

policies for the protection of children and youth  
in the diocese of western massachusetts

preamble

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.

Parishes are encouraged to do background checks on all employees and any volunteers who regularly work with children or youth.

Background checks should 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.

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:

- a. provide children or youth with non-sacramental alcohol, illegal drugs or pornography,
- b. consume non-sacramental alcohol or illegal drugs or misuse legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- c. be under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs or the misuse of legal drugs at any children's or youth event,
- d. engage in illegal behavior or permit other adults or children or youth to engage in illegal behavior,
- e. engage in any sexual, romantic, illicit or secretive relationship or conduct with any child or youth,
- f. 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.

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. Each parish is encouraged to have a Safe Church Minister who is current on safe church issues and training and is not otherwise an employee of the parish. The Safe Church Minister 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 a Warden. It is recommended that the Safe Church Minister and the Vestry regularly conduct a "safe church audit" to review practices and policies within the congregation.

Parishes should adopt safe church policies, consistent with the requirements in this policy. The policies should be clear, should be posted in areas where activities for children and youth take place and should be given to all adults who regularly work with children or youth and to parents. Parish policies should include the names and phone numbers of the Rector or priest, senior warden, parish safe church officer, and contact person in the Bishop's office.

Parish computers should have adequate password protection. Parishes should 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.

Education and training

Parishes shall 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. Each parish shall maintain a record of those who have attended such training.

The Diocese shall require all clergy and employees and volunteers who work with children or youth at diocesan events to attend training on how to prevent child abuse and promote healthy boundaries in church settings and will maintain records of those who have attended the training.

The Diocese will offer the requisite training. Individuals should attend re-training every three to 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.

#### Responding to concerns

Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a parish environment shall immediately report the violation to the Rector or priest and senior warden. Anyone who knows of a violation of these policies in a diocesan environment or by a clergy person shall immediately report the violation to the Bishop's office.

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 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.

The Bishop, hearing reports of violations by clergy, or by adults at diocesan events, shall be responsible for providing appropriate pastoral care to all those affected and appropriate remedial and/or disciplinary action, up to and including canonical disciplinary action.

#### Contact information

Specific details about how to do background checks, norms for various types of youth events and how to supervise compliance with this policy can be obtained at training events offered by the Diocese, your parish safe church minister or the Diocesan Safe Church Officer.

The Safe Church Officer for the Diocese is the Reverend Canon Sarah Shofstall (413) 737-4786 x 11. [sshofstall@diocesewma.org](mailto:sshofstall@diocesewma.org)

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

This policy was adopted by unanimous vote of the Council of the Diocese on April 21, 2005. It goes into effect January 1, 2006.