

# **Christ Episcopal Church Safe Church Policy Adopted by Vestry, March 19, 2019**

## **Introduction**

Christ Church is committed to being a welcoming, inclusive parish where every person in our parish is safe, and in which we can build trusting and loving relationships. As part of our baptismal promises that we will “seek and serve Christ in all persons...and respect the dignity of every human being,” our vestry has approved this written policy to help ensure that every person at Christ Church is safe, and that provides guidance and guidelines for reporting breaches of trust or instances of abuse.

Our Diocese urges all parishes to write and adopt a “Safe Church Policy.” Our Episcopal Church Canons (the church rules that govern our clergy and parishes) provide for disciplinary procedures that guide us in cases in which abuse allegations occur. Though these Canons in many instances apply solely to clergy, they provide guidance for situations involving lay people. In addition, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts deems all clergy and paid staff at churches to be “mandated reporters,” requiring church staff to report to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) any instance where “there is reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of eighteen years is suffering physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse.” (MGL Ch. 119: sec. 51A.) As a faith community, our goal is to provide clear guidelines on ensuring a safe space, and if concerns about possible abuse ever arise, to provide guidelines on reporting and investigating these concerns. The primary goal is to make sure our church is safe, but also to ensure that should there ever be an instance of abuse, that there is the opportunity for both justice and reconciliation.

We are committed to protecting and supporting vulnerable people of all ages, and it is our policy to make a report to the Executive Office of Elder Affairs any instance in which there is reasonable cause to believe abuse or neglect of an elder has occurred. Massachusetts law defines an “elder” as any person over 60, and the term “abuse” includes not just physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, but also caretaker neglect, financial exploitation, or self-neglect. (MGL Ch. 19A: sec. 14 et seq.) Unlike the statutes governing child abuse or neglect, the law does not explicitly list church staff or clergy as “mandated reporters.” The law does mandate reporting by social workers, psychologists, case workers, home health aides, and family counselors. We believe

that the work of clergy, staff, and lay visitors is sufficiently close to these roles that we are morally, if not legally, mandated to report elder abuse or neglect.

**Recognizing and Reporting Misconduct, Abuse, Discrimination, or Harassment** Christ Church is a sacred place, and a sanctuary where we nurture community and live in relationship with one another. As such, we provide an environment where all people are honored and respected, and where harassment, discrimination, and abuse are not tolerated, are reported, and are addressed with integrity and dispatch.

**Defining Discrimination or Harassment** Discrimination or harassment means treating someone differently because of personal characteristics such as race or ethnicity, gender or sexuality, age, citizenship status, disability, age, marital status, or political association. Harassment is behavior that interferes with any individual's quality of life by creating an intimidating, hostile, humiliating, or offensive environment. Sexual harassment or misconduct of a sexual nature includes sexual behavior or advances, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

**Recognizing Harassment, Discrimination, Abuse, or Misconduct** Our Diocese offers a Safe Church Training program. All clergy, staff, parish leadership, and volunteers who work with children or who do visits (for example, taking communion to homes or hospitals) are required to complete this training either at an in-person class, or on line. Clergy are required to complete a day-long, in person training session every three years. Staff and volunteers at Christ Church are required to complete a refresher course every three years even if they have already been trained. This training course helps us here at Christ Church to recognize abuse, misconduct, or harassment, and provides guidance for preventing abuse, as well as creating an environment in which staff and volunteers are protected from any false allegations.

In addition to Safe Church Training, staff members and volunteers who work directly with children or youth must allow Christ Church to perform a

CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) check as administered by the Commonwealth. CORI reports are kept strictly confidential and are only reviewed by either the Rector or Associate Rector.

**Reporting** Any suspected instance of harassment, discrimination, or abuse must be reported to the clergy, either the Rector, the Associate Rector, or preferably both. The report must be made immediately and should be made in person. If misconduct by a member of our clergy is disclosed or suspected, that must be made known immediately to a Christ Church Warden. The Warden is then required to inform the Bishop directly or to report the allegation to either the Canon to the Ordinary or to the Chairperson of the Diocesan Disciplinary Board. Although our policy is to report allegations of clergy misconduct first to one of our Wardens, parishioners are allowed to contact the Diocesan officers listed above directly. (Contact information is available in the diocesan directory and on the diocesan website.) Allegations of child abuse or neglect will be reported to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families. Allegations of elder abuse will be reported to the Executive Office of Elder Affairs.

**Rules for Adults Who Work with Children or Young People Approved by Vestry, March 2019** All adults who work with children or youth at Christ Church are expected to abide by guidelines that help us to ensure a safe environment for everyone. Copies of these guidelines were approved by our vestry and are available in the parish office.

1. At least two adults will be assigned to all groups involving minors (defined as a person age eighteen or under). For any events or activities involving an overnight stay (e.g., a retreat or service trip), at least two non-related adults will be in attendance at the event or activity. Any off premises event or activity must be approved by a member of the clergy and requires a permission slip.
2. We understand that one-on-one

interactions may need to take place (for example, a young person asks to speak with a clergy member or teacher in private, or an adult needs to speak with a young person about a matter that would be embarrassing to the young person if brought up in a group setting). One-on-one interactions should be conducted in an environment that is visible to others (in a classroom or office with an open or glass door, for instance, or in sight but out of earshot). Another adult should know the whereabouts of and participants in such a meeting. 3. Pastoral counseling sessions may be occasions in which an adult and minor are alone. Another adult should know when and where such a meeting is taking place. 4. Field trips, confirmation outings, mentoring in the context of confirmation preparation, retreats or other trips are all situations in which on occasion, adults and minors are alone. We help ensure safety in these situations for all involved by requiring permission slips for all meetings or events off site at Christ Church, and these permission slips will note that one-on-one meetings are allowed. (See #10.) Whenever possible, mentors, confirmation sponsors, and clergy will inform parents or guardians in advance of any one-on-one meeting. 5. Adults who work with minors are not to give gifts to individual minors without prior knowledge of a parent, guardian, or clergy. Gifts to a group (for example, prayer books or a cross to confirmands or a church school class) are allowed. If an adult who works with young people is in doubt about a potential gift, it is best to consult the Rector or Associate Rector. 6. No minor should ever be left alone while waiting for a ride. Two adults should stay with a minor at the conclusion of an activity until the minor is picked up. 7. No alcohol will be brought to or consumed during any event at Christ Church that includes minors.

8. Minors are not to be released to any adult who is not a parent or

guardian

unless a parent or guardian has expressly given permission to the event leader in advance. 9. Any separate accommodation for a minor's needs, such as administering

medication, must be approved in advance by a parent or guardian.

10. All off-site activities require written permission slips, signed by a parent or

guardian. Means of transportation will be included in the permission slip.