

## **SAINT FRANCIS EPISCOPAL CHURCH, HOLDEN, MASSACHUSETTS**

### **SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

The aim of this policy is to make our Church a safe place, safe for those who worship, safe for those who minister, safe for those who come in need, safe for children and safe for all who seek or serve Christ. We believe that this policy helps us live out our Baptismal covenant to respect the dignity of every human being.

#### **SCREENING AND SELECTION FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

The Diocese will do background checks on all clergy who are deployed or licensed to officiate within the Diocese. The Diocese will also do background checks on any diocesan employees or volunteers who regularly work with children or youth. St. Francis will do background checks on all employees and any volunteers who regularly work with children or youth.

Background checks will include the following:

- a. a written application
- b. a public records check
- c. an interview
- d. reference checks

The more access an individual has to children and youth, the more detailed a background check should be.

If the potential minister has a criminal record, they can be allowed to serve if the crime did not involve a vulnerable person (child, youth, person with disability or senior citizen) and if there has been a minimum of three years of stability. No one accused of child abuse or neglect should be involved with children or youth while an accusation of victimization is still pending and no one convicted of such offense shall serve in ministries with children or youth.

Volunteers should not be permitted to work with children or youth until they have been known to the clergy or congregation for at least six months.

#### **BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS FOR MINISTRY WITH CHILDREN OR YOUTH**

Adults shall never, under any circumstances:

- provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs, or pornography,
- consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or the misuse of legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- engage in illegal behavior or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior,
- engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth,
- discuss their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth.

Firearms and concealed weapons are prohibited at any church activity. Rectors may make special exceptions for off-duty police officers or others required to carry firearms.

## **MONITORING PROGRAMS AND INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

Plans for all events and ministries for children and youth should include at least two unrelated adults present at all times. If unanticipated circumstances result in an adult being alone with children or youths, that adult shall immediately report those circumstances to the Bishop's Office if it is a diocesan event or the Rector or Senior Warden if it is a parish event. It may be appropriate for a Sunday School class to have only one teacher so long as at least one other adult can maintain visual contact with the teacher.

Any new programs, trips or events that involve children or youth should be given prior approval by the Rector and the Vestry. Those driving children or youth need parental permission and all drivers must have a valid driver's license and must be at least 21 years of age. Adults occupying vehicles with children or youth should include at least two unrelated adults (second adult must not be a member of the youth group). One adult is acceptable only if the children being transported are the children of the driver.

No event for children or youth shall take place in a private residence without prior approval by the vestry.

Adults who work with children or youth within a congregation should be discouraged from having a separate and private relationship with any unrelated child from the church away from sanctioned church youth activities.

### **Social Networking Sites – Relationships**

1. Adults who minister to children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Individual personal profiles are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Adults should not submit "friend" requests to minors or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults. Youth may ask to be "friends," and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
2. If an adult chooses to accept friend requests from minors or youth who are associated with their community of faith, other adult leaders must have full access to all aspects of that adult's profile and correspondence.
3. Adults who want to connect via a social networking website with youth to whom they minister are strongly encouraged to set up a closed group account that youth may join. Youth requesting to "friend" an adult can then be invited to join this group rather than be accepted as a friend on an adult's personal profile account. The purpose of these two separate accounts/profiles is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with youth and real family, friends and colleagues.
4. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited will be immediately reported to the clergy and/or the Department of Children and Families (DCF). If the material is on a church-affiliated site, that material should be documented for church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DCF and/or police. The Massachusetts DCF hotline is 1-800-792-5200.

### **Social Networking Sites – Groups**

1. Closed groups, but not "hidden" groups, will be used for youth groups (J2A, Rite 13, administrators, confirmation, pilgrimage, mission trips, etc.).
2. Groups will have at least two unrelated adult administrators as well as at least two youth.
3. Invitations to youth to join the group will be made by youth administrators, unless a youth previously asked an adult administrator to invite him/her to join the group.
4. Any material on any site (whether affiliated with the church or not) that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited will be immediately reported to the clergy and/or DCF. If the material is on a church-affiliated site, that material will be documented for

- church records and then removed from the site after consultation with DCF and/or police.
5. Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited will immediately be removed from the site.
  6. Any content that details inappropriate behavior (outside of the bounds of the established behavioral covenant) during a church-sponsored event or activity will be addressed by adult youth leaders and parents.
  7. Social networking groups for youth will be open to parents of current members.
  8. Parents will be informed that the content of youth pages or groups that are not sponsored by the church are NOT within the purview of adult youth leaders.
  9. Adult leaders of youth groups and former youth members who, due to departure, removal from position, or are no longer eligible because they “aged out” of a program will be immediately removed from digital communication with youth groups via social networking sites, list serves, etc.

### **Social Networking Sites – Relationships (Clergy)**

1. Clergy are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile to shield both adult and youth members from viewing content that may be inappropriate.
2. Individual personal profiles of clergy are to be used to interact with real friends, family and peers. Clergy should not submit “friend” requests to parishioners and others to whom they minister. The disparity of power may not give the other person the ability to decline such request.
3. Clergy who want to connect via a social networking website with parishioners are strongly encouraged to set up a group account that all parishioners may join. The purpose of having a personal profile and parish group is to create a line of privacy and maintain healthy boundaries with parishioners and real family, friends and colleagues.
4. Clergy should consider the impact of declining a “friend” request from parishioners. These encounters may create a tension in “real-world” relationships. Clergy can direct “friend” requests from parishioners to the parish’s group page.
5. Clergy who work directly with youth are encouraged to establish church-sponsored digital communications groups to maintain contact with youth members.
6. When a cleric’s ministry at a parish or other ministry setting ends, the cleric should remove parishioners as “friends” or contacts in all forms of digital communications.

### **Digital communications and content**

#### *Behavioral Covenants*

1. Church-sponsored sites (and/or group pages) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.
2. Content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.
3. Church-sponsored sites (and/or group pages) should always display appropriate language.
4. Eligibility of membership to join a church-associated social networking group should be limited to members of St. Francis.
5. Individuals may tag themselves in photos, but should not tag others.
6. Bullying, pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, etc. will not be tolerated and content reflecting such will be removed.
7. Mandated reporting laws regarding suspected abuse will be complied with.

### **Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs**

1. Adults should refrain from initiating video chats with youth.
2. Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
3. All transcripts of online text chats, video chats, blogs or video blogs should be saved when possible.
4. All clergy and adults engaged in ministry with youth should consider the content and nature of

any post that will be read by or visible to youth.

### **Publishing/Posting Content Online**

1. St. Francis will inform participants when they are being videoed, either verbally or with signage.
2. St. Francis will secure signed Media Release forms from adults and guardians of minor children who will or may participate in activities that may be photographed or videoed for distribution.
3. Photos that are published on church-sponsored sites will not include name or contact information for minor children or youth.

### **Use of Email or Texting (Includes Twitter)**

1. Email can be an appropriate and effective means of communicating basic factual information such as the time of an event, agenda for a meeting, text of a document, etc.
2. Email is not an appropriate communication method for matters that are pastorally or legally sensitive, emotionally charged or require extensive conversation.
3. If an email message is longer than a couple of sentences, then the matter might more properly be addressed via live conversation.
4. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted in an email.
5. All email users should take a moment to consider the ramifications of their message before clicking on the “send” or “reply to all” button.

## **OVERSIGHT**

St. Francis has a Safe Church Officer who is current on safe church issues and training and is not otherwise an employee of the parish. The Safe Church Officer should be consulted by the Rector, Vestry members or others on safe church matters and should report all questionable or non-standard arrangements to the Rector or Warden. The Safe Church Officer and the Vestry will conduct a “safe church audit” annually in the summer to review practices and policies within the congregation.

These policies will be posted in areas where activities for children and youth take place and will be given to all adults who regularly work with children or youth and to parents.

The Church prohibits all forms of sexual harassment in the Church, including unwelcome sexual advances and requests for sexual favors. Other unwelcome conduct which may constitute sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to the following:

Verbal: repeated sexual innuendos, sexual epithets, derogatory slurs, off-color jokes; propositions, threats, or suggestive or insulting sounds; inappropriate email, including email that was sent accidentally

Vision/Non-Verbal: derogatory posters, cartoons or drawings; suggestive objects and pictures, including electronic; graphic commentaries; leering; or obscene gestures

Physical: unwanted physical contacts, either romantic, sexualized or aggressive

Other: making or threatening reprisals to an individual who opposes, objects to or complains about sexual harassment; possession of inappropriate material of a sexual nature in the Church or its display, duplication or transmission.

The Church will not take any action in retaliation against anyone who, in good faith and with a genuine belief that he/she has been sexually harassed, brings or voices a complaint pursuant to this Policy or otherwise opposes sexual harassment. In addition, the Church will not tolerate any retaliatory acts by other individuals.

## **RESPONSE**

Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a parish environment shall immediately report the violation to the Safe Church Officer, Rector, Associate Rector or Senior Warden. Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a diocesan environment or by a clergy person shall contact the Diocesan Intake Officer to report the concern(s).

Anyone who has reason to suspect that child abuse has taken place, whether at church or away from church, shall report it to the appropriate civil authority.

Rectors hearing reports of violations shall contact the Intake Officer in consultation about potential responses. The Rector and/or the Intake Officer shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected and appropriate remedial and/or disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment or volunteer ministry with the church.

When the Intake Officer receives reports of violations by clergy or by adults at diocesan events, she shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected and appropriate remedial and/or disciplinary action according to the canons of the Church, in consultation with the Bishop and the President of the Disciplinary Board.

## **EDUCATION AND TRAINING**

St. Francis will direct clergy, lay employees and volunteers who work with children or youth to attend training on how to prevent child abuse and promote healthy boundaries in church settings. St. Francis will maintain a record of those who have attended such training.

The Diocese will offer the requisite training. Individuals will attend re-training at least every four years. The Bishop's office will approve curriculum and trainers for the requisite training. Current training should be available for those who screen, train or supervise those who regularly work with children or youth.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

The Rector for St. Francis Episcopal Church is Patrick Perkins, [rector@stfrancisholden.org](mailto:rector@stfrancisholden.org)

The Senior Warden of St. Francis Episcopal Church is Susan Bastardo, [smbastardo@gmail.com](mailto:smbastardo@gmail.com)

The Safe Church Officer of St. Francis Episcopal is Matt Surabian, [matt@surabs.com](mailto:matt@surabs.com)

The Safe Church Officer for the Diocese is the Reverend Tanya Wallace, [allsaintschurchrector@gmail.com](mailto:allsaintschurchrector@gmail.com). Contact her with general questions about trainings or safe church policy.

The Intake Officer for the Diocese is the Reverend Molly Scherm, [mollyscherm@gmail.com](mailto:mollyscherm@gmail.com). Contact her to report harassment or abuse by clergy or other diocesan employees.

The Bishop of Western Massachusetts is The Rt. Rev. Douglas Fisher, [DFisher@diocesewma.org](mailto:DFisher@diocesewma.org). Contact him with safe church concerns about any diocesan employee or program.

The phone number to report suspected child abuse in Massachusetts is: 1 (800) 792-5200 or you can call the Department of Social Services in your area.

Rev. 06.22.2023