

Safe Church

Tier 1 – Universal Training: Resources for Faith Community Conversations

Fostering a culture of safety and inclusion for all people is a priority for all of ECMN as part of our shared Baptismal Covenant.

To this end, all faith communities are required to annually make Tier I training available to all members. Tier I training offers a broad overview of all four Safe Church Policy documents through community conversation, with attention to the issues they address regarding vulnerability, power, and healthy boundaries. From here, specific church leaders are required to go further and take more specialized training (Tiers II and III).

Each faith community is empowered to deliver Tier I content in whatever medium suits their context best. Some examples include: an adult forum PowerPoint presentation, email communications with links, a clergy or trainer-led video announcement, or all of the above. Above all, this is a moment for the leadership of your faith community to share internally about its approach and commitment to Safe Church policies and practices.

A suggested overview of content to be included in Tier I, which may be expanded upon:

From Tier II: Safe Church for God's Children

Policy: This includes the first two of the four Safe Church Policies (Children and Youth & Vulnerable Adults).

We want to create safe, positive, and healthy experiences where all people are welcomed into the unconditional, sacrificial love of God.

Setting Up Programs

- We use preventative best practices for childhood sexual abuse. Some of these are to screen and background volunteers, train them, and then monitor ongoing ministries.
- All approved ministries will be listed publicly on our website for reference.
- Any digital communication with young people will be strictly about these ministries, with ongoing pastoral care needs being shared back with parents and guardians.
- We proactively discuss emergency response plans and facility safety issues.

Program Practices & Behaviors

- We give affection and attention in appropriate ways (high fives, words of affirmation, etc.). We have established norms for community behavior that exclude things that can be indicative of grooming behaviors (wrestling, holding small children on laps, long hugs, etc.).
- A young or vulnerable person will never be alone with a leader. All ministries will have at least 2 unrelated adults who have completed Tier II training.
- We verbally establish community covenants for ministries with children and youth (example [here](#)).
- We have policies and practices ensuring inclusion for LGBTQ+ folks, people with sensory differences, and more.
- Offsite and overnight programs have more guidance for monitoring sleeping spaces, etc.

From Tier III: Safe Church for God's People

Policy: This includes the two policy documents related to harassment and exploitation, as well as the two policies related to responding to concerns in these matters for lay and ordained ministers.

Abuse, Harassment, and Exploitation

We follow all employment laws related to sexual abuse and harassment. Additionally, we seek to prevent sexual exploitation, which is the development or attempted development of a sexual relationship between a person in any ministerial position and an individual with whom he or she has a pastoral relationship (clergy or lay).

Vulnerability

Adults don't often appear to be vulnerable. However, in the community of faith we are all vulnerable under God because we come to one another with presumed spiritual need. Furthermore, times of crisis (career change, relationship change, health issues, isolation, etc.) bring us all under the definition of being a vulnerable adult. Signs of an inappropriate relationship developing with a church leader include: favoritism, afterhours personal communication, feelings of having a crush, inappropriate conversations, etc.

Guiding Principles

- Sometimes healthy romantic relationships emerge in a ministry context. When this happens, it is the policy of this faith community to recommend a six month break from shared leadership in ministry while the relationship takes root to avoid conflicts of interest. Certainly, you may continue in service with the church as a public couple thereafter (overview available [here](#)).
- Whether poor behavior is coming from leadership towards lay individuals, or from lay individuals towards church leaders, a variety of behavioral issues (bullying, verbal harassment, poor candor) can also be addressed using these policies.

What to Do

- If you or someone else is having concerns about sexual abuse, harassment, or exploitation, you can reach out for support. Connect with your priest or the Bishop's office for a confidential conversation (karen.o@episcopalmn.org).
- We have an overview of the response grid for how to respond to these situations which require a good amount of pastoral care for everyone involved (available [here](#)). An impartial response team coordinator is a key part of this process.

More information and resources about ECMN's safe church policies, training, and practices can be found at www.episcopalmn.org/safe-church.

Additional questions can be sent to the Missioner for Children, Youth, and Camp at sarah.b@episcopalmn.org.