reporter. In each case, documentation that this process has been followed will be made by the Rector and kept in a locked file.

5. The Rector should inform the vestry immediately that a report has been made to the appropriate authorities or that it was decided not to report. Names and details will be withheld until further investigation makes it necessary to divulge this information.

6. In the event that the alleged perpetrator is the Rector or Assistant Rector, the report should be made to a warden. The warden should immediately contact the Diocesan Office of the Archdeacon (617) 482-5800, extension 495, and the response team.

SECTION 3. Sexual Harassment Reporting Protocol

The Church of the Redeemer is committed to providing a Christ-centered community where parishioners can worship and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, or any conduct of a sexual nature (verbal or physical) that has the effect of creating an intimidating, offensive environment for one or more people.

Any person who feels intimidated or victimized by sexual harassment by a member of the church community including employees, should immediately report his/her complaint to a representative of the church leadership in the following manner:

- 1) If possible, report harassment to the Rector.
- 2) If the parishioner prefers, the complaint can be initially reported to the
 - Assistant Rector
 - Senior warden or
 - Junior warden,

who will assist in reporting the complaint to the Rector.

If the complaint involves the Rector's conduct, the complaint will be addressed by the Diocesan Office of the Archdeacon (617) 422-5800, ext. 495. The victimized person can report directly, or, ask for assistance from the wardens.

All complaints will be fully investigated and the appropriate steps to end harassment will be taken.

All information will be kept confidential. Please note that confidentiality cannot be confused with secret. *Confidential* protects the vulnerable. *Secret* maintains status quo and may allow a destructive behavior to continue.

SECTION 4. Safety and Prevention of Child Abuse

In an effort to create the safest possible environment within our church, several safety and abuse prevention measures will be implemented. These measures include screening of staff, professional and volunteer, who have oversight responsibilities for children and youth, training of staff on child abuse issues, use of team teaching and chaperoning, and open classrooms.

Most churches are all too willing-without any screening process whatsoever-to welcome anyone expressing an interest in working in a volunteer capacity with minors. Churches are by nature trusting and unsuspecting institutions, and it is these very qualities that have made them targets of child molesters. Remember, child abusers more often are people who are known and trusted by the community, not strangers. Any person who seems overly attracted to children or youth and spends more time with them than with their own peers should be carefully screened.

A single incident of abuse or molestation can devastate a church. Parents often become enraged, the viability of the church's youth and children's programs is jeopardized, and church leaders are considered responsible for allowing the incident to happen. There is also the enormous potential for legal liability for the church, its officers, directors, and institutions. More tragic is the emotional trauma to the victim and the victim's family. (Of course, false accusations of abuse can be devastating as well. A well-implemented abuse prevention policy can deter such false accusations.)

In light of the frequent occurrence of child abuse and neglect, it is imperative that churches and institutions openly recognize and discuss the importance of protecting children and young people from such abuse. Being educated on these issues, being familiar with diocesan guidelines and adapting them to our particular situation constitute the best defense.

Staff Screening

The Church of the Redeemer requires that all professional staff who have oversight of youth and children's ministries, prior to beginning service, sign a statement indicating that he/she has never been convicted of child abuse and has not had such a conviction expunged. Anyone who has had a child abuse conviction or expungement, as well as anyone refusing to sign the statement, will not be permitted to work with children.

Staff Training

All volunteer child care workers and youth workers, as well as all church employees will be required to attend a training session related to the church's policies about sexual misconduct within six months of their employment or service and will be required to read the diocesan Sexual Misconduct Awareness Training Materials, the Church of the Redeemer's Safe Church Policy and sign a statement that they understand and will abide by its provisions.

First year teachers or workers will also be encouraged to attend one training session related to the church's policies during the course of their first year of teaching. These sessions will be offered by the parish and will be conducted by professionals from the community, the clergy or designated parish trainers.

Leaders of community groups of children or youth who use the church facilities will be required to read the Church of the Redeemer's Safe Church Policy and sign an acknowledgment form. Church facilities will not be available to groups whose leaders refuse to read and sign the form.

Volunteers with irregular or very limited teaching or care responsibilities, will be notified of the existence of the child abuse prevention policy, given a copy of it, and encouraged to read it. However, because many of these volunteers work briefly during a year, they will not be required to sign the acknowledgment form.

Team Teaching and Chaperoning

Whenever possible, a teacher and a trained youth assistant should teach in teams. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers to permit such team teaching. Other church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth who meet at the church, or who leave the premises in a church-sponsored group, should have two or more unrelated leaders present whenever possible. When the group includes both boys and girls, both male and female leaders should be present.

If church-sponsored or community groups of children or youth stay overnight at the church, or if a church-sponsored group leaves the premises for an overnight activity, two or more leaders must be present. If this group is a mixed gender group, chaperones must include at least one male and one female.

Open Classrooms

Classrooms or childcare rooms may be visited without prior notice by church staff, parents or other volunteer church workers. Brief observations of child care rooms and classrooms of children or youth will be conducted by the Church School director during Church School hours.

Nursery

The Nursery should be staffed by more than one caregiver at any time. This not only assures the well-being of the children, but also provides coverage for any emergency.

Driving Policies

Persons designated to provide automobile or van transportation to or from church events must be known to the designated leader of the event. The driver must:

- Be at least 21 years old;
- Have a valid state driver's license, qualified for the vehicle being operated,
- Have no record of convictions for drunken driving, driving under the influence, driving with a suspended or revoked license, repeated speeding or reckless endangerment within the last five years;
- Have proof of insurance.

Gifts

All staff, either paid or volunteer, are not to give gifts to individual children or young people they are working with in the church. Because gift giving can be a form of buying loyalty or silence, gift giving should be done on a group basis or for special occasions only. Gifts should not be elaborate but should be modest and appropriate to the occasion.

Individual Counseling

One-on-one interactions are sometimes necessary and appropriate, but care should be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults. Counseling should take place in a space for that purpose and never "after hours." Another adult should be in the vicinity and know who the staff member is meeting with and where.

Overnight Trips

Events requiring staff members to escort children or youth out of the area overnight or for longer periods of time must be carefully planned. Details must be communicated fully to parents or other caretakers of the children or youth. Chaperones must be experienced staff and volunteers known to the Rector or Church School Director. Volunteers new to the parish may also accompany the experienced chaperones but should not be left alone with children or young people. One adult should never be allowed to escort children or youth on an overnight outing alone. When groups of children or young people sleep in one common room, two adults should sleep in the same room.

Reporting

Adults working with youth or children are required to notify the responsible clergy or supervisor in the case of inappropriate sexual behavior or advances by a child or adult toward another child, youth or adult.

Communications/Supervision

All staff, both paid and volunteer, should be involved in regular, scheduled staff meetings to discuss problems, policies and potential problems. Clarification of staff action and plans of action should be open for discussion at each meeting.

Remember

None of the above policies or procedures can guarantee that persons hired will not abuse children. Nor do they guarantee that staff or volunteers will never act inappropriately. However, our best insurance against child abuse is to establish policies and procedures; to keep an open mind to the possibilities; to follow up complaints or incidents, to follow intuition; and when confronted with the facts, to act decisively upon them.

I hereby acknowledge that I have read the Church of the Redeemer's Safe Church Policy, understand it, and agree to abide by its provisions.

Signature

Print Name

Date