



## *Safe Church for God's People*

**Policies For Addressing Concerns for Lay Ministers Regarding Abuse,  
Harassment, And Exploitation**

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# I. OVERVIEW

## **A. This Policy Covers: Abuse, Harassment, and Exploitation that is Sexual, Physical, or Verbal.**

The Episcopal Church has long been committed to providing healthy and inspiring communities of faith, which requires keeping all people safe and aware of appropriate boundaries regarding interpersonal relationships and/or interactions that can be construed as sexual in nature. Therefore, we have policies to protect children, youth, and vulnerable adults, as well as policies that address sexual abuse, harassment, or exploitation of any adult. These requirements and policies extend to other inappropriate behaviors including physical and verbal abuse, harassment, or exploitation. Our training to these policies includes standards for recognizing and reporting concerns of inappropriate behavior to responsible leaders of the church.

The application of any corrective actions is clear in regards to the first set of policies for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Any deviations from best practices for keeping these ministries safe should be immediately reported and then redirected by leadership. Furthermore, any actual harm to children, youth, and vulnerable adults should be reported directly to local authorities.

Corrective action for concerns and violations of the policies protecting adults from abuse, harassment, and exploitation by lay or ordained adults is more nuanced and requires case by case engagement. This is especially true when looking specifically at inappropriate sexual behavior in these categories. For the purposes of this policy, this is the category that will be explored in depth. Then, through extension, the recommendations for best practices can also be applied to inappropriate verbal and physical behaviors.

## **B. Sexual Abuse, Harassment, and Exploitation**

It is important to note that the category requiring the highest level of case by case engagement is our policies and practices about cases of sexual exploitation. Our policies regarding sexual harassment and abuse of adults are the most clear; where verbal or physical action or advance is unwanted, it is inappropriate. However, the policies regarding sexual exploitation must examine the perception of consent within the relationship and whether it is a healthy or unhealthy manifestation of love and sexuality. Here we acknowledge that consent is not the only measure of health, and the potential for exploitation is high when power exists between individuals. This is true for any two adults involved in ministry together, whether lay or ordained, since the nature of ministry itself is what conveys power regardless of role. Lay and ordained ministry alike often involves sharing vulnerable and personal information with one another as part of one's faith story, and sometimes working tiresome hours together (whether voluntary or compensated).

It is for this reason that safe church policies deem any sexual relationship inappropriate between a clergy person and an individual under his or her pastoral care. The Canons of the Episcopal Church follow suit with this and provide remedies for clergy regarding personal relationships and actions outside the bounds of appropriate interpersonal and sexual behavior. However, church Canon and Safe Church policies and procedures are less clear about remedies for lay ministers of the church, either employees or volunteers, and neither Canon nor policy clearly define inappropriate relationships of a sexual nature or advise on how to respond to allegations of unwanted sexual advances or assault. This lack of clear procedures for lay individuals not legally or canonically bound to the discipline of the Church can lead to a confusing situation for local church leaders when individuals within their faith communities bring forward either allegations of Safe Church violations or the development of a perceived consensual relationship. And while an aggrieved

person may indeed take the most egregious cases of alleged abuse or harassment directly to local law enforcement, it may be that the aggrieved individual is seeking a more local and pastoral action and advice when a criminal case isn't warranted or desired.

Ideally, the Church might develop and promulgate a clear set of policies and practices that would help remedy such situations among lay ministers in a fair, compassionate, and accountable manner, providing parties with clear actions steps. These steps should both ensure that the ministries themselves remain safe and thrive, while also encouraging health and healing for the individuals involved. They should also provide clear expectations for what the church, the lay minister, and the partner or aggrieved person should do and can expect in the event a sexual abuse, harassment, or potentially exploitative relationship is reported. Correspondingly, a lay minister accused of inappropriate sexual behavior would have a clear understanding of the steps by which the Church would seek to determine whether actionable behavior indeed occurred and how she or he might offer an appropriate defense in the event they feel wrongly accused.

The diagram and grid below are two charts that seek to outline some best practices around responding to these matters for everyone involved. The visual diagram seeks to give an overview of everyone involved and the streams of communication. The text grid seeks to give detailed written directives for each phase of the process. Both charts involve the three categories of policy concerns: 1) sexual abuse, 2) sexual harassment, and 3) emerging/confusing relationships that carry potential for exploitation. Both charts also include sections for everyone involved: 1) ECMN, 2) the two parties, 3) the supervisor, 4) the faith community and its leadership, and 5) an impartial response team coordinator. The supervisor is typically the dean, rector, or priest of the parish.

It is important to note that the use of a response team is invoked for the protection and privacy of everyone, as well as impartiality to both parties. The response team coordinator is chosen by the Bishop and the ECMN Intake Office from a list of volunteers who have been trained ahead of time to serve in this role. The coordinator is often a clergy person, but may also be a lay person with considerable experience and training in shepherding these types of matters (such as a spiritual director or HR professional). Calling upon a coordinator in this way has two notable positive outcomes. The first is that it allows the supervisor to be involved and informed but frees them from also being the investigator or communicator between the involved parties. The second is that it allows the implicated lay minister a chance to make an appropriate defense. The other members of the response team are the personal representatives chosen by the parties themselves. These representatives are typically a trained therapist or spiritual director, and they should not be paid by the faith community. If financial support is needed beyond private insurance benefits, the Bishop's discretionary fund may be considered.

In all of this work, it is important to balance the rightful expectation and need for confidentiality with an appropriate and fully informed response by the church. The following outline of suggested best practices limits the number of people involved and minimizes the scope of communication to only what is necessary and appropriate. The people involved in the informed discernment should only be six people: the supervisor to whom the report is made, the bishop, the intake officer, and a response team of three individuals. At the very outset, the person or persons making a report should be told that further discussion beyond this core group is not only unnecessary for fairness but actually serves to undermine the process, the result, and healing for all affected persons. The clergy involved should also be instructed not to reach out beyond the scope of this core group. The response team coordinator and the individuals themselves are privy to the full details of the situation, while sharing back only the relevant facts and recommendations to the clergy and the vestries involved for the purpose of making employment decisions. The communications made to the faith community are even more limited, and should only involve two points: 1) a discernment process is underway

regarding matters of Safe Church, and 2) the result of that discernment. This policy document can be made publicly available as a resource to interested members of the faith community.

## II. COMMUNICATION DIAGRAM



### III. RESPONSE GRID

	Sexual Abuse	Sexual Harassment	Emerging Relationships / Potential for Sexual Exploitation	
<b>Who is reporting?</b>	<p>The person making a complaint of unwanted and inappropriate behavior.</p> <p>This may be done through conversation, in writing, or via an advocate whom the victim trusts who speaks directly on their behalf.</p>	<p>The person making a complaint of unwanted and inappropriate behavior.</p> <p>This may be done through conversation, in writing, or via an advocate whom the victim trusts who speaks directly on their behalf.</p>	<p>One person (or both parties) feel they might be being exploited in an unhealthy relationship with a lay minister with power.</p> <p>(Consent feels confusing. Fidelity to outside relationships might be in question. The person reporting is seeking help to end what they are aware is an unhealthy relationship.)</p>	<p>The two people in lay ministry or membership together, who are in an emerging or confusing relationship, bring their situation to church leadership.</p> <p>They make the report because they understand, same as Clergy, that the vulnerable and power-laden nature of the ministry setting can easily evoke misunderstood feelings, and thus requires healthy intervention.</p>
<b>Who is the report made to?</b>	<p>Supervisor (Typically the Dean/Rector/Priest)</p> <p>Legal authorities, if desired.</p>	<p>Supervisor (Typically the Dean/Rector/Priest)</p> <p>Legal authorities, if desired.</p>	<p>Supervisor (Typically the Dean/Rector/Priest)</p> <p>This is not a legal matter.</p>	<p>Possibly two supervisors, if they are different people. (Typically the Deans/Rectors/Priests)</p> <p>This is not a legal matter.</p>

<p><b>What does the Supervisor do with the report?</b></p>	<p>Supervisor contacts the The report is passed to the ECMN intake officer by phone call. If that person is unavailable, the report can be passed to the Bishop if necessary after hours. If neither person is available, the report should be passed via email to the Intake Officer. Records are kept of these communications.</p> <p>The ECMN intake officer informs the implicated lay minister that a report has been made, and that they will hear from the coordinator with further information.</p> <p>Supervisor can inform the wardens and vestry about the report and pending discernment process, but without details or names of those involved.</p>	<p>Supervisor records the details of the reported behavior and directs the implicated person to stop any alleged harassing behavior. Addresses the safety and well-being of the aggrieved. Keeps records of these communications and interventions.</p> <p>Supervisor immediately informs ECMN intake officer of these records and the related actions taken by telephone and email. This is simply a notice of concern and intervention, and not yet a report of ongoing harassing behavior.</p> <p>Supervisor can inform the wardens and vestry about the report and pending discernment process, but without details or names of those involved.</p>	<p>This person contacts the appropriate intake officer, or the Bishop if necessary after hours, and finally sends an immediate email if no response.</p> <p>Additionally, the implicated lay minister is told a report has been made directly, and that they will hear from the coordinator with further information. (If the lay minister is not jointly reporting, and thus already aware.)</p>	<p>A response team is not required for this.</p> <p>This person suggests that these two individuals take a break from active ministry for a period of six months. They also recommend that each person engage in personal counseling or spiritual direction to explore the nature of their emerging relationship.</p>
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<p><b>Immediate Response</b></p>	<p>If the implicated person agrees with complaint, the lay leader is removed from their ministry position and the faith community (paid or volunteer).</p> <p>The aggrieved can choose to take legal action if desired.</p> <p>If the implicated person contests the complaint, follow the steps below.</p>	<p>If harassing behavior continues, supervisor suspends ministry of the implicated person and formally reports charge of harassment to the ECMN intake officer. The ECMN intake officer informs the implicated lay minister that a report has been made, and that they will hear from the coordinator with further information.</p>	<p>Supervisor directs that these two individuals take a break from active ministry together for a period of six months. The supervisor also recommends that each person engage in personal counseling or spiritual direction to heal from any brokenness in relationship.</p> <p>Any further and unwanted advances from either party to the relationship will be treated as actionable harassment.</p>	<p>A recommendation for ending overlapping ministry is made (for approximately six months).</p>
<p><b>Response Team</b></p>	<p>The Bishop appoints a Coordinator unfamiliar with either party to jointly conduct the following steps. Ideally the Coordinator is a clergy person.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Same as left if the relationship circumstances lead to harassment.</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>
<p><b>Investigation by the Response Team</b></p>	<p>The Coordinator empowers the two parties involved to obtain a representative (ideally a licensed therapist or possibly a spiritual director). The coordinator interviews the two parties and gather facts twice (before and then after outside</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Same as far left.</p> <p>However, if this lay minister is a paid staff person, it is *optional* for the supervisor to choose to put them on *paid* leave during this time. It is also permissible for regular employment to continue. If leave is chosen, then it is communicated to the</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>

<p><b>Investigation by the Response Team (Cont.)</b></p>	<p>counseling by their representative).</p> <p>The coordinator may also speak directly to each representative if each representative consents (per these policies).</p> <p>The lay minister is put on paid or unpaid personal leave during this time.</p> <p>This leave is communicated to the faith community as not disciplinary but “in compliancy with best practices for a discernment process regarding lay concerns in our Safe Church for God’s People policies.”</p>		<p>faith community as “not a disciplinary action but in compliance with best practices for a discernment process regarding lay concerns in our Safe Church for God’s People policies.”</p>	
<p><b>Impacted Ministries (Ensuring they continue to be safe and thrive)</b></p>	<p>The response team supports the faith community clergy and vestry to ensure that affected ministries have appropriate leadership.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Church leadership finds other leaders to take on their roles.</p>

<p><b>All parties involved (Defining the healing path)</b></p>	<p>Each person is expected to participate in their own personal counseling with their representative during the investigation.</p> <p>The coordinator provides ongoing check-ins and pastoral care to both people.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Each person is encouraged to engage in personal counseling for the same period of time (for approximately six months).</p> <p>The coordinator provides ongoing check-ins and pastoral care to both people.</p> <p>While maintaining confidentiality to all, the coordinator makes themselves available for conversation with any other affected parties (i.e. significant others).</p>	<p>Suggested course of individual counseling or spiritual direction for each person.</p>
<p><b>Support for the supervisor of the faith community</b></p>	<p>The supervisor who received the report is told that they are not to exercise judgement on the matter nor provide direct pastoral care. Their role is solely “supervisor” and/or “employer” in this matter.</p> <p>The supervisor can lean on the bishop if need be for their own pastoral support.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>Not applicable.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Decision</b></p>	<p>The response team relays their reasons and recommendations about the validity of the complaint exclusively to the supervisor, based on the initial informational interviews, plus other information gained from counseling.</p> <p>The supervisor then makes a decision about employment, and the lay minister is either restored to or removed permanently from their current ministry position.</p> <p>If removed from ministry, the wardens and vestry of the faith community must be told, but with as few details as necessary. (Ex: any other parties involved need not be named, any details beyond “breach of SCGP policy” or “conduct unbecoming of a ministry leader / loss of trust” aren’t necessary.)</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>The response team informs the supervisor as to whether or not the six months and counseling has resulted in restoration or right relationship between the two parties and a return to healthy behavior for the lay minister.</p> <p>If no...continued ministry (whether paid or volunteer) is in question. The wardens of the faith community must be briefed (forgoing specifics) and invited into the final decision and communication.</p> <p>If yes...then the desire/appropriateness of ongoing overlapping ministry with the other party must be determined and enacted by solely the response team and the supervisor.</p>	<p>If these two individuals have established a committed relationship outside of the ministry setting after six months, then it is permissible for them to re-engage in shared ministry in a way that serves them as a couple and the community as a whole.</p> <p>The supervisor in charge may still recommend additional time away from shared ministry if he feels that would benefit all involved.</p>

<p><b>Communicating the decision to the faith community</b></p>	<p>If employment continues, the faith community should be told that this process has concluded and there were no violations of policy.</p> <p>If employment is ended, the response team, the supervisor, and the wardens and vestry together inform the faith community that <u>there was a violation of the policies</u> for Safe Church for God’s People without further details.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>If employment continues uninterrupted and there was no paid leave, no communication to the faith community is necessary.</p> <p>If employment continues after a paid leave, the faith community should be told that this process has concluded and there were no violations of policy.</p> <p>If employment is ended, the response team, the supervisor, and the wardens together inform the faith community that that this was the final recommendation, based on ongoing behavior unbecoming of a ministry leader, pursuant to this process for discerning lay concerns regarding the policies for Safe Church for God’s People. <u>Since lay concerns aren’t written into the policies themselves, it would be in correct to say there was a violation of policy.</u></p>	<p>Not applicable. The couple has become a “known couple in community” now.</p>
<p><b>Overall timeline</b></p>	<p>This process is expected to take 4-8 weeks.</p>	<p>Same as left.</p>	<p>This process is expected to take 6-12 months.</p>	<p>This process is expected to take 6-12 months.</p>

## IV. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Navigating the intersections of personal relationships, human sexuality, and the requirements of ministry is important and sensitive work. This is true for people engaged in ordained and lay ministry alike. When violations of personal boundaries within these settings happen, it is always difficult, and sometimes a tragic event. When concerns or violations are alleged in the local faith community, it may be that a well- designed, clear and transparent procedure for Church response allows the local faith community to weather the storm while providing fair and compassionate support for those involved in these very human situations. This addition to Safe Church policy and practice is meant to help those involved, and their faith communities, find a process towards health and healing for all.

- The Bishop is only involved in this process when a clergy person is implicated in a report, or if a member of the bishop's staff is implicated in a report. When the implicated person is ordained, the correct process to engage in by canon is Title IV.
- The decision is made by the local faith community in most cases, with the added response team member, since safe church policy is voted on and approved locally.
- All investigations and communications and pastoral care are made by the impartial response team members, who keeps confidentiality across all parties.
- Only if a person is being removed from ministry (paid or volunteer) do any other people need to be informed. And in that case it is only the wardens and vestry of the faith community.
- A key component of reports involving emerging relationships and/or potential sexual exploitation is ending overlapping ministry for a time. This is important because the ministry setting, regardless of whether a person is ordained or not, evokes vulnerability and power between individuals (from leader to leader, or from leader to participant). When relationships emerge exclusively from shared ministry, spiritual and physical ecstasy are easily misconstrued. People need a break from that context, and effective personal counseling, in order to truly evaluate those feelings individually. It is always possible (for clergy or for lay leaders), that a real relationship could be forming. And if that is true, it will resurface in a healthy way after counseling and time apart. At that point, re-engaging in shared ministry in a healthy way is possible, just as it is for any two adults in a committed relationship.
- These processes are pastoral, not legal. They are intended to allow lay ministers in a faith community to seek some relief from allegations of Safe Church infractions, but also to examine fitness for continued ministry. If a person has been sexually abused or assaulted, that person may always take their accusation to local law enforcement officials for legal remedy. Indeed, such may be necessary recourse in some cases. In those cases, the work of response team is now focused upon support for the clergy, the faith community, and the aggrieved and accused, while a public inquiry unfolds.
- It is possible that some of these best practices might be of use in cases involving ordained ministers. When a Title IV process is invoked, this policy might offer some helpful additional guidance.
- Since this process involves transparent communication with the ECMN Intake Officer and a response team coordinator, it is possible for relevant information to be kept confidentially. If a lay minister has gone through the discernment practices invoked by this policy subsequently becomes interested in employment elsewhere in ECMN, that faith community can make an inquiry directly to ECMN as to the fidelity of the former faith community in adhering to their responsibilities to follow this policy impartially as well as to outcome of the discernment.

## **IV. TRAINING AND COMPLIANCE**

All persons required to take the training for Safe Church for God's People (Tier 3) are required to know, understand, and abide by this policy document.

In ECMN's Policies for Protecting Children and Youth, please review the following:

- Section III titled "Training and Compliance" has a description of the Tier 3 training required for this policy.
- The grid in Appendix C outlines which types of church personnel are required to be trained under this policy. Supervisors, decision-makers, of and persons who have Pastoral Relationships must be trained three months of taking on that role.

## Appendix A: Trifold on Personal Romantic Relationships (PRRs)

### KNOW THE SIGNS OF AN UNHEALTHY PRR (that is, Personal Romantic Relationships)

**Sexual Harassment...** includes unwelcome sexual advances and requests for favors of a sexual nature or connotation. Examples include but are not limited to: repeated sexual innuendos, derogatory slurs, or off-color jokes; propositions, threats, or suggestive or insulting sounds; posters, drawings, or virtual communications of a derogatory, threatening, or sexual nature; unwanted physical contact.

**Sexual Exploitation...** is the development or attempted development of a sexual relationship between a person in any ministerial position, lay or ordained, volunteer or compensated, and an individual with whom he or she serves in a ministry relationship within the church. Examples include but are not limited to: verbal proposals of an inappropriate or sexual nature; promises of some benefit in exchange for sexual or romantic favor; inappropriate or unwanted communications, information, or photographs of a suggestive or sexual nature.

**If you believe you are experiencing sexual harassment or exploitation in the church,** contact your clergy, your local faith community's Safe Church Officer, or the Episcopal Church in Minnesota.

### WHAT IS SAFE CHURCH?

In our Baptismal Covenant, we promise to respect the dignity of every human being. Our Safe Church Policies establish and maintain standards intended to ensure that our faith communities are safe places where all of God's people are loved and encouraged to grow into the people God calls us to be.

Complete Safe Church policies can be found on the website of the Episcopal Church in Minnesota at...

<https://episcopalmn.org/safe-church>

CHURCH NAME  
ADDRESS  
ETC.

### ON DEVELOPING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN SHARED MINISTRY

### UNDERSTANDINGS AND EXPECTATIONS

A Part of  
*Safeguarding God's People:  
Policies for the Prevention of  
Sexual Exploitation and  
Harassment in the Church*

*We get it...* The community of faith can be a really good way to meet people, to make friends who share common interests, and, from time to time, maybe even to build personal and romantic relationships that could last a lifetime. And serving in a ministry together can be a great way to get to know someone well and intimately, maybe even to discover a romantic interest in someone with whom you serve. And that can be a really, really good thing.

But in some situations, it can also be an awkward thing for the people you serve when a building romantic relationship begins to outshine ministry to others. And the Church has been made painfully aware through its experiences over time that, even in volunteer ministry, potential power dynamics and differentials can cloud a couple's judgement and lead to awkward or inappropriate situations... public situations that come to light due to private matters.

That's why the church has developed policies for Safeguarding God's People, teaching ministers and ministry volunteers how to safely and appropriately relate with one another in shared ministry settings, how to recognize relationships as healthy or unhealthy, and what to do when you may be forming an intimate relationship with a person with whom you serve in ministry.

## PRR IN CHURCH MINISTRY

PRR, or Personal Romantic Relationships, in Church Ministry are governed by a set of understandings and expectations that are a part of overall Safe Church policy in the life of the faith community. We aren't looking to interfere with anyone's private life, but we do want to set the positive and necessary standards of carrying out PRR in church ministry.



### WHO:

Any person within the church who takes part as a leader in the programs and ministries of the faith community, voluntary or compensated, lay or ordained, who is building, or interested in building, a PRR with another person with whom they share in ministry.

### EXAMPLES:

Two people who serve as Confirmation leaders for the 8th grade youth group.

Two people who volunteer together at the local nursing home, caring for the elderly residents.

Two people who co-teach a Sunday morning kids class.

### WHEN:

We like each other in a PRR kind of way.  
We have been dating each other, or we want to.  
We see ourselves as a couple.

### NOW WHAT DO WE DO?...

Chat with your priest and know what the policies are.

### THE POLICIES OF THIS FAITH COMMUNITY:

Any two persons who share in ministry and who wish to explore a PRR within the church while serving in ministry together are to:

- Set a time to meet with the clergy person leading the faith community to inform her or him about your growing relationship;
- Be prepared to step away from shared ministry for a period of about 6 months while you explore and grow in your PRR. Certainly you may continue in service with the church and be a couple publicly, but best to do so in different ministries for a time to avoid potential conflicts of interest and focus or any unhelpful or unbalanced leadership dynamics that can arise from a PRR in a shared ministry.
- Be open to the guidance and pastoral counsel of the clergy, who seek your well-being as a couple and the good of the ministries of the community as a whole. Get together with the clergy from time to time, and be willing to share how things are going with you as you seek to return to shared ministry.
- After about 6 months in building your PRR, talk with the clergy about returning to shared ministry, as you feel led by the Spirit.