

**ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM
POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL
ASTORIA COMMUNITY CHURCH
2022**

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1. INTRODUCTION: The purpose of this manual and our Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Prevention Program is to help protect children, youth, women and other vulnerable populations (the elderly, sick, disabled, developmentally delayed and immigrants) at Astoria Community Church. The program will include various levels of screening/background checks, clear written policies and procedures, a Code of Conduct and training (offered annually).

God's Heart for the Vulnerable

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores the cry of one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Astoria Community Church is committed to being a refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. Abuse is not a sin like any other sin. Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is powerless to stop it (see Ecclesiastes 4:1).

As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be "wise as serpents." (Matthew 10:16) We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy. Jesus spoke often about abuse using the metaphor of wolves, shepherds, and sheep. Jesus warned about "wolves in sheep's clothing" who would prey upon the vulnerable (Matthew 7:15). The Bible affirms the value and dignity of children and all who are made in God's image. God condemns abuse in all forms. Jesus calls every Christian and every church to walk in the light with him and "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding

each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Child abuse is a common reality in our world and even in churches. The data shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are sexually abused in the U.S. before they turn 18. Other forms of child abuse are also common.¹ Jesus condemned anyone who would abuse a child in the strongest possible terms: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6) Intimate partner violence, clergy abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse against adults are also common. Jesus condemned those who used their spiritual position to exploit others (e.g. Mark 12:38-40). Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what must be lived out: as much as possible to take responsibility as individuals and as an organization to prevent abuse and hold those who abuse accountable.

2. PURPOSE OF MANUAL AND PROGRAM

These procedures are designed to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct and abuse in order to:

1. Provide a safe and secure environment for our children, youth, adults, members, volunteers, visitors, and paid staff.
2. Assist ACC in evaluating a person’s suitability to supervise, oversee, and/or exert control and power over the activities of children, youth, and other vulnerable populations.
3. Satisfy the concerns of parents and other adults with a screening process for all paid staff and volunteers who work with children, youth and other vulnerable populations.
4. Provide a system to respond to alleged victims of sexual abuse and their families, as well as the alleged perpetrator.

3. DEFINITIONS

The following terms used herein are defined as follows:

1. **Paid Staff:** Any pastor, elder or employee who is paid.
2. **Children/Youth/Minor/College Student:** Any person who has not reached his/her 18th birthday and a young college student who is in ministry at ACC for the purposes of this policy.
3. **Adult:** A person who has reached his/her 18th birthday.
4. **Volunteer:** Any unpaid person engaged in or involved in activities and who is entrusted with the care and supervision of minors or other vulnerable populations (see definition below) or a person who directly oversees and/or exerts control over or oversight of minors or adults.

5. **Vulnerable Populations:** Any persons with limited power or who may be susceptible to exploitation such as children, youth, women, the elderly, the sick, the disabled, the developmentally delayed and immigrants.
6. **Abuse:** In general, abuse occurs when a person in a position of power and/or trust (e.g. pastor, elder, boss, mentor, supervisor, parent, adult, older child, etc.) uses that power to exploit or violate someone who is more vulnerable. That exploitation or violation can take a variety of forms such as emotional, financial, physical, sexual, spiritual, etc.
7. **Sexual Abuse:** When a person in a place of power and/or trust, engages in sexual behavior with a child or an adult under their supervision, authority, mentoring, or spiritual care, including:
 - a. **Sexual Penetration:** Any act or attempted act of vaginal or anal penetration, however slight, by a person's penis, finger, other body part, or an object, and/or any oral-genital contact.
 - b. **Sexual Contact:** Any intentional touching of a person's breasts, buttocks, groin, genitals, or other intimate parts. Touching may be over or under clothing and may include the touching or making the person touch, or making the person touch their own body. This also includes contact with non-sexual areas of the body for the sexual gratification of the perpetrator (such as with certain paraphilic disorders).
 - c. **Non-Contact Sexual Acts:**
 - observing a person's nudity or sexual activity or allowing a person to observe sexual activity;
 - recording, photographing, transmitting, showing, viewing, streaming, or distributing intimate or sexual images, audio recordings, or sexual information of persons;
 - exposing one's genitals or inducing a person to expose their own genitals; or
 - within a power dynamic (boss-employee, doctor-patient, teacher-student, pastor-congregant, adult-child) communicating romantic or sexual desire, interest, or sexually stimulating content toward a person

A child cannot consent to any sexual behavior with an adult or another child. An adult under the authority, care, or mentorship of a leader cannot consent to sexual activity. Even when both people are adults and the contact is not forcible, any crossing of sexual boundaries within a power structure is not an “affair” or a “relationship” but an egregious abuse of power. Adult sexual abusers often develop an emotional and spiritual connection and then exploit it. While not always recognized as a crime according to state laws, this is a serious violation and Astoria Community Church will treat it as such. If any staff person wishes to pursue a consensual relationship with someone under their spiritual care or a power hierarchy within Astoria Community Church, they must contact the Board of Elders for the sake of transparency and to discuss any appropriate boundaries given the power dynamics or other factors.

8. **Sexual Assault:** sexual contact or behavior that occurs without the consent of the victim. Sexual harassment generally violates civil laws—all have a right to work or learn without being harassed—but in many cases is not a criminal act (see more on harassment below). Sexual assault usually refers to acts that are criminal. Some forms of sexual assault include (but are not limited to): penetration of the victim's body, also known as rape, attempted rape, forcing a victim to perform sexual acts, such as oral sex or penetration of the perpetrator's body, and fondling or unwanted sexual touching.

Consent may be given through words or overt actions indicating a freely given agreement to the sexual act or contact. Silence or the absence of an explicit “no” does not equal consent. Physical submission by the victim - such as “freezing” or “fawning” - does not equal consent. Consent also implies the ability to say no in a mutual relationship: Children, adults with certain developmental disabilities, certain vulnerable adults (e.g. elderly or ill), or those within a power differential (e.g. with a religious leader, mentor, teacher, or supervisor) are unable to consent to sexual activity. Other circumstances such as intoxication or unconsciousness also render a person unable to give consent to sexual activity.^[1] Deception or manipulation of a person also renders that person unable to consent.

9. **Sexual Harassment:** The legal definition of Sexual Harassment by the US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (1980) is “Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:
- a. submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment;
 - b. submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
 - c. such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Beyond the legal definition, harassment, sexual or otherwise, can also occur in a community, conference, or event when the people involved are not employees of the church. In accord with our values, sexual harassment is not restricted to what is defined as sexual harassment under the law. Astoria Community Church considers any unwanted sexualized behavior or sexualized behavior within a power differential to be a serious form of harassment (including unwanted touch or communication, other unwanted sexual attention, or any behavior that sexually objectifies or degrades.) Other common forms of harassment include bullying and hostile or demeaning acts based on the individual’s immutable or other protected characteristics. Harassment can include aggressive acts or comments against a specific group of people based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status.¹

10. **Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence):** A pattern of behavior where a person in or who has been in an intimate relationship uses tactics of control, belittling, isolation, fear, stalking, and/or intimidation to dominate, harm, degrade, or otherwise undermine the worth and agency of the other person in the relationship. Intimate partner violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, social, or financial.^[2]
11. **Emotional Abuse:** A pattern of controlling behaviors such as shaming, insulting, degrading, intimidating, threatening, humiliating, and/or domineering. Bullying is a common term for acts that typically constitute emotional abuse. In the case of emotional abuse to children, these behaviors can

¹ [1] For more discussion on consent including state laws see <https://www.rainn.org/articles/legal-role-consent> and https://apps.rainn.org/policy/?_ga=2.24798265.200928410.1590493313-413255437.1539433206

^[2] For more information and examples an excellent resource is The Duluth Model at <https://www.theduluthmodel.org/wheels/>

cause or have a substantial likelihood of causing harm to a child's physical, psychological, social, spiritual, or moral development.

12. **Neglect** can take different forms:

- Physical: failure to provide necessary food or shelter, or lack of appropriate supervision
- Medical: failure to provide necessary medical or mental health treatment
- Educational: failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs
- Emotional: inattention to a child's emotional needs, failure to provide psychological care, or permitting the child to use alcohol or other drugs

13. **Financial Abuse:** The illegal or improper use of a vulnerable person or his/her financial resources for another's profit or advantage. Some examples of financial abuse may include: the taking of money or property; forging a signature; getting a person to sign a deed, will or power of attorney through deception; coercion or undue influence; or, illegally or improperly adding names to bank accounts or safety deposit boxes. The elderly in particular are often targeted for financial abuse.

14. **Physical Abuse:** Non-accidental physical injury (ranging from bruises to severe fractures or death) by way of bodily contact (such as slapping, punching, pushing, beating, kicking, shaking or striking with an object) or non-injurious contact with the goal or effect of intimidating, threatening, or controlling.

15. **Spiritual Abuse:** a form of emotional abuse using religion. Many acts of abuse in a religious environment will have a spiritual dimension. Examples include:

- a. Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to harm.
- b. Compelling a person to engage in religious acts against his or her will.
- c. Abuse that occurs in a religious context or by a religious leader.
- d. Invoking of divine authority to manipulate a person into meeting the needs of the abuser.
- e. Using spirituality or spiritual authority to dismiss a person's perspective, agency, or value.
- f. Attempts to use the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality to put their leadership or decisions beyond questioning or accountability.
- g. Attempts to spiritualize or justify harm using the divine, sacred texts, sacred tradition, theology, or spirituality.

16. **Stalking:** A pattern of unwanted, fixated and obsessive behavior which is intrusive and causes fear of violence, alarm, or distress. Stalking is a terrifying reality and is now recognized as a crime in all fifty states.

Examples of stalking include (from The Justice Department's Stalking Victimization Survey):

- a. Making unwanted phone calls/texts or sending unwanted messages or emails.
- b. Following or spying on the victim.
- c. Showing up or waiting at places without a legitimate reason.
- d. Leaving unwanted items, presents, or flowers.
- e. Posting information or spreading false or confidential information about a person or victim on the internet, in a public place, or by word of mouth.

17. Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC): This refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. Examples of crimes and acts that constitute CSEC include:

- child sex trafficking/the prostitution of children;
- child sex tourism involving commercial sexual activity;
- the commercial production of child pornography; and
- the online transmission of live video of a child engaged in sexual activity in exchange for anything of value.

CSEC also includes situations where a child, whether or not at the direction of any other person, is subjected to sexual exploitation in exchange for anything of value, which includes non-monetary things such as food, shelter, drugs, or protection from any person.

Depending on the specific circumstances, CSEC may also occur in the context of internet-based marriage brokering, early marriage, and children performing in sexual venues.

18. Witness of Abuse: This is when someone is a witness to abuse, even if they are not the recipient of it. This can be almost as damaging as if it happened directly to the person.

19. Social Media: Any form of electronic communication through which a user creates, utilizes, accesses, retrieves, and/or visits online communities or systems to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. Social Media is to encompass, but is not limited to, all of the following: email, texting, chat rooms, instant messaging, social networks, video messaging, online message boards, gaming systems, landline and mobile telephones, online voice communications, etc.

4. STAFF AND VOLUNTEER BACKGROUND SCREENING AND TRAINING REQUIREMENT

Who will be screened:

After an initial vetting process, the following individuals will be screened initially, rescreened every two years and/or if the person leaves and returns after more than 1 year.

- All staff
- All nursery and Sunday school teachers, volunteers, and employees
- All youth group leaders and volunteers
- All Diaconate Outreach volunteers working with children, youth, the elderly, vulnerable populations (defined as the sick, disabled, mentally challenged, immigrants)
- All Diaconate Helps volunteers serving children, youth, elderly, vulnerable populations (as defined above) (transportation, meals ministry if going into the home, any assistance given in a person's home)
- All Community Group Leaders and Hosts
- All Diaconate members
- All Elders (the Session)

- All Sunday Operations, Worship Team Volunteers and paid Musicians within ACC community (exception being paid musicians who are not apart of ACC)

Screening of Members

Astoria Community Church shall utilize the following screening tools for all members:

- The completion of a membership course including questions related to our abuse safeguarding policy and whether they have ever abused or been accused of abuse
- A commitment to the ACC Abuse Safeguarding Policy
- State sex offender registry check

Categories for Background Screening Procedures:

- A. **Leaders (paid and unpaid) in positions of power** -- Elders, Diaconate team, Nursery Workers, Sunday School teachers, Youth Group Leaders, Community Group Leaders and Hosts, Bible Club Leaders, Faith and Finances teachers and allies. **All five steps listed below are required with Level 2 Arrest/Conviction Check (exception being persons without SS#s - see ** below) Leader Application**
- B. **Leaders (paid and unpaid)** -- any persons working with money, VBC team leaders, ESL Ministry team leaders, Meals Ministry leaders, any leader of a Diaconate Partner Organization. **All five steps listed below are required with Level 1 Arrest/Conviction Check (exception being persons without SS#s - see ** below.) Leader Application**
- C. **Helps Ministry - Transportation/Rides offered.** Motor Vehicle Records must be checked and verification that they have auto insurance. **Driver Application, Simple Application, Level 1 Arrest/Conviction Check & MVR (#5 below)**
- D. **Outreach Volunteers serving in Partner Organizations** that require their own background check -- Variety Boys and Girls Club Tutoring, Safe Families for Children, Hour Children Food Pantry & Hillside Center for Education **AND Helps Ministry Volunteers and other Outreach Ministries** - Meals ministry volunteers, other Helps assistance volunteers, ESL ministry volunteers, and VBC volunteers - **Simple Application**
- E. Sunday Operations and Worship Team Volunteers and paid musicians - **Simple Application (minors allowed, see * below)**

Category	Application	Review	Reference	Interview	Background
A. Leaders (paid and unpaid) in positions of power * -- Elders, Diaconate team, Nursery Workers, Sunday School teachers, Youth Group Leaders, CG Leaders, Bible Club Leaders, Faith and Finances teachers and allies.	Membership and Leader Application	✓	✓	✓	Level 2 Arrest/Conviction Check (exception being persons without SS#s - see ** below)

B. Leaders (paid and unpaid) * -- any persons working with money (exception Hospitality Team members), VBC team leaders, ESL Ministry team leaders, Meals Ministry leaders, any leader of a Diaconate Partner Organization.	Membership and Leader Application	✓	✓	✓	Level 1 Arrest/Conviction Check (exception being persons without SS#s - see ** below.)
C. Helps Ministry - Transportation/Rides offered. Motor Vehicle Records must be checked and verification that they have auto insurance.	Driver Application, Simple Application	✓			Level 1 Arrest/Conviction Check & MVR (#5 below)
D. Outreach Volunteers serving in Partner Organizations that require their own background check -- Variety Boys and Girls Club Group Homework Help, Safe Families for Children, & Hillside Center for Education AND Helps Ministry Volunteers and other Outreach Ministries (non-partner organizations) - Meals ministry volunteers, other Helps assistance volunteers, ESL ministry volunteers, VBC volunteers, and Hour Children Food Pantry (see ** note on Minors below)	Simple Application	✓			
E. Sunday Operations, Worship Team Volunteers and paid musicians within ACC community (paid musicians who are not apart of ACC do not need to fill out the Simple Application)	Membership (certain roles) and Simple Application	✓			

5 Step Screening Process:

1. Application (Leader, Driver and/or Simple), 2 references (1 work and 1 ministry for employees, 1 pastoral and 1 volunteer supervisor for volunteers) and signed statement of truth;
2. Review all information in application paying attention to gaps;
3. Contact in writing (email) all references and follow up with phone calls if no response;
4. Conduct interview -- interview will explore a candidate's written application and include questions related to abuse, protecting the vulnerable, and the ACC's Abuse Safeguarding Policy ***;
5. Background Check:
 - a. Confirmation of education and previous employment (for employees)
 - b. Check for arrest and conviction records (Two security check levels - Level 1 and Level 2) and/or motor vehicle report, if applicable. This will include local, state and FBI criminal record check; State sex offender registry check.
 - c. An internet and social media search

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused a child or others in any way, or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual may not work with children or vulnerable adults in any capacity. If any potentially concerning information comes to light OR if the screening process shows that a candidate has ever been accused or convicted of any type of crime, ACC will consult with an expert to help assess the situation.

* For people without a SS# and recent US residents (less than a year in the US) who are seeking to serve under Categories A & B (see above), they will need to wait 2 years before applying to these volunteer roles. During those 2 years, we will require them to pursue membership and become involved in the life of the church community. However, they are able to serve in Categories D & E roles without the additional requirements.

** Minors are not allowed to volunteer with children and youth. They may volunteer with Sunday Operations/choirs, ESL, Food Pantry and VBC as long as there are 2 unrelated adults present. We require minors to fill out a simple application and provide 1-2 references.

*** It is important to use this interview to screen for individuals in denial about the existence and/or dangers of abuse. Our best protection as a church is a group of caring individuals who are not in denial about abuse and are conscientious about the boundaries of the policy.

Training Requirement:

All persons in Categories A-E will be required to attend a 4 hour Sexual Abuse Prevention training (in person initially and then recorded GRACE training). All of the ACC community, especially parents of minors, will be strongly encouraged to attend this training as well and commit to discussing healthy boundaries, sexuality and sexual abuse and misconduct with their children and youth at an age appropriate level. We will offer continuing education on an annual basis.

5. CODE OF CONDUCT - BEHAVIORAL GUIDELINES FOR THE ENTIRE ACC COMMUNITY

INTRODUCTION:

As a measure of prevention and of setting clear expectations between adults, children and youth, ACC has implemented the following Code of Conduct. Within the pretense or context of a ministry relationship, certain behaviors and situations are unacceptable. To ensure the proper monitoring of activities, especially those pertaining to youth and vulnerable adults, this *Code of Conduct* intends to establish a balance between encouraging positive and appropriate interactions and hindering inappropriate and/or potentially harmful or unsafe interactions. Establishing standards of conduct with this balance in mind assists in creating and maintaining environments where there is no opportunity for sexual misconduct or other harmful acts.

The public and private conduct of pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers, can inspire and motivate, but when the actions are inappropriate it can also scandalize and undermine the people's faith. Pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers must know that God's goodness and grace supports them in their ministry and they must also be aware of the responsibilities that come with the trust offered by those seeking their services.

Responsibility for adherence to the *Code of Conduct* is not optional and rests with the individual. However, the ACC community is responsible to reinforce these boundaries with someone who may not be adherent to them. All of us at ACC are responsible to report violations of policy or concerns to ACC's Safeguard Team, identified below. All adults performing work, ministry, or volunteer service within ACC are expected to follow these guidelines. Pastors, elders, staff, and volunteers who disregard this *Code of Conduct* or fail to act consistently with the *Code of Conduct* will be subject to corrective action by Astoria Community Church. Violations of these guidelines are a serious matter and will be investigated and resolved in accordance with the organization's policy. Corrective action may take various forms—from a verbal reproach to removal from the ministry based on the specific nature and circumstances of the offense and the extent of the harm or potential harm.

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for ACC to share certain information in order to properly respond to the matter, safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

We ask that all ACC community members who have concerns or knowledge of a policy violation and/or an abuse allegation to use discretion when discussing these incidents. Any important information pertaining to policy violations and/or an alleged abuser should be directed to the Safeguarding Team only and as soon as possible.

STANDARDS OF APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR

1. Healthy Boundaries

It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others.

Show respect in physical touch and distance:

- Appropriate touch is always welcomed by the person (If you are not sure, just ask - e.g. Can I give you a hug?)
- Notice the body language of others and be aware of your impact on others
- Be considerate of others and give them appropriate space

Show respect in your words:

- Determine to use words that convey the respect always due to others.
- Avoid any language that belittles or objectifies (e.g. commenting on a person's body or sexual attractiveness)
- Avoid sexualized comments including inappropriate jokes or stories

Show respect in agency and personal boundaries:

- Healthy people do not seek to control others, but rather encourage and empower others to take agency in their own life (e.g. making decisions for someone or taking control of an aspect of their life such as directing their finances or career or social life).
- Avoid volunteering inappropriately intimate information or asking someone to reveal intimate details or personal information when the person is not ready or comfortable doing so.
- Give agency to others: "Where would you be comfortable meeting up?"
- Always respect the "no" of others in setting personal boundaries.

The following behaviors are unacceptable by any Session Member, Staff, Leader, Member or Regular Attender at Astoria Community Church:

- Any abuse of power as defined by this policy
- Sexual harassment of any kind, including unwanted sexual attention, comments, or unwanted physical touch
- Behavior or words that intimidate or demean anyone based on age, race, sex, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, national origin, religion, language, disability, health conditions, socioeconomic status, marital status, domestic status, or parental status.
- Any words that belittle or threaten

Abusers often use charm to manipulate others. Targets of abuse often report feeling flattered and then later confused, upset, guilty, ashamed, and as if it is all their fault. Victims should know that although it is normal to feel this way, abuse is never their fault. Those in positions of power and trust are responsible and able to respect appropriate boundaries.

Abusers are often skilled at explaining away concerning behavior. Victims should document any boundary violations or other concerns and speak up as soon as possible to the Safeguarding Team. All of us should be mindful of what is happening around us and speak up to the Safeguarding Team if anyone is demonstrating concerning behavior, crossing boundaries, or violating this policy in any way. Additionally, if one witnesses behavior that is prohibited by this Code of Conduct, if comfortable, one should immediately stop the behavior and/or protect the person being harmed.

2. **Conduct With Children & Youth** - The entire ACC community including staff and volunteers who interact with children and youth shall maintain an open, transparent, respectful and trustworthy relationship.
- A. Any adult at ACC must never be alone with a minor who is not their own child. ACC will always use a team approach to managing youth activities. The following exceptions apply to the Youth Group ministry only. In the event that a youth requests to meet one on one with a Youth Ministry staff or volunteer about a personal matter, the best option is to invite a 2nd leader to be present for the meeting. If there is a valid reason for a one on one meeting, the leader must let the Senior Pastor or the Youth Ministry Coordinator know when and where the meeting will take place. The meeting should take place in a public setting or if at the office, the door and curtains to the office should remain open and another staff or volunteer should be present in the adjacent office.
 - B. All adults should respect children's/youth's right not to be touched or looked at in ways which make them feel uncomfortable, and their right to say no. Physical contact should never occur in private. Except in emergencies, physical contact between adults and minors in professional relationships should be initiated by the minor. Adults should not generally initiate physical contact other than an occasional congratulatory pat on the upper back, hand shake, or "high five" for example.
 - C. Staff and Volunteers shall not possess or use drugs at any time and shall not use alcohol when working with youth. ACC has a "No Tolerance" policy regarding the use or possession of non-prescription drugs/substances (including tobacco and marijuana) and the use of alcohol when working with youth. Anyone found to be using or in possession of non-prescription drugs/substances, will be terminated. Anyone using alcohol when working with youth will be subject to disciplinary action including possible termination. If a staff or volunteer becomes addicted to a controlled substance, prescription medicine, we ask that they report this to their supervisor and commit to getting help with their addiction.
 - D. Staff and Volunteers should not allow an individual child or youth to visit or stay overnight in private apartments or homes, hotel rooms or any other place when no other adult is present. In rare, emergency situations, when accommodation is necessary for the health and well-being of the child or youth, the staff or volunteer should take extraordinary care to protect all parties from the appearance of impropriety and from all risk of harm. This includes assuring that more than one adult is present. No single minor will stay with an adult who is not their own parent or guardian.
3. **Sexual Conduct** - Any adult at ACC interacting with children and youth must not exploit the trust placed in them by ACC for any purpose, and particularly not for sexual gain or intimacy.
- A. Staff and volunteers must never develop intimate relationships with minors, including online relationships, and should avoid developing inappropriately intimate relationships with other staff or volunteers. Staff and volunteers must act in a professional manner and be an example of Christian chastity at all times.
 - B. No staff or volunteer may exploit another person for sexual purposes.
 - C. Allegations of sexual misconduct should be taken seriously and reported to civil authorities when the situation involves a minor and to the Safeguard Team and Response Teams.

- D. Staff and volunteers should review and know New York State's regulations and reporting requirements and follow these mandates. However, it is important that all adults report child abuse regardless of whether they are a mandated reporter or not. All Christians have a moral obligation to speak up for children.
4. **Harassment** - Any adult at ACC must not engage in physical, psychological, written, or verbal harassment of staff, volunteers, or ACC members and attendees and must not tolerate such harassment by other staff, volunteers or ACC members and attendees.
- A. Teaching Elders (Pastors), Staff, Ruling Elders, Diaconate members, and other Volunteers shall provide a professional work environment that is free from physical, psychological, written, or verbal intimidation or harassment.
 - B. Harassment encompasses a broad range of physical, written, or verbal behavior, including without limitation the following: Physical or mental abuse, racial insults, derogatory ethnic slurs, persecution based on religious beliefs or practices, disparaging remarks and treatment because of disability, provoking bullying and ridicule as a result of illegal disclosure of medical information, unwelcome sexual advances or touching, sexual comments or sexual jokes, requests for sexual favors used as: a condition of employment, or a condition for favorable personnel decisions, such as promotion or compensation, or an agreement to provide or continue professional counseling or pastoral services, and display of offensive materials.
 - C. Harassment can be a severe incident or a persistent pattern of behavior where the purpose or the effect is to create a hostile, offensive, or intimidating work or professional environment.
 - D. Allegations of harassment will be taken seriously and reported immediately to the SafeguardTeam. ACC's policies and procedures will be followed to seek justice and to protect the rights of all involved.
5. **Electronic Communication** - All decisions related to electronic communication with minors must be made by a supervisor. "Electronic communication" includes all aspects of social media as defined in the "Definitions" portion of this document.
- A. Any communications to minors (middle and high school aged) must have parents or guardians copied in as well. Elementary school aged children should never be contacted directly.
 - B. Electronic communication should be brief and on topic using language appropriate for communicating with the minor and his or her parent or guardian. Additionally, all communication must conform to the ACC's Policies and Procedure Manual and training. Communication that disregards or violates the *Code of Conduct* standards in any way will not be tolerated regardless of the medium used for conveyance.
 - C. Except in an emergency, all communication (including electronic) between professional staff and volunteers and any minor should take place between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. including posting to websites and social networking sites.
 - D. Appropriate boundaries that must be respected in face-to-face or verbal communication also apply to any electronic communications with minors or adults.
 - E. The following guidelines apply to specific forms of electronic communication:
 - a. Cell phones, texts, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and other Messaging services:
 - i. Except in case of an emergency, staff and volunteers will not call or text minors

directly (on the minor's cell phone) and will instead contact parents or call family phones.

- ii. Staff and volunteers will not communicate with minors by text or other electronic messaging service unless the parent or guardian is also on the group text.

b. Email

- i. Youth and Children's Ministry staff will use their ACC email accounts for all communications with parents and youth. If youth ministry volunteers want to communicate with youth (6th - 12th grade) via email, they should discuss this first with the Youth Ministry Coordinator.
- ii. Except in exceptional circumstances, staff and volunteers must copy parents or guardians on all email communications. If copying parents or guardians is not possible or not recommended, copy a supervisor or administrator. In the case of elementary school children, only email parents.
- iii. Staff and volunteers may not add any minor to personal email lists. When copying minors on approved communications, blind copy options must be used.
- iv. If, at any time, staff and volunteers receive an inappropriate personal communication from anyone participating in or affiliated with the ACC, the individual should maintain an electronic copy, print a hard copy, and notify a supervisor immediately.

c. Social Networking Sites

- i. Staff and volunteers should not use personal social networking sites to contact minors. ACC can create a group or agency page strictly for agency related communications. These accounts must be approved in advance by the appropriate staff, registered with ACC, and labeled to reflect their official nature. More than one individual must have oversight over the content and internal messaging, although passwords and administrative authority for such pages should be limited to the pastor or agency administrator or their designee.
- ii. No personal contact information should be provided in profiles or the accounts used on behalf of the representative of ACC.
- iii. Only official email addresses, office phone numbers, and job titles may be used.
- iv. All accounts should be set to maximize privacy. ACC may publicize their presence on social media. However, no effort should be made to seek out minors as participants on the sites.
- v. Staff and volunteers should ignore "friend requests" from minors that are addressed to the adult's personal social media account/application.
- vi. No pictures may be posted without written permission for all those appearing in the photo (for minors, this would be the parent or guardian), and persons may not be tagged or identified in a photo.
- vii. Staff and volunteers shall comment only on services or ministry-related threads from the ministry-related account.
- viii. Staff and volunteers may not use instant messaging programs on social networking sites to communicate with minors, unless the material is recorded

- and kept on file, and reviewed by a supervisor.
- ix. Supervisors and/or their designees should monitor sponsored sites. Inappropriate posts should be promptly removed/deleted.
- x. Monitoring responsibility also applies to any unofficial site created by third parties about the program or services. If inappropriate content is present, monitors should report the pages/groups/users to the hosting site and ask that the site be removed. This includes but is not limited to unauthorized use of logos, bullying, harassment, or defamatory language.

6. **Policy on Known Child Sex Offenders** - ACC is committed to holding admitted or convicted offenders we believe are repentant to a high standard of accountability. Known offenders who demonstrate evidence that they are not repentant are extremely dangerous and are not welcome in our church. Jesus welcomed sinners, but he did not command us to welcome wolves among the sheep. Known offenders who wish to have any connection to our church must be willing to undergo a process designed to assess their individual situation, ongoing repentance, and what safeguards are appropriate. Offenders must agree to accept whatever accountability and safeguards our leadership, in consultation with child protection experts, deem appropriate. Offenders must be willing to agree to this before the process of assessment begins. No assessment will begin if the victim(s) of the perpetrator are still in our church as any victim should be free to worship without their perpetrator present.

If a convicted offender asks to join our community, we will contact our GRACE Safeguarding Specialist to assist with the assessment of the situation. Similarly, if an individual was in the past credibly accused of child sexual abuse or any form of child maltreatment, but was not or has not yet been convicted, we will contact our GRACE Safeguarding Specialist on how to best proceed.

Leaders will use the following process:

1. Interview with the Known Offender
2. Interview with other Relevant Parties (e.g. family, treatment provider, counselor, parole officer, etc.)
3. Acquiring Records relating to the Offender
4. Assessing Repentance in Consultation with Experts
5. [If applicable]: Setting Level of Participation, Accountability, and Safeguarding Requirements (Including listening to any known survivors about the impact in their life, and accountability on and off church property).

Leaders will consult with experts as needed throughout this process to ask appropriate questions and assess them.

No one who is convicted of or who has admitted to abusing a child may participate in any of the children, youth or vulnerable persons, may work with children or vulnerable persons in the ministry of our church, will have any access to children in our church (on or off church property), or hold any position of power or trust, even if it is not directly connected to ministry to children. Any offender who evidences deception, minimization, excuses, victim blaming, or other indicators they are not repentant shall not be allowed any connection to our church. Unrepentant offenders are not welcome.

Any adult who is a convicted or admitted child sex offender who attends group activities shall agree to have their name known to the congregation and shall abide by all accountability and safeguards. They can only attend one predetermined service each week. They must report in and be assigned to an escort who will accompany him or her at all times while at the service and church building. Any adult offender who is known or believed to be attracted to children or fantasizes about children will not attend in any settings with children.

The safeguards shall address accountability on and off church property and will involve communication with appropriate persons such as family, friends, employers, counselors, and parole/probation officers. The safeguards shall be reviewed as needed, and at a minimum every year by leadership and the Safety Team, and in consultation with child protection experts.

When a known offender is judged to be repentant and has some connection to the church, those who have responsibility to minister to him or her will have specific training.

7. Conflicts of Interest - The entire ACC Community should avoid situations that might present a conflict of interest. Even the appearance of a conflict of interest can call integrity and professional conduct into question.

- A. Anyone in the ACC Community shall disclose all relevant factors that potentially could create a conflict of interest.
- B. Anyone in the ACC Community should inform all parties when a real or potential conflict of interest arises. Resolution of the issues must protect the person receiving ministry services.
 - a. No one should take advantage of anyone to whom they are providing services in order to further their personal, religious, political, or business interests.
 - b. Pastoral counselors should not provide professional paid counseling services to anyone with whom they have a business, professional, or social relationship. When this is unavoidable, the client must be protected. The counselor must establish and maintain clear, appropriate boundaries.
 - c. When pastoral counseling services are provided to two or more people who have a relationship with each other, the Pastoral Counselor must:
 - i. Clarify with all parties the nature of each relationship;
 - ii. Anticipate any conflict of interest;
 - iii. Take appropriate actions to eliminate the conflict; and
 - iv. Obtain from all parties written consent to continue services.
 - v. Provide documentation of these conversations to the appropriate supervisor.
- C. Conflicts of interest may also arise when a Pastoral Counselor's independent judgment is impaired by (a) prior dealings, (b) becoming personally involved, or (c) becoming an advocate

for one (person) against another. In these circumstances, the Pastoral Counselor shall advise the parties that he or she can no longer provide services and refer them to another Pastoral Counselor or to an ACC supervisor for reassignment.

- 8. Staff or Volunteer Wellbeing** - Staff and Volunteers have the duty to be responsible for their own spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional health.
- A. Pastors, Staff and Volunteers should be aware of warning signs that indicate potential problems with their own spiritual, physical, mental, and/or emotional health.
 - B. Pastors, Staff and Volunteers should seek help immediately whenever they notice behavioral or emotional warning signs in their own professional and/or personal life.
 - C. Pastors, Staff and Volunteers must address their own spiritual needs. Support from another pastor or spiritual mentor/supportive friend is highly recommended.
 - D. Inappropriate or illegal use of alcohol and drugs is prohibited.

6. MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR SUPERVISION AND MONITORING

All adults at ACC must monitor their own behavior and the behavior of all others at ACC to prevent, recognize, and respond to risky, inappropriate, and harmful behaviors and to reinforce, acknowledge, and appreciate appropriate behavior.

All adults at ACC should continuously observe interactions between adults and youth, and youth and other youth, at ACC and react appropriately.

Staff and Volunteers shall initially all go through ACC's Child Abuse Prevention training and attend annual continuing education training on an annual basis. They will learn the behavior warning signs of potentially risky adults. It shall be the responsibility of all adults to maintain a "healthy suspicion" of all adults in the ACC environment and to watch for the potentially risky grooming behaviors identified in the training.

Staff and Volunteers should be clear about the established policies and procedures for ACC as set out in this manual and be able to identify any actions in violation of these boundaries. Staff and Volunteers should pay particular attention to adults who show favoritism, giving gifts, setting up unsupervised or unscheduled time along with a young person, or any other sign of possible grooming activity.

ACC takes all policy violations and all concerns related to respect and safety seriously. Any person who witnesses or learns of a violation of this policy is encouraged to inform a member of the Safeguarding Team (see below for description) as soon as possible. Furthermore, any concerns related to vulnerable persons should be brought to the attention of a member of the Safeguarding Team. The Safeguarding Team shall document all concerns or policy violations and collaborate on any appropriate response and accountability. See Section 7 below for more details on responding to policy violations and allegations.

1. Teams

- **Safeguard Team**
 - The Safeguarding Team is responsible for equipping the community of Astoria Community Church for effective prevention and response. The team consists of 4-6 ACC members including men and women serving two-year terms with an option to serve another 1 or 2 terms. The initial team will have staggered terms.
 - Duties of the Safeguarding Team:
 - Implement and oversee compliance with the ACC Abuse Safeguarding Policy
 - Maintain rigorous familiarity with the ACC Abuse Safeguarding Policy
 - Brief all staff, volunteers, and members on the application of the policy on a regular basis
 - Assure that all new staff, officers, volunteers (required), members and regular attenders (encouraged) attend an abuse prevention training (recorded GRACE training).
 - Assure that all staff, officers, volunteers and members receive annual continuing education on abuse and harassment issues from outside experts and regular internal briefings on our policy.
 - Collect the appropriate data to ensure the effectiveness of our policies and procedures. Data points may include:
 - Random checks to see that there are always two adults with children in a room
 - Data of all the people who have taken the safety training and when it is their time to renew their training
 - How often a child goes to the restroom unaccompanied
 - Ensure that the adult to children ratio is always maintained at ACC sanctioned events
 - Receive, Document, and Respond to any policy violations or concerning behavior
 - Lead in responding to any allegations of abuse (see below)
 - Conduct or coordinate screening of pastors, officers, staff, and volunteers.
 - Complete continuing education from a qualified organization on an annual basis
 - Responsible for appointing members to the Policy and Procedure Team and overseeing their work.
- **The Policy and Procedure Team**
 - This team aims to be experts of ACC Policy and Procedure. They make sure that all the rules and procedures are being followed by the other teams.
 - This team is to have 3 members, serving 3-year terms with an option to serve another 1 or 2 terms. Initial team will have staggered terms. .
 - This team works closely with the Safeguard team to ensure that the policies and procedures are being taught, used, and applied correctly.
- **The Audit Team (GRACE)**

- The Audit Team is an independent organization that evaluates the effectiveness of the safety policy and procedures of Astoria Community Church.
- There should be a line item in the budget every year to pay for this audit.
- Session
 - The Session consists of Ruling Elders and Teaching Elders that have spiritual oversight of the church. They are the ecclesiastical decision makers of Astoria Community Church
 - This team will also handle communication with the larger congregation and assure that the congregation is cared for as well.

2. Policy and Procedure Enforcing on Sundays:

- a. Ensure that children/youth are not in vulnerable situations from 9:00am - 1:00pm on Sundays at the synagogue. There must always be two staff/volunteers with children or youth at all times. For nursery, the ratio of adults to babies/toddlers must be 1 to 3.
- b. A hall monitor will be located on the 2nd floor (9-2PM) - only parents, children, youth, staff, and volunteers can enter.
- c. Parents must clarify if there is anyone who is NOT to pick up their child.
- d. All doors open with appropriate gates installed.
- e. No child under 11 may go to the upstairs or downstairs bathrooms without parent supervision. Exception being when an approved minor under 11 is coming to church (example Bible Club kids) without their parents present. They should have assigned 2-3 adults that they know and can ask to take them to the upstairs bathroom (not the downstairs bathrooms). The adult will check to make sure the bathroom is empty and then stand outside in full view in the hallway. There will always be a hall monitor present.
- f. All visits to the bathroom on the 2nd floor must be with a parent. No nursery or children's church staff/volunteers are allowed to accompany a child to the bathroom. A volunteer "runner" will be present to physically find the parent if the parent does not respond to a text from the staff or volunteer.
- g. The Safeguard Team will periodically inspect the nursery room, classrooms and other areas where children and adults are together. They will also check bathrooms, closets and other areas where sexual abuse might occur. A checklist will be followed to ensure policies are being implemented.
- h. The Safeguard Team will regularly inspect the nursery to assure that staff are acting consistently every time (drop off and pick up policy; not changing diapers or taking toddlers to the bathroom etc.)
- i. Nursery workers are to remain inside the room at all times.
- j. There will be clear signage and expectations of where children/youth and adults are allowed and not allowed to be while on the grounds of the Synagogue (such as secluded areas, corners, closets or unused, unlocked rooms.) The Safeguarding Team will regularly inspect these areas of the Synagogue.

3. Policy and Procedure Enforcing at Office, in vehicles, other sites and at outside events:

- a. Ensure that youth are not in vulnerable situations at Youth Group meetings at the Church office

- b. One youth at a time in office bathroom
- c. The Safeguard Team will periodically inspect offices and other areas where children and adults are together. They will also check bathrooms, closets, recycling and trash room and other areas where sexual abuse might occur. A checklist will be followed to ensure policies are being implemented.
- d. Any meetings with youth outside of Youth Group must have at least 2 Youth Group leaders present and must follow the same ratio guidelines as in 3e. See exceptions above “Standards of Appropriate Behavior”, Section 2A.
- e. At any sleepover event, if ratios cannot be met, the event will be cancelled. (1-8 male youths require 2 male adults; 9-12 male youths require 3 male adults; 13-16 male youths require 4 male adults and 1-8 female youths require 2 female adults; 9-12 female youths require 3 female adults; 13-16 female youths require 4 female adults) Same ratio as above for sleeping arrangements. Male and female sleeping quarters will be distinctly separate. No phones are allowed in the bedrooms, restrooms or changing/showering areas. These boundaries will be shared with the youth prior to retreat and on the first day of retreat. A buddy system will be instituted so that no youth is ever alone.
- f. Outside Events (such as Vacation Bible Club, Prayer Tent at Street Fairs, Church picnics): all conduct is to be in line with this policy.

4. Profile of a Predator and/or Risky Adult: Offenders will always adapt their tactics so that no list will ever fully prepare us for someone we know and trust to act in a way that seeks to manipulate others in such a calculated way. Therefore, the below list is not exhaustive.

- a. Majority are known by the children/youth they abuse (90%)
- b. All have thoughts about being sexual with children, and act on those thoughts
- c. All actively seek access to children and the opportunity to be alone with them
- d. All genders (88% are male; 9% are female; 3% are unknown)*
- e. All ages (including kids, teens and seniors)
- f. All socioeconomic groups (wealthy, middle class & disadvantaged)
- g. All races & ethnicities
- h. Diverse occupations
- i. Use the Affection Lure offline and online
- j. 20% of child sexual abuse occurs with children under 5 years of age; 50% with kids between 5-12 years old; and 30% occurs with teens between 13-17 years of age.
- k. Most child molesters are expert at getting children and families to trust them. Many target their victims and attempt to involve themselves in the child's life, including their family, school, house of worship, sports, and hobbies. They are often the first to offer to babysit or drive your child to activities. Child molesters will smile at you, look you right in the eye and make you believe they are trustworthy.
- l. Common grooming strategies include:
 - Befriending parents, particularly single parents, to gain access to their children.
 - Offering babysitting services to busy parents or guardians.
 - Taking jobs and participating in community events that involve children.
 - Becoming a guardian or foster parent.
 - Attending sporting events for children.
 - Offering to coach children's sports.

- Volunteering in youth organizations.
- Offering to chaperone overnight trips.
- Loitering in places children frequent - playgrounds, parks, malls, game arcades, sports fields, etc.
- Befriending youngsters on social media (Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) and online gaming platforms.

*Based on substantiated reports of child sexual abuse.

5. Detecting Sexual Abuse:

Most cases of sexual abuse go undetected. There might be no apparent physical signs, or there might be physical signs detected only by medical examination. The cases that are reported are generally reported by abused children to their parents, siblings or other “caretakers” -- often in the form of casual remarks that lead the listener to query deeper. But most children say nothing. They might not realize that what was done to them was wrong or not even have the language for what has happened or is happening to them. They might be too embarrassed or frightened to speak up. Or, the offender may have threatened further harm if they tell. Often, the offender blames the victim for what he/she has done. And the victim might not want to get the offender in trouble -- especially if a “friendship” has developed between the offender and victim.

In some cases, there are “telltale” physical or emotional signs that may evoke suspicion.

Physical indicators:

- Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Torn, stained or bloody underclothing.
- Pain or itching in the genital area.
- Bruises or bleeding in external genitalia, vaginal or anal areas.
- Sexually transmitted illnesses.
- Pregnancy

Behavioral indicators:

- Unwilling to change for gym or participate in physical education class
- Withdrawal, fantasy or infantile behavior
- Bizarre, sophisticated or unusual sexual behavior or knowledge
- Poor peer relationships
- Delinquency or running away

We must use caution as these signs can be indicative of other problems, and are not exclusively tied to sexual abuse. But the repeated occurrence of an indicator, or the presence of several indicators, warrants further investigation. When there are a few signs or behavioral indicators or concerns that coincide, a report of abuse should be made based on “reasonable suspicion.” If a child or youth reports being sexually assaulted by a caretaker and/or discloses any form of abuse, this must be reported to the local authorities no matter how unconvincing or even if it is recanted (these are actually common disclosure behaviors). At a minimum, a call to a local child advocacy center should be placed to talk with someone with training about the concerns.

The above section is taken from Church Mutual's *Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse* pamphlet and *The Educator's Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* paper from The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/educator.pdf>

7. RESPONSE PROCEDURE FOR ACCUSATION OF SEXUAL ABUSE

All ACC adults have a responsibility to monitor their behavior and that of other adults, ACC staff and volunteers and a duty to report ethical or professional misconduct, inappropriate or harmful behavior, potentially risky situations, and potential boundary violations by anyone. All allegations, disclosures, evidence, or reasonable suspicion of child abuse are first to be reported to the civil authorities, before any internal reporting and response.

Pastors, staff, and volunteers must hold each other accountable for maintaining the highest ethical and professional standards. When there is an indication of illegal actions by pastors, staff, or volunteers, ACC will respond promptly to investigate any accusation of sexual abuse. All accusations of sexual abuse will be taken seriously.

When an uncertainty exists about whether a situation or course of conduct violates this policy or other religious, moral or ethical principles, the pastor, staff or volunteer will consult with the Safeguard Team (see below.)

Responding to Abuse and Harassment

ACC is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any allegations or findings of abuse or harassment within our church. We will work to create an environment where anyone feels comfortable raising questions and concerns, coming forward with reports of any misconduct, and being proactive about preventing and responding to abuse. In responding to abuse, ACC will always prioritize the safety and needs of the victim(s) and other vulnerable persons.

Immediate Response Protocols

1. When there is a reasonable belief that any person is in immediate danger (e.g. an act of violence is actively happening or has just occurred), call 911.
1. If there is a disclosure of abuse, any evidence or knowledge of abuse, or any reasonable belief of abuse against a minor (age 17 or younger) or vulnerable adult (e.g. elder abuse or involving abuse against a person with a developmental disability), all persons within ACC must immediately report to the local authorities or ACS (Administration of Children's Services) and cooperate fully. DO NOT try to investigate the matter. Any delay in reporting could result in a loss of critical evidence, potentially be a violation of the law, and worst of all, enable the continued abuse of vulnerable children. After the report, contact a member of the Safeguarding Team. If the victim is now an adult, but the abuse was against them as a minor, we will support them and respect their agency in reporting. The only exceptions are if the abuse occurred within our church, or we know the name of the perpetrator and the jurisdiction in which it would be reported.
2. If there is a disclosure, any evidence or knowledge, or any reasonable belief of abuse or harassment against an adult, all persons within ACC must immediately report to a member of the Safeguarding

Team. The Safeguarding Team member shall report immediately to the entire team (except a member or partner of a member involved in any allegation). If the misconduct allegations involve the Safeguarding Team, the report may go to any other member of the ACC Session.

3. The Safeguarding Team shall respect the agency of the adult victim(s) in reporting any and all suspected crimes to the appropriate authorities. The decision to report adult abuse is ultimately up to the adult victim(s). However, the Safeguarding Team should work to encourage and support the victim(s) in every possible way. The Safeguarding Team shall also consult with national or local experts and the victim to make a safety plan when there is any potential reason to believe the victim or others at ACC may still be in danger (e.g. in cases involving domestic violence, stalking, assault, or threats).
4. If the alleged offender is within ACC, upon notification from the Safeguarding Team, the Session shall immediately suspend or terminate the alleged offender from any church position he or she may hold and ask the person not to attend ACC until the completion of any investigations and/or ACC has sufficient information to make a determination concerning any personnel decisions and/or other consequences. ACC will assign a liaison to maintain contact with the alleged perpetrator. This type of situation may also call for implementing a Limited Access Agreement. Ultimately, when considering how to handle an alleged offender who attends the same church as the alleged victim, ACC may need to reach out to the GRACE Certification Specialist or a similar expert for guidance. The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate any immediate steps required for the protection of the vulnerable and inform the ACC Session.
5. This team will work in close communication with the Session and the Diaconate. They also may need to reach out to legal representation if needed. They will develop a communication plan for the church and, as appropriate, the neighborhood. They will also notify the church's insurance company after a report has been made to the authorities.

Further Response Protocols

Whenever possible, the Safeguarding Team should refer the victim(s) to local expert help (where available) and/or national organizations such as The National Domestic Violence Hotline (1-800-799-SAFE), The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673), or SAMHSA's National Helpline (1-800-662-HELP). With the family's consent, they will reach out to pre-picked counselors to help the abused. As needed, with the family's consent, they will also reach out to Diaconate and work closely with them to care for the family.

Any victim has a right for their privacy to be respected as much as possible. At times, it may be necessary for ACC to share certain information in order to respond appropriately, safeguard other vulnerable persons and allow for any other potential victims to come forward.

The Safeguarding Team shall coordinate further appropriate response including but not limited to:

- Ensuring all potential crimes against children have been reported to appropriate authorities according to the policy above
- Taking any further action for the protection of vulnerable persons
- Facilitating cooperation with any investigations including helping investigators assess the possibility of other victims and communicating in appropriate ways within the church or with others

- Ongoing, appropriate care for the victim(s) including helping them connect with professional trauma informed care if desired
- When appropriate, with careful attention to protecting the privacy of any victims, offering public support and/or opposing harmful narratives toward victims
- Maintaining contact with the alleged offender during any investigations or administrative leave to ensure proper boundaries and accountability, especially with regard to controlling the narrative, retaliation, and access to other vulnerable people
- Caring for others in the church and coordinating with outside resources as needed
- Documenting relevant actions and information related to the case
- Reaching out to qualified experts when an Independent Investigation is appropriate

Independent Consultation and Investigation

There are several scenarios when it is strongly advisable that ACC pursue an independent consultation or investigation in response to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as:

1. Authorities decline to investigate a report of abuse even though there is evidence of wrongdoing.
2. An adult victim is not ready to report allegations of a criminal nature to the authorities.
3. The alleged offender is not charged with criminal wrongdoing by the authorities after an investigation, but sufficient concerns remain whether the alleged offender engaged in wrongful conduct that may disqualify him/her from continued participation in the organization.
4. There is a serious pattern of misconduct denied by the alleged perpetrator.
5. The alleged offender is a member of executive leadership or the Safeguarding Team.
6. The alleged victim(s) requests an investigation or there is a strong belief that there may be other victims.
7. The organization wants to investigate and assess how it responded to the allegations of abuse in order to better understand how it could have responded more effectively and to improve for the future.

The Safeguarding Team will make a recommendation to the Session regarding the wisdom of an independent consultation or investigation. When the Session declines to engage an independent consultation or investigation, they, along with the Safeguarding Team, shall document all related information along with an account of their decision. The documentation shall be made known and available within the church for the sake of transparency while protecting the privacy of any potential victims.

When the Session decides to engage in an independent investigation, it must be conducted by an organization or persons completely independent of ACC and experienced in investigating cases of the specific form(s) of abuse or misconduct in view. The organization or persons should utilize a multidisciplinary team of trained investigators (examples can include current or past law enforcement officers, prosecutors, and/or mental health experts) who are trained in best practice investigative standards, have significant experience investigating a wide range of misconduct and/or abuse cases, and utilize trauma-informed practices in their investigations.

Upon completion of an investigation, the independent investigating body will deliver to the Session a report that will consist of its investigative findings, analysis, and recommendations. Any personnel decisions will be made in view of the recommendations of the report, by the Session, according to the values and employment practices of our organization and in communication with the Safeguarding Team.

Those who use any position of power to abuse as defined by this policy shall never again serve in any formal role within ACC.

Retaliation

ACC prohibits any form of retaliation against any individual or group who are involved in any protected activity in this policy, such as reporting concerns or potential evidence, or cooperating in a criminal or independent investigation. Retaliation can take many forms, including, but not limited to, shunning, violence, threats, or intimidation that would discourage some persons from engaging in activity required or encouraged by this policy. Actions in response to a good faith report or response under this policy are considered retaliatory if they could reasonably have an adverse effect on the wellbeing of an individual or if they impact their ability to fully participate in church activities, including compliance with this policy. Reports, concerns, or questions about retaliation should be immediately reported to the Safeguarding Team or a member of the Session. All individuals and groups of individuals engaging in retaliation will be held accountable under this policy.

8. CARING FOR SURVIVORS

Survivors should have agency over sharing their story. When survivors choose to do so, they need our utmost support.

This support will include:

- Listening and staying calm
- Affirming without judgment
- Validating strong emotions (such as anger, betrayal, and confusion)
- Respecting their privacy
- Encouraging and empowering their agency
- Encouraging them to seek professional medical or mental health care as appropriate

Our support will recognize our limitations and will not offer therapeutic, legal, or other professional advice, but will focus on personal support and empowerment.

We will be careful to avoid causing further harm, and under no circumstances - even when the abuse is alleged and not proven - will we:

- Place any portion of blame for the abuse on the victim
- Probe for intimate details of the abuse
- Express disbelief
- Attempt to silence the victim
- Encourage noncompliance with the law
- Express support for the perpetrator
- Urge reconciliation with or forgiveness of the perpetrator

Receiving an adult's abuse disclosure is an honor, not a burden; it is a sign of trust. Survivors often choose to disclose their abuse years, even decades, after it occurred. ACC encourages anyone receiving an adult's abuse disclosure to be guided by the following responses:

DO Say

Thank you for telling me.

I believe you.

I'm so sorry for what
you're going
through. How can I
help?

Take as much time as you need.

I am here.

*The following should only be said if the
victim indicates these concerns are on
his/her mind.*

It is okay to be angry.

It's understandable you're feeling that
way.

Your reaction is not an uncommon
response.

You're not going crazy. These are normal
responses following abuse.

It wasn't your fault.

DON'T Say

Why are you telling me this?

Why didn't you _____
(run/scream/stop him etc.)

What do you mean when you say he
abused you? What exactly did he do?

You need to forgive and move on.

It'll take some time, but you'll get over
it.

It was so long ago, why are you still
letting your abuser win by hanging on to
it? Let it go.

Try to be strong.

Out of tragedies good things happen.

You're lucky that _____ didn't
happen.

I know how you feel.

Perhaps you misunderstood...

9. GENERAL STATEMENT OF INTENT

I will:

- Treat everyone with respect, loyalty, patience, integrity, courtesy, dignity, and consideration.
- Avoid situations of isolation or being alone with children and/or youth at all ACC activities.
- Use positive reinforcement with children/youth rather than criticism, competition, or comparison.
- Refuse to accept expensive gifts from children and/or youth or their parents without prior written approval from a supervisor.
- Refrain from giving gifts to children and/or youth without prior written approval from the parents or guardian and a supervisor.
- Report suspected abuse to the proper contact within ACC (Pastors) and Administration of Children's Services (ACS). While not all individuals are legally mandated to report, all are morally obligated as Christians to report child abuse or abuse against vulnerable adults.
- Cooperate fully in any investigation of abuse of children and/or youth.
- Comply with the behavioral standards in the Code of Conduct.

I will not:

- Smoke or use tobacco products in the presence of children and/or youth.
- Be under the influence of alcohol while in my role for ACC.
- Use, possess, or be under the influence of any non-prescription drugs or substances at any time.
- Pose any health risk to children and/or youth (i.e., no fevers or other contagious illnesses)
- Strike, spank, shake, humiliate, ridicule, threaten, degrade or use discipline that frightens or humiliates minors.
- Touch a child and/or youth in a sexual or other inappropriate manner.
- Use profanity in the presence of children and/or youth.
- Connect with children and/or youth electronically, including social media, without advance approval from a supervisor.

10. SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AND ABUSE PREVENTION PROGRAM POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL - ACKNOWLEDGMENT

These policies and procedures have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors and other vulnerable populations. The following is the official receipt denoting that the individual whose signature appears below has read and understands the guidelines contained in this manual. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. ACC reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with ACC or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received, read and understand ACC's Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Prevention Program Policy and Procedure Manual. I intend to follow these guidelines and to monitor and protect children, youth and

vulnerable adults in my service at ACC. I understand that any action inconsistent with this manual or failure to take action mandated by this manual may result in my removal as an employee or volunteer. I understand that these policies and procedures are the property of ACC.

Full Legal Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

Sources:

National Catholic Services (National Catholic) and Virtus, *Model Code of Conduct for Priests, Deacons, Pastoral Ministers, Administrators, Employees, and Volunteers (Code of Conduct)*

Church Mutual's *Safety Tips on a Sensitive Subject: Child Sexual Abuse* pamphlet and *The Educator's Role in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* paper from The National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/educator.pdf>

Various sample policies from GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)