

Community Church of Sebastopol
Safe Church Policy
Adopted by the Council on April 5, 2017

In adopting this policy, Community Church of Sebastopol seeks to establish norms and guidelines that will make our congregation a safe space for all, especially those who are most vulnerable in our congregation.

The Community Church of Sebastopol is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all children, youth, adults, staff, and volunteers who participate in ministries and activities sponsored by the church. The following policy reflects our commitment to preserve this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience the love of God through relationships with others.

In keeping with the covenant of baptism, we commit ourselves and our resources to the nurture, care, and protection of our children, youth, and vulnerable adults. We pledge to intentionally provide the structure, education, and policies that will keep them safe from harm and abuse. In making these promises we confess the tragic reality that churches have not always been safe places for children, youth, and vulnerable adults. Exploitation and sexual abuse can occur in all faith communities, both large and small, urban and rural. The problem cuts across all economic, cultural and racial lines. We believe any abuse of a child, youth, or vulnerable adult is intolerable, and thus we must confess our complicity when we are tempted to believe “it can’t happen here.”

By establishing and implementing this policy, we not only seek to protect our church from liability but also to reflect the love and hospitality we have come to know in Jesus the Christ.

We do not tolerate *child abuse, elder abuse, sexual abuse, and sexual harassment* in any form, as defined by the State of California.

Our purpose is to provide a safe and secure environment for children, youth, and vulnerable adults at Community Church of Sebastopol, and to protect them from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse while participating in Community Church of Sebastopol activities. We intend this policy to guide staff and volunteers to prevent incidents of abuse, and to protect our staff and volunteers from unwarranted allegations of child or elder abuse.

All staff and volunteers must abide by the guidelines—failure to follow the guidelines may result in termination from employment or volunteer service, and put individuals at risk for accusations of child or elder abuse.

The Council will implement this policy, the clergy and staff team will provide training for all staff and volunteers, and the church office manager will provide paperwork and receive the results of background checks. The office manager will keep all records in a locked file cabinet for security and privacy.

I. Definitions of terms used in the Safe Church Policy

Child Abuse: When a child is injured physically, sexually, emotionally, or through neglect, including but not limited to the following examples:

- Physical abuse is an injury that is inflicted by other than accidental means on a child by another person (e.g. injuring a child by hitting, shaking, biting, or throwing objects);
- Sexual abuse is an act of sexual assault on and the sexual exploitation of children (e.g. sexual contact with a minor or the use of children in sexual films or pictures);
- Emotional abuse is an attack on a child's emotional and social development (e.g. belittling, threatening, yelling at, humiliating, ignoring, blaming or otherwise emotionally mistreating a child);
- Neglect is the failing to provide adequate food, clothing, shelter, nurture, and/or supervision.

Companion Adult: An adult who does not have any criminal convictions and who has been approved by the Senior Minister to fill this ministry. A Companion Adult will accompany a registered sex offender while on the property of Community Church of Sebastopol, or while attending an event sponsored by Community Church of Sebastopol, or while representing Community Church of Sebastopol.

Elder Abuse: Any physical abuse, neglect, financial abuse, abandonment, isolation, abduction, or other treatment resulting in physical harm or pain or mental suffering of a vulnerable or elderly person.

- Abandonment: The desertion of an elder by someone who is a caregiver.
- Abduction: The removal, without the consent of the conservator, of a conservatee to another state.
- Financial Abuse: The illegal or unethical exploitation and/or use of an elder's funds, property, or other assets.
- Isolation: the intentional preventing of an elder from receiving mail, telephone calls, or visitors.
- Mental Suffering: The infliction of fear, agitation, confusion through threats, harassment or other forms of intimidating behavior.
- Physical Abuse: The infliction of physical pain or injury, sexual assault or molestation, or use of physical or chemical restraints without or beyond the scope of a doctor's order.
- Neglect: The failure to fulfill a caretaking obligation such as assisting in personal hygiene, providing food, clothing or shelter, protecting a person from health and safety hazards, or preventing malnutrition.

Mandated Reporter: Mandated reporters are required by the state of California to report any known or suspected instances of child abuse or neglect to the county child welfare department or to a local law enforcement agency (local police/sheriff's department).

Minister: A person engaged in carrying out the mission and ministry of the church. The clergy, every employee, all elected and appointed lay leaders, and every volunteer are ministers of this congregation.

Authorized Minister or Clergy: A person who holds ordained ministerial standing (or has been commissioned or licensed by an Association of the United Church of Christ).

Ministerial Relationship: The relationship between one who carries out the ministry of the church and the one being served by that ministry.

Minor: As used in these policies, the term "minor" means any child or youth living at home who has not graduated from high school. This may include youth who are 18. The terms "child" and "youth" are used more loosely—"youth" generally means someone in Middle School or Senior High School; "child" generally means those who are 5th grade or younger.

Sexual Exploitation: Sexual activity or contact (not limited to sexual intercourse) in which a minister (as defined above) engaged in the work of the church takes advantage of the vulnerability of a participant by causing or allowing the participant to engage in sexual behavior with the minister.

Sexual Harassment: Repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to his or her wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person which might cause intimidation, humiliation, or embarrassment to the other person, or subjecting the person to public discrimination. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition or circumstance of instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity;
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for evaluation in making personnel or church-related decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's performance or participation in church activities or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or church environment.

Sexual harassment includes unsolicited and unwelcome contact that has sexual overtones, particularly:

- Written contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene letters, notes, email, or invitations;
- Verbal contact, such as sexually suggestive or obscene comments, threats, slurs, epithets, jokes about gender-specific traits, or sexual propositions;
- Physical contact, such as intentional touching, pinching, brushing against another's body, impeding or blocking movement, assault, coercing sexual intercourse; and
- Visual contact, such as leering or staring at another's body, gesturing, or displaying sexually suggestive objects or pictures, cartoons, posters, or magazines.

Sexual harassment also includes continuing to express sexual interest after being informed directly that the interest is unwelcome and using sexual behavior to control, influence or affect the career, salary, work, learning, or worship environment of another. It is impermissible to suggest, threaten, or imply that failure to accept a request for a date or sexual intimacy will affect a person's job prospects, church leadership, or comfortable participation in the life of the church.

It is forbidden either to imply or actually withhold support for an appointment, promotion or change of assignment, to suggest that a poor performance report will be given because a person has declined a personal proposition, or to hint that benefits, such as promotions, favorable performance evaluation, favorable assigned duties or shifts, recommendation or reclassifications, will be forthcoming in exchange for sexual favors.

Social Media: Any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to social networks, blogs, web sites, forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, FaceBook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Instagram, Snap Chat, and Flickr.

Vulnerable Persons: Any person who is at risk of abuse or harm due to life circumstances, including children, youth, and elders. Vulnerable Adults include people who are homeless, mentally ill, mentally handicapped, physically handicapped, frail, and/or elderly.

II. Ministerial Conduct

The clergy, every employee, all elected and appointed lay leaders, and every volunteer are ministers of this congregation. As such, each is responsible for understanding the ways in which their words or actions may affect others.

Sexual Exploitation or Sexual Harassment, of parishioners or others, by anyone engaged in the ministry of Community Church of Sebastopol is unethical behavior and will not be tolerated within this congregation.

All ministers of the church may sometimes deal with individuals who are emotionally or personally vulnerable in some way. It is important that every minister of the church be adequately prepared and educated for the ministry in which they serve others, and to understand the ways in which their actions may impact those who may be vulnerable to their use or misuse of power.

It is the policy of Community Church of Sebastopol to encourage its ministers to nurture safety within Ministerial Relationships by being attentive to self-care, education, boundary issues, and the importance of referring those in need to supportive and helpful resources.

III. Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment

As a community of Christian faith, Community Church of Sebastopol is committed to creating and maintaining programs, facilities, and a community in which church members, friends, staff, and volunteers can worship, learn, and work together in an atmosphere free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, exploitation, abuse, and intimidation. Such behavior is prohibited by church policy. It is the intention and responsibility of the church to take whatever action may be needed to prevent and correct behavior that is contrary to this policy.

If any person has a concern that this policy has been or is being violated, s/he should make this concern known to the clergy or moderator, in this order:

1. Senior Minister
2. Associate Minister
3. Church Moderator

Clergy or the Moderator may ask for concerns to be put in writing for complete documentation. In cases of suspected abuse by clergy, the Moderator is not required to share information with the clergy. The Moderator takes the complaint to the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Once a concern has been raised, the clergy or moderator then has the responsibility to take appropriate action, and monitor the issue until it is resolved. Although not every report of misconduct will require steps to be taken, church leaders shall foster safe conduct by example and by correcting, mentoring, and counseling followed by “progressive discipline.” This means leaders shall document (take notes on) actions taken to counsel and correct individuals—including verbal warnings or written notices. If verbal and written notices are unsuccessful, and termination from ministry, employment, or volunteer status is required, a termination letter shall be issued. A leader may be expected to recuse him/herself from the reporting and disciplinary process in situations where there appears to be a conflict of interest, but may not do so when s/he is a Mandated Reporter.

IV. Safe Church Policy Requirements

A. General Child & Youth Safety Requirements:

All paid staff shall be background checked, including office staff.

Anyone (paid staff or volunteer) who has ongoing contact with children and youth shall sign agreement to follow the Safe Church Policy Requirements, and be background checked, and receive Mandated Reporter training.

Adults with limited volunteer time with children (i.e., pie baking, MADD Camp, Summer Interest Centers, substitute teaching, etc.) shall agree to and sign the Safe Church guidelines, and must be accompanied by a background-checked adult whenever they work with children.

All ministers who work with minors and/or vulnerable adults will have been members—or regular attendees—of Community Church of Sebastopol for at least one year. An exception to this guideline is that Authorized Ministers or Seminarians may work with minors as soon as they have met the other provisions of this policy.

Having a criminal record does not necessarily disqualify someone from ministry with children, youth and/or vulnerable adults *except* if the criminal record includes crimes against a child, vulnerable adult, or crimes of a sexual nature. If, as a result of the volunteer clearance review the clergy deem it necessary, a volunteer may be refused permission to minister with children, youth, and/or vulnerable adults or the clergy may limit the type of work a volunteer may do.

B. Specific Child & Youth Safety Requirements:

- **Supervision:** The Children's Education & Youth Committees shall provide proper adult-child ratios for supervision. Supervision should be maintained before and after activities until all children are in the custody of their parent or legal guardian. For all overnight activities there must be at least two unrelated adults present.
- **Permission Slips & Medical Release:** Written consent (in the form of a permission slip/medical release) of one parent or guardian will be required for all activities off the church property and all overnight activities.
- **Sign-ins/Sign-outs:** Parents and guardians shall sign in and sign out children under 12 years old for all church activities in which the parent/guardian drops off their child and does not stay for the activity. Children will not be released to unauthorized adults, nor to other siblings or youth.
- **Two Adult Rule:** Two background-checked adults should be present during any church sponsored children or youth activity. Any adult should attempt to avoid circumstances that cause them to be alone with a child/youth. All interactions should be interruptible and observable.
- **Visibility:** All activities with children and youth must be conducted in a way that allows visibility—for example, glass doors, open doors, and meeting in public places that allow for observation.

- **Prevention of Child-on-Child Abuse:** Children should not be sent to isolated settings (like the bathroom or an empty classroom) in pairs.
- **Bathroom and Diapering:** Two adults must be present when clothes or diapers are changed. The parent may also be recruited to change clothes or diapers. A background-checked adult must accompany children to and from the bathroom and inform another adult when this takes place. The adult will assist the child only when necessary. The bathroom door must remain open so that children and adults assisting are within view or earshot of another volunteer.
- **Empty Room Check:** All volunteers and staff must check the classroom or area at the end of an activity to make sure that it is empty.
- **Consent and Affection:** True expressions of affection toward children can be a manifestation of Christ's love for all of us. We believe in consent in all forms of contact. If an adult or youth helper wants to hug or pick up a child, they should ask the child if s/he would like that—if the child says no, then the adult or youth helper honors that “no.” Children learn early on what it means to give their consent—this is the basis for building healthy relationships as they grow.

C. Non-Compliance Incident Log:

Reasonable and unforeseen circumstances will probably arise when we try our best to follow the above Safety Requirements, but we cannot. In such cases, we will create an entry in an Incident Log that recognizes our non-compliance. The Incident Log will be kept in the church office by the church office manager. When the Safe Church Policy is reviewed, the team designated by Council to perform the review will examine the Incident Log book.

V. Children and Youth Discipline

Community Church of Sebastopol encourages behavior that fosters community and is respectful of others and ourselves in all our programs. If a minister working with children and/or youth feels that a minor's behavior is disruptive and/or endangers the wellbeing of self or others, that minister may return the minor to his/her parent or guardian (if present at the time) or may call the minor's parent or guardian so that the child may be picked up. The ministers will work with the minor and the minor's parents/guardians to allow for a safe return to the activities of the group at a future time.

VI. Internet & Social Media Safety

Any individual's use of the internet and social media from their own device is beyond the scope of this policy. Having stated that, Community Church of Sebastopol volunteers and employees use the internet and social media platforms to further the ministry of the church. The following guidelines are included in this policy in order to make every effort possible to ensure appropriate use of the internet and social media by all employees and volunteers:

- Photographs of minors may be published by authorized internet and social media administrators on the church's website, FaceBook page, etc, and in brochures and other publications unless a parent/guardian submits a signed “do not publish” form naming the child whose photograph is not to be published. The Children's Education Ministry Team is responsible for creating and updating this form. Any person of any age and any parent/guardian of any minor may request that a specific picture be removed from the church's website,

FaceBook page, etc, and/or that a picture not be used in future publications; the church will respond to this request as quickly as possible.

- Any person accessing inappropriate internet sites while on church property and/or using church equipment or devices will be asked to exit the program immediately and may be barred from using church equipment/devices in the future.
- Special care should be taken when posting photos, videos, etc, from church events on social media. Section III (Prohibiting Abuse, Exploitation, and Harassment) applies to social media interaction. This may be complicated when, for example, youth post about other youth on social media. Should questions arise about healthy online relationships, please consult with the clergy.

VII. Suspected Child/Elder Abuse Reporting and Response

The child abuse and elder abuse reporting laws in California state that Authorized Ministers are mandated reporters; it is the responsibility of all Authorized Ministers of Community Church of Sebastopol to report any reasonable suspicion of child or elder abuse to the appropriate authorities. While other ministers of this congregation may not be mandated reporters of suspected abuse, the reporting laws encourage them to report their suspicions and protect them when they make such a report in good faith. In establishing this policy, Community Church of Sebastopol hopes to empower such reporting as a matter of gospel justice.

Reasonable suspicion is based on facts, alongside a person's life experiences and training. Therefore, not all people would necessarily come to the same suspicion. We are not all expected to be experts. It is not our duty to investigate suspicions of abuse. Our duty lies in appropriately reporting so that the vulnerable will be protected.

When a minister (volunteer or staff) develops, in the course of their ministry, a suspicion of abuse, s/he should report their suspicion to the Senior Minister, the Associate Minister, or in their absence (or in the case that a clergy member is suspected) the Moderator, as soon as possible. Such a suspicion will be responded to in accordance with the Response Plan below.

Care should be taken to avoid prejudging the situation, but all suspicions of abuse will be taken seriously. All suspicions of abuse will be handled forthrightly with due respect for the privacy of the individuals involved. All care will be taken to avoid accusatory attitudes and statements. The church's first responsibility is to the vulnerable and to the potential victims of abuse. Nevertheless, the suspected abuser should be treated with dignity.

Suspected Abuse Response Plan:

- If a child or vulnerable adult is in pain, injured, or appears injured, call 911.
- The clergy (or in the absence of clergy, the Moderator) will contact the appropriate governmental agencies (i.e., Child Protective Services, Adult Protective Services, a police department) and make verbal and written reports of the suspected abuse. The police department will always be contacted if there is a suspicion that a child or elder is in immediate danger.
- In a case of suspected child abuse, when a parent/guardian is not suspected of committing the abuse, the clergy (or in the absence of clergy, the Moderator) will notify the child's parent(s)/guardian(s).
- In a case where the person suspected of abusing another may have done so on church property and/or in conjunction with a ministry of the church, the clergy (or in the absence of clergy, the

Moderator) will contact the church's insurance company, legal counsel, and the appropriate member of the Northern California-Nevada Conference staff. Additionally, the person suspected of abusing another may be

- Called upon for a conference with the Senior Minister,
 - Reported to the proper authorities,
 - Removed from working with children and youth,
 - Asked to remain off church property and away from church activities while the suspicion is being investigated by the authorities.
- All members and friends of Community Church of Sebastopol will cooperate fully with civil authorities under the guidance of an attorney, which will be retained on an as-needed basis.
 - If requested, the clergy (or in the absence of clergy, the Moderator) will take steps to protect, to the best of his/her ability, the anonymity of the person who brings the suspected abuse to the clergy or Moderator's attention.
 - The Council will authorize the Senior Minister or a Council appointee to act as the official spokesperson for the congregation. Only the authorized person or persons may speak for the congregation to the news media.

VIII. Registered Sex Offenders

It is possible that a registered sex offender may wish to attend (and perhaps unite in membership with) Community Church of Sebastopol. While not all registered sex offenders pose a risk to others, Community Church of Sebastopol has decided to err on the side of safety and to protect the most vulnerable in our community of faith. Therefore, we establish these guidelines:

- All registered sex offenders are required to make that status known to the Senior Minister of Community Church of Sebastopol. This information is not confidential and will be shared by the pastor with anyone s/he deems necessary, including but not limited to the Associate Minister, Moderator, Vice Moderator, and Office Administrator.
- Anyone who is a registered sex offender will always be in the company of a Companion Adult (as defined in Section I) while on the property of Community Church of Sebastopol or while attending an event sponsored by Community Church of Sebastopol or while representing our church in any capacity. It is the responsibility of the registered sex offender to schedule the presence of a Companion Adult when needed.
- Registered sex offenders may not work in any volunteer or paid capacity with our children and youth ministry programs.
- A person convicted of committing a crime against children may, by decision of the clergy or vote of the Church Council, be banned from participating in any church activity at which children may be present, including worship services.

IX. Updating these Policies and Continuing Education

These policies may be amended and/or updated by the Church Council as needed, and should be reviewed by an ad-hoc team designated by Council at least every two years. As part of the review, the ad-hoc team will include an examination of the Incident Log (which notes the instances when we have been unable to comply with the Safe Church Policy), and will evaluate the entire Safe Church Policy.

The Church Council may delegate a team to continue educating the congregation around issues of abuse, vulnerability, power relationships, and healthy relationship boundaries.

2017 Safe Church Policy Team:

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