

TRAINING FOR A SAFE CHURCH

Diocese of Vermont

...for the preservation of the safest possible environments within the church...

In an effort to increase the physical, emotional, and spiritual health and safety of congregations, the Diocese of Vermont requires training in sexual conduct for all clergy, postulants, candidates, lay employees, and certain categories of volunteers. This education has two parts: (1) preventing sexual harassment and exploitation in the workplace and in pastoral relationships, and (2) preventing child sexual abuse in church settings.

Policies and Procedures Relating to Sexual Misconduct

I. POLICY STATEMENT

The Diocese of Vermont strictly prohibits sexual misconduct of any type by any ordained person (deacon, transitional deacon, priest or bishop) canonically resident or functioning in the Diocese of Vermont, or any employee or volunteer authorized to perform work or provide services within the Church.

II. RATIONALE AND GOAL

The Church has long recognized the possibility of sexual misconduct on the part of her leaders, and has sought to address such matters to the best of her knowledge and ability in ways that are pastorally appropriate and humane for both accuser and accused. It is necessary to define and codify the Church's expectations and responsibilities concerning such matters. In part, this is a concomitant of a greater awareness in American society of the problems of sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation. In part, it is the result of federal legislation that makes sexual misconduct by persons in positions of authority - including church leaders - grounds for civil or criminal action. This document aims to communicate in clear and unequivocal language the expectations and responsibilities incumbent upon all members of The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Vermont that will help to assure that our community remains free from the personal pain and destructive influences that necessarily arise through the perpetration of sexual abuse, harassment and exploitation.

III. DEFINITIONS

The Diocese of Vermont adopts the Episcopal Church definitions in Title IV, Canon 2, including those of sexual abuse, sexual behavior, and sexual misconduct:

Sexual Abuse shall mean any Sexual Behavior at the request of, acquiesced to or by a person eighteen years of age or older and a person under eighteen years of age, in high school or legally incompetent.

Sexual Behavior shall mean any physical contact, bodily movement, speech, communication or other activity sexual in nature or that is intended to arouse or gratify erotic interest or sexual desires.

Sexual Misconduct shall mean (a) Sexual Abuse or (b) Sexual Behavior at the request of, acquiesced to or by a Member of the Clergy with an employee, volunteer, student or counselee of that Member of the Clergy or in the same congregation as the Member of the Clergy, or a person with whom the Member of the Clergy has a Pastoral Relationship.

IV. PROCEDURES TO AID THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Preservation of the safest possible environments within the church requires clear expectations, openness, and vigilant and sensitive cooperation on the part of aware and informed persons. Of particular importance are environments which present a high degree of risk or opportunity for sexual misconduct. These procedures represent the minimum of preventative measures to be observed in all such environments.

At the Time of Recruitment

1. All “Covered Persons” (as defined below) will be required to complete and sign an application form which specifically includes a request for personal references, information concerning any prior adjudication in regard to sexual misconduct, and acknowledgment of the church’s right to conduct a confidential background check.

Compliance Assurance

2. Within the first thirty days of employment or assignment, all Covered Persons will be required to sign a statement indicating that they have read and understand, and intend to comply with, the Diocese of Vermont Policy and Procedures Relating to Sexual Misconduct (this document).

An Informed Workforce

3. Within the first six months of employment or assignment, all Covered Persons must receive training on issues of sexual harassment and exploitation and on the prevention and detection of child sexual abuse in church settings. All persons engaged in high risk areas of service must additionally participate in this training. All such training must be provided or approved by the Diocese of Vermont. As of January 1, 2013, all Covered Persons must have completed such training within the previous five years and have documentation of attendance on file in the diocesan office. Subsequently, Covered Persons must attend a re-certification workshop presented and/or approved by the diocese every three years.

The following groups are “Covered Persons” and required to complete approved training program:

Clergy who are canonically resident or licensed and any clergy person desiring to exercise ordained ministry in the Diocese of Vermont

Employees of the Diocese, including:

Ministry Support Team members, all maintenance and office volunteers
Staff and Volunteers for Rock Point Summer Camps and any other diocesan-sponsored activity for children and/or youth

Employees of a Congregation

Eucharistic Visitors licensed by the Bishop

Lay Pastors authorized by the Bishop

All members of Covenant Groups and Local Ministry Support Teams authorized by the Bishop

Everyone, paid or volunteer, **who supervises children or youth activities**

Everyone, paid or volunteer, **who is engaged in any other high risk area of service**

The Diocese of Vermont strongly encourages **all other leaders and members of our congregations** to attend safe church training to learn about prevention practices and how to deal with any possible allegation of misconduct or abuse within their church community, particularly with regard to clergy and lay leadership.

The Diocese of Vermont **urges congregations to adopt safe church policies** which are consistent with Diocesan Policy, including a requirement that all employees of the congregation and anyone who supervises children and/or youth activities, whether paid or volunteer, must attend an approved safe church training program and be properly screened for ministry.

Risk Reduction

4. Whenever possible, persons engaged in high risk areas of service should arrange for a co-worker or chaperon to be present during the exercise of their duties. Activities which require one-on-one interactions should be conducted in an environment that provides for visibility by other adults.

Prohibition of Employment

5. Any Covered Person who refuses to complete and sign the required application form and assurances will not be admitted to the position or assignment in question.

Corrective Action

6. Any Covered Person who fails to comply with the above procedures should be immediately warned of the need for corrective action. Failure to correct a deficiency within a reasonable period of time will result in the prohibition of the person from further engagement in that area of service.

V. PROCEDURES FOR RESPONDING TO A COMPLAINT

The Bishop represents the principal authority of The Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Vermont regarding all matters of sexual misconduct in which the alleged perpetrator is a Covered Person. The Canon on Ecclesiastical Discipline provides a process for dealing with such matters when the alleged perpetrator is a member of the ordained clergy. In other instances, the Bishop uses the process outlined in the Canon as a guide. In any matter of sexual misconduct, the Intake Officer is available to assist you in taking these steps.

Reporting Alleged Sexual Misconduct

1. Any person who believes her or himself to have been sexually abused, harassed or exploited by a Covered Person should report the matter directly to the Diocesan Intake Officer

Preliminary Investigation

2. When information concerning alleged sexual misconduct is received by the Diocesan Intake Officer (IO), the IO will determine whether the allegations, if true, constitute an offense for which a member of the clergy may be held accountable under the Title IV disciplinary canons. If the allegations are such an offense, the IO will consult with the Bishop and the President of the Disciplinary Board to determine further action consistent with the provisions of Title IV and the corresponding Diocesan Canons.

Protection of Rights

3. Throughout the investigation and any subsequent action, reasonable care will be diligently exercised to assure the privacy and due process rights of all parties.

If the Alleged Victim is a Minor

4. If the alleged victim is a minor, the Intake Officer must, immediately upon receiving a complaint or other information which, in her judgment, signifies sufficient cause to warrant a complaint, ascertain whether a report of suspected child sexual abuse has been filed with an appropriate official of the Vermont Agency of Human Services. If a report has not been filed, the IO must take such action as may be necessary to cause said report to be filed immediately.

Process for Responding to a Complaint

5. Title IV of The Episcopal Church Canons sets out a process to resolve questions regarding behavior of clergy and to provide pastoral care and response for those persons and communities aggrieved by a cleric's conduct. The Title IV process is designed to promote "healing, repentance, forgiveness, restitution, justice, amendment of life and reconciliation among all involved or affected."