

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Holyoke, Massachusetts

Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth

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. All of us have responsibility for making our church a safe haven for all of God's people.

Section I -- Screening and Selection for Ministry with Children and Youth

1. The Parish is required by the Diocese of Western Massachusetts to do background checks on all employees and any volunteers who regularly work with children or youth. Background checks should include the following:
 - a written application
 - nationwide criminal background check
 - SORI and CORI checks
 - an interview
 - reference checks
2. Only persons who have been members of St. Paul's Church, Holyoke, for at least six months shall work as volunteers with the children of the parish.
3. No convicted sex offender shall be involved with children at any time. No person accused of being a sex offender shall be involved with youth or children until the investigation is complete and the person has been cleared.
4. St. Paul's Church will have a Safe Church Minister who is current on safe church issues and training and who is not otherwise a paid employee of the parish.
5. The Safe Church Minister should be consulted by the Rector, Vestry members or others on all safe church matters from training needs to violations of this policy.
6. No one accused of child abuse or neglect should be involved with children while the accusations are still pending. A careful evaluation of an individual's ability to work with children will be conducted by the Safe Church Minister, Rector and Senior Warden after the accusations are resolved.
7. This policy is to remain posted in areas where activities for children and youth take place and is to be given to all adults who regularly work with children and youth and to parents.
8. This policy is to be made available on the St. Paul's Church website.
9. This policy will include the names and phone numbers and email addresses of the Rector, Senior Warden, Safe Church Minister and the contact person in the Bishop's office.
10. The Safe Church Minister, Rector and Vestry of St. Paul's Church will conduct a safe church audit every 3-4 years to review practices and policies. Any changes will be approved by the vestry and made public as outlined in sections 7 and 8 above.

Section II – Training

1. A minimum of four hours of specified education regarding child sexual abuse and four hours of specified education regarding adult sexual misconduct in church settings is **required** by the Diocese of Western Massachusetts for the following persons:
 - all clergy canonically resident or licensed in the diocese
 - all employees of the congregation (secretaries, sextons, organists, and anyone considered an employee for IRS purposes)
 - anyone who regularly supervises youth activities (paid or volunteer), including youth group advisors, day care providers, youth choir leaders, etc.
 - Sunday School teachers
2. A minimum of four hours of specified education regarding child sexual abuse and four hours of specified education regarding adult sexual misconduct in church settings is **recommended** for the following persons:
 - Vestry members (especially those with canonical responsibility for finances)
 - Anyone who sees parishioners in a private setting on behalf of the parish.

The Safe Church Minister, Rector and Vestry of St. Paul’s Church are responsible for the congregation’s compliance with the above diocesan requirements for training.

As an insured parish of the Diocese of Western Massachusetts, St. Paul’s Church shall keep on file a list of those parishioners/employees who have completed the education, and a copy of the certificate of attendance for each person. **Individuals shall attend re-training sessions every 3-4 years.**

Section III – Behavioral Standards for Ministry with Children or Youth

Adults are prohibited from:

- 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;
- 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.

Firearms and concealed weapons are prohibited at any church activity.

Computers are to have adequate password protection. St. Paul's Church will have clear guidelines and adequate supervision (by parish staff or authorized person) of anyone using a parish computer to access the Internet. Such guidelines should make clear that any activity on a parish computer is not considered private and may be accessed by authorized persons.

Church School and Youth Ministry

- Two adults shall be present at all times in groups of parish children or youth, except for Church School classes. During Church School classes, doors to the classroom will remain open and the adult leader of the group must be visible from the doorway at all times.
- No adult shall be alone with a child where they cannot be visually observed by others, such as behind a closed door or in a car. Where children or youth meet, doors are to be left open at all times.
- Parents of the children or youth served, St. Paul's clergy, administrative and professional staff shall have access to all meetings of children or youth at random to observe the relevant program.
- 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.
- 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.
- No adult shall take children or youth on an off-campus outing or on an overnight outing without at least one other adult attending. Where there are both boys and girls, it is best if both a male and female leader is present. No event for children or youth shall take place in a private residence without prior approval by the vestry.
- Children with serious disciplinary problems during Church School sessions and youth group events shall be referred to their own parents immediately. It is not within the ministry of Church School teachers, volunteers, and youth workers to act *in loco parentis* with regard to serious behavior problems. Where discipline is called for in children and youth ministry settings, it shall be limited to appropriate reprimands and/or quiet time apart from the class or group until parents are notified.
- Parents or guardians must complete written permission forms before church personnel or volunteers transport children and youth for a church sponsored activity or for any purpose on more than an occasional basis.

Responding to Concerns

Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in the parish shall immediately report the violation, in person, to the **Safe Church Minister, Rector or Senior Warden (in any combination in which they feel most comfortable)**. All clergy are, by state law, mandated reporters in instances of child abuse and/or neglect.

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.

Priests hearing reports of violations 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.

All matters (except as may be determined pastorally appropriate by the Rector) shall remain confidential between the parties concerned. Once a disciplinary decision is made (especially involving sexual misconduct) additional steps may be taken by the Rector to advice as is prudent to insure the safety of the whole church.

If allegations involve the Rector or any ordained person serving at St. Paul's Church, reporting will be to the appropriate civil authorities (as necessary to prevent immediate danger), or to the Safe Church Minister and Senior Warden, who will in turn report to the Bishop's office.

If an allegation of abuse or neglect has been made and reported to the relevant law enforcement or local family services departments, whether reported from inside or outside of the parish, the respondent will be removed from contact with children or incapacitated adults within this parish (as determined by the criteria of the complaint), until the investigation is complete and a report that the respondent has been cleared of the accusation is received by the Rector of St. Paul's.

Upon receipt of such report, the Rector, Safe Church Minister, and Senior Warden will notify the respondent in person or in writing within 48 hours of receipt.

The respondent will be required to attend safe church re-training sessions as outlined in Section II and pastoral care for transitioning back into volunteer or work status within the Parish.

Responding to Grievances

The primary intent of this policy is to prevent occurrences of misconduct (sexual, physical, and emotional) and to insure that, where allegations are made, the response will be just and compassionate for all parties concerned.

Grievances to a decision of disciplinary action can be made in person (at an agreed upon and appropriate time and place) or in writing to the Safe Church Minister and Senior Warden. A decision must be administered in writing to the respondent within 48 hours of receipt of the grievance.

The Respondent then has the option of (following the same steps as outlined above) sending their grievance to the Rector. A decision must be administered to the respondent within 48 hours of receipt of the grievance. The Rector's decision is then final.

If the allegations include the Rector, Canon rules apply that will be administered and monitored by the Bishop.

Contact Information:

The Safe Church Minister for the Parish of St. Paul's Church is Timothy Cotz

phone: 413-567-2123

email: Cotz_Tim@glenmeadow.org

The Senior Warden for the Parish of St. Paul's Church is Gina S. Nelson

413-536-0195

Gina.nelson@the-spa.com

The Interim Rector for the Parish of St Paul's Church is the Reverend Jean Austin

413-532-5060

revjaustin@yahoo.com

The Safe Church Officer for the Diocese is the Reverend Canon Sarah Shofstall.
413.737.4786 x 11.

sshofstall@diocesewma.org

To report suspected child abuse in Massachusetts: 800.792.5200 or
Holyoke Department of Social Services: 413.493.2600.

Attachments: Compliance Assurance Statement
Background Check Form / Authorization
Permission Form
Definition of Terms

Compliance Assurance Statement

I, _____, have read, understand and intend to comply with the Policy for the Protection of Children and Youth at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Holyoke, Massachusetts.

Signature

Date _____

(Please print your name)

Witnessed by _____ Date _____

Definition of Terms

The following are included as definitions for the purposes of this policy:

Child – A child is defined as anyone under the age of 12 years.

Youth – Anyone who is at least 12 years old, but not yet 18 years old. A youth may also be an individual who is 18 years old or older, but still in High School.

Incapacitated Adult – is a person of at least 18 years old who by virtue of physical or mental impairment is responsible to others for their care and safety.

Physical Abuse – is non-accidental injury, which is intentionally inflicted upon a child, youth or incapacitated adult.

Sexual abuse – is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child, youth or incapacitated adult and an adult. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child, youth, or incapacitated adult.

Sexual abuse perpetrated by another child or youth is any contact or activity of a sexual nature that occurs between a child or youth and another child or youth when there is no consent, when consent is not possible, or when one child or youth has power over the other child or youth. This includes any activity which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of any of the children or youth.

Emotional Abuse – is mental or emotional injury to a child, youth or incapacitated adult that results in an observable and material impairment in the growth, development or psychological functioning.

Neglect – is the failure to provide for a child, youth or incapacitated adult's basic needs or the failure to protect a child, youth or incapacitated adult from harm.