

Parish of the Epiphany Safe Church Policy

PREAMBLE

Parish of the Epiphany seeks to make our church a safe place for all those who come to it. We join with the Diocese of Massachusetts and Christians across the globe in denouncing oppression in all forms, including sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment. While this policy applies only to church sponsored activities, our hope is that through adherence to this policy the Church and all who attend can better live out the baptismal covenant to “respect the dignity of every human being” and “seek and serve Christ in all people.”

May God’s compassion, wisdom and love bless us all as we continue our work together to ensure that the church is truly a sanctuary, and that the household of God is formed in God’s image and likeness as followers of Christ.

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this document the following terms and phrases shall be defined as follows:

Children and Youth refer to individuals under the age of 18. Traditionally Epiphany uses “child” or “children” to refer to people under the age of 12 and “youth” to refer to people between the ages of 13 and 18.

Sexual Harassment is any unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature that makes the recipient feel uncomfortable or threatened. Both Federal and State laws prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace, and these requirements may be guiding principles in enforcing this policy.

EMPLOYEE AND VOLUNTEER SCREENING

All applicants for a) paid or b) volunteer positions which involve working with children must complete a written application to ensure consistent collection of data, including a CORI request form.

All new applicants for volunteer positions which involve working with children or youth must be recommended by an existing member of the Epiphany community.

The Diocese of Massachusetts will conduct background checks on all clergy who are deployed or licensed to officiate within the Diocese. Church employees and volunteers who work with vulnerable populations such as children or youth can expect that Epiphany will regularly conduct CORI and sex offender searches on their backgrounds.

The Church is a place of forgiveness and healing. The Church also has a responsibility to care for the most vulnerable among us. Any person found to have a record will be ineligible to serve. Automatic disqualifiers include a criminal conviction for: sexual offense involving a minor, including incest; sexual or physical abuse of a minor; and/or child pornography.

The Children's Ministry Committee will work with the Vestry person in charge of Safe Church practices to decide if a volunteer should be disqualified from working with children or youth based on their individual history. Whenever the suitability of a volunteer working with vulnerable adult populations, such as the sick and elderly, is questioned on safety grounds clergy and members of the Vestry charged with Safe Church responsibilities will decide if the volunteer needs to be disqualified from continuing service.

TRAINING

The Diocese of Massachusetts provides Safe Church Training for adults. Parish of the Epiphany requires all church employees, vestry members, child care workers and volunteers who work with children or youth to attend the diocese's Safe Church training within six months of their employment or service. Individuals should attend re-training every three to four years.

Additionally all church employees, vestry members, child care workers and volunteers who work with children or youth will be required to read Epiphany's Safe Church Policy and sign a statement that they understand and will abide by its provisions.

VESTRY SAFE CHURCH RESPONSIBILITIES

A Church staff member shall be designated as the Safe Church Administrator and shall be responsible for administering this Policy. In a separate document, the Church shall provide the Safe Church Administrator's name and contact information.

A representative from the congregation who is familiar with safe church training and who is not otherwise employed by the Church shall be appointed by the vestry to conduct an annual safe church audit with the Vestry in accord with safe church practices promulgated by the Diocese and Parish of the Epiphany.

Vestry will designate a committee to work with clergy whenever the suitability of a volunteer is questioned on safety grounds. Whenever the suitability of a volunteer is questioned on safety grounds the volunteer will immediately be suspended from all volunteer activities pending the findings of this committee.

The Vestry will review and if necessary update all Safe Church information distributed to the congregation annually.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT

Massachusetts law requires that mandated reporters (see below) immediately make an oral report to the local office of the Department of Children and Families when, in their professional capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering from abuse or neglect.

It is the responsibility of adults who work with or care for children or youth to report suspected abuse or neglect to the Department of Children and Families.

Absolute proof is not required. You should report any physical or emotional injury resulting from abuse, including sexual abuse; or any indication of neglect, including malnutrition; or any instance in which a child is determined to be physically dependent upon an addictive drug at birth. The department will conduct an investigation in order to determine if the child has actually been neglected or abused. Mandated reporters are not identified to the family and are legally protected from liability in any civil or criminal action.

Who is a mandated reporter?

- 1) All clergy. The only exception would be reports heard in confession pursuant to “The Reconciliation of a Penitent” found in The Book of Common Prayer, according to the use of The Episcopal Church, pgs. 447-452, 1979 edition.
- 2) Paid employees who supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel children or youth on a regular basis.
- 3) Volunteers and non-mandated reporters may report directly to DCF or give their report to the Rector or another mandated reporter. The Rector or mandated reporter must then file the report.

How to report:

- 1) Call the local DCF area office Monday through Friday. The local DCF office for Winchester is located in Arlington at 30 Mystic Street, Arlington, MA 02474
Phone: (781) 641-8500 Fax: (781) 646-5172
- 2) Call the Child-At-Risk-Hotline after hours, weekends or holidays at 1-800-792-5200.W
- 3) Within 48 hours of the oral report, you must follow-up with a written report. The form for filing the report is obtainable from the local DCF Area Office or downloaded from the web at www.mass.gov/dss.
- 4) Volunteers or employees who report to DCF should also make a report to their supervisor, clergy or a member of the Vestry.

REPORTING SUSPECTED ELDER ABUSE OR ABUSE OF A DISABLED PERSON

Any signs or evidence of abuse or neglect against the elderly should be reported to the Elder Abuse Hotline (800) 992-2275.

Signs or evidence of neglect or abuse against a disabled person should be reported to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission at (800) 426-9009. Additional Elder resources are available under Resources.

REPORTING SUSPECTED CLERGY ABUSE

An allegation of abuse or clergy misconduct should be made to one of the Bishops or to the Office of Pastoral Response at the Diocesan Center. If an allegation of clergy misconduct involves suspected harm to a child, DCF must also be notified immediately.

Allegations of clergy misconduct may be raised by the alleged victim, a parent or guardian of an alleged minor victim or an alleged victim who is under a disability, a spouse or adult child of an alleged victim. Parishioners may also make an initial report to one of the Wardens if they feel comfortable and safe doing so. The Warden can then

assist the parishioner in making the report to the bishop. An allegation can be brought in a number of ways, including: in writing, through a personal meeting, or through a phone call.

OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE

Harassment

Harassment in the form of inappropriate and unwelcome words or actions from other parishioners will not be tolerated. Parishioners are encouraged to address these matters, where they do not involve physical threats, by speaking directly with the offending individual. Clergypersons are always available, however, to help parishioners who may not feel comfortable having these conversations.

Domestic Abuse

Individuals in an abusive relationship often refuse to seek help because they fear their abuser will retaliate. Domestic abuse victims also fear their story will not be believed or that they deserve the abuse they are receiving. Clergypersons are always available for confidential counseling and referral assistance to anyone in need.

BEST PRACTICES

The Parish of the Epiphany strives for adherence to the following best practices. It is the best practice to:

- (a) Have two adults shall be present at all times in groups of parish children or youth.
- (b) Have teachers teach in teams. Concerted effort will be made to recruit sufficient numbers of volunteer teachers to permit such team teaching.
- (c) When one-on-one interactions are appropriate and/or necessary, care shall be taken that they are conducted in an environment that provides visibility to others. If at all possible, another adult should have knowledge of the adult person's whereabouts and with whom they are meeting.
- (d) 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 will be conducted by staff during Sunday school hours.
- (e) No gifts shall be given by volunteers or staff to children or youth without the prior knowledge of the parents and/or the supervisory staff.
- (f) No adult shall take children or youth on an off-campus outing or on an overnight outing without at least one other adult attending. A single child should never be taken on an off-campus outing or on an overnight outing, even if two adults are present.
- (g) No event for children or youth shall take place in a private residence without prior approval by the vestry.
- (h) The use, possession, distribution, or being under the influence of alcohol, illegal drugs, or the misuse of legal drugs while participating in or assisting with programs or activities for children or youth is prohibited.
- (i) The church shall have at least 1 fire drill each calendar year.
- (j) All rooms will remain locked when not in use.
- (k) Volunteers will at all times follow the Disciplinary Policy and the Epiphany Bathroom Policy.

(1) Adults are prohibited from:

- engaging in illegal behavior or permitting other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior;
- Engaging in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth;
- Discussing their own sexual activities or fantasies with children or youth;
- Possessing any sexually oriented materials (magazines, cards, videos, films, clothing, etc) on church property or in the presence of children or youth;
- Using the Internet to view or download any sexually oriented materials on church property or in the presence of children or youth.