

# SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY

*Trinity Church*

Hackettstown, New Jersey

our

## CONGREGATIONAL PROTECTION POLICY

of

### PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

to uphold the highest standards of sexual conduct and respond to any incidence of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment

#### PRINCIPLES

1. As a Church, we are committed to the highest standards of sexual conduct as held up for us in SACRED SCRIPTURE.
2. We understand sexuality to be a holy and wholesome God-given gift.
3. We have zero tolerance for any and all forms of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment on the part of:
  - Pastors
  - Staff
  - Volunteers
  - Parishioners
  - Parties using our facilities
4. We are especially sensitive to our responsibility and trust in regard to children and youth.
5. We are committed to providing everyone the most wholesome environment possible relative to sexual standards and behaviors.
6. We are also committed to providing children and youth the most careful protection possible against any and all forms of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment.
7. We are working with these understandings and definitions:
  - Sexual abuse is a form of sexual misconduct and occurs when a person within a ministerial role of leadership (lay or clergy, pastor, educator, counselor, youth leader, or other position of leadership) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, client, employee, student, staff member, coworker, or volunteer. (1996 *Book of Resolutions*. P.130) It can include coerced or forced sexual contact (including those unable to give informed consent), sexual interaction or contact with children or youth, and sexual exhibitionism or display of sexual visuals or pornography. (2016 *Book of Resolutions* p.777)
  - Sexual misconduct within ministerial relationships is a betrayal of sacred trust. It is a continuum of sexual or gender-directed behaviors by either lay or clergy person within a ministerial relationship (paid or unpaid). It can include child abuse, adult sexual abuse, harassment, rape or sexual assault, sexualized verbal comments or visuals unwelcome touching, and advances, use of sexualized materials including pornography, stalking, sexual abuse of youth or those without capacity to consent, or misuse of pastoral or ministerial position using sexualized conduct to take advantage of the vulnerability of another (2016 *Book of Resolutions* p.776)
  - Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual comment, advance or demand, either verbal or physical that is reasonably perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive working

environment resulting from discrimination on the basis of gender. (2016 *Book of Discipline* ¶161J, p.114)

## **PRACTICES**

### 1. Reporting

- a. Should there ever be an incidence of sexual misconduct, abuse or harassment, we require of one and all that it be immediately reported to:
  - The Senior Pastor. Should the allegation be against the Senior Pastor, the matter is reported to the District Superintendent.
  - In the case of a minor, it must also be immediately reported by the Senior Pastor to both the appropriate public officials as well as the parents as soon as possible. The Senior Pastor will then report to the District Superintendent.
  - In the case of adults (age 18 or above) it will be reported by the Senior Pastor to the District Superintendent who together will determine the appropriate next course of action which may include the notification of public officials.
  - In the event the Senior Pastor is not physically available, reports should be directed to one of the associate pastors.
- b. Should a previous incidence of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment come to light, it too must be immediately reported to:
  - The Senior Pastor. Should the allegation be against the Senior Pastor, the matter is reported to the District Superintendent.
  - In the case of a minor, it must also be immediately reported by the Senior Pastor both the appropriate public officials as well as the parents as soon as possible. The Senior Pastor will then report to the District Superintendent.
  - In the case of adults (age 18 or above) it will be reported by the Senior Pastor to the District Superintendent who together will determine the appropriate next course of action which may include the notification of public officials.
  - In the event the Senior Pastor is not physically available, reports should be directed to one of the associate pastors.

### 2. Background Checks

- a. Background checks are required every seven years for:
  - All clergy.
  - All staff.
  - Volunteers participating in any overnight venture with minors.
- b. All information from the background check will be held in the strictest confidence and will be disclosed only to the senior pastor of this church and the administrative assistant working with that pastor
- c. The Senior Pastor will focus on any reports of sexual abuse, misconduct or harassment, other criminal behavior, DWI charges, as well as driving violations, and make appropriate determinations.

### 3. Counseling

- a. As much as possible, our norm is to provide personal counseling in a confidential setting yet always in close proximity to at least one other adult.

### 4. "2 to 1 Rule" and "1 to 1 Rule"

- a. As much as possible, there will not be one adult alone with one minor.

- b. However, we recognize the value of person-to-person ministry. At times that will mean a "1 to 1" sharing of an adult and a minor, yet always in close proximity to at least one other adult.
5. Signed Agreements
  - a. All staff and all volunteers will be given a copy of this policy and the Social Media Supplement and required to sign our agreement to support and follow it completely at the beginning of their service and whenever significant changes are made to this policy.
6. Persons/Groups Using our Facility
  - a. Any persons or groups using our facilities will first be required to read the Safe Sanctuary Policy and sign an agreement that they will ensure that they as well as their group will conduct themselves in accord with these principles at the beginning of their use of the facility and whenever significant changes are made to this policy..
7. Intergenerational Gatherings
  - a. As much as possible, it is our goal to eliminate the opportunity for inappropriate interactions between minors and between minors and adults during intergenerational gatherings e.g. rehearsals for the Christmas musical, church picnic, Fat Tuesday celebration, etc.
8. Off-site Situations
  - a. The adult supervisor in charge of the off-site trip will have the responsibility to implement these policies including the social media policies of Trinity Church at the off-site facilities.
  - b. Should changing or showering be involved, it is preferable that complete privacy be afforded to all, especially minors.
  - c. Should complete privacy not be possible for changing or showering, especially if minors are involved, two adults of the same gender as the minors must be present.
  - d. Should sleeping arrangements be involved, it is required that persons of the same gender be housed in segregated circumstances. Should minors be involved, there must be at least two adults of the same gender as the minors in close proximity and present for supervision.
  - e. Adult supervisors from this church will provide guidance so that minors from this church involved in an off-site situation are not alone with another minor or adult from our church group or the group we are visiting or serving. As stated in Practices #4b above, there will be times when personalized ministry will necessitate a "1 to 1" sharing.
  - f. Adult volunteers from this church involved in an off-site setting will not usually be alone with a minor from this church or the group we are visiting or serving. As stated in Practices #4b above, there will be times when personalized ministry will necessitate a "1 to 1" sharing.
9. Ministry with Children
  - a. All volunteers must have continuously and actively attended our church for at least 6 months prior to any involvement with church school leadership or service. As circumstances may warrant, the Senior Pastor may make an exception. In these instances, the new volunteer would be paired with an experienced church member.
  - b. Our standard practice is to always have two adults present in all classes and activities.
  - c. If for a brief period it is impossible for two adults to be present, the door must be left open.
  - d. All classroom doors will have glass windows in them.
  - e. All students through the second grade will use only the bathrooms reserved for them.

- f. The bathrooms so reserved for our church school children will be marked "FOR CHURCH SCHOOL CHILDREN ONLY".
- g. A church school aide will escort children up through second grade to the rest room.
- h. Church school aides will maintain a presence in and monitor all hallways while church school is in session.
- i. We understand that parents are the primary educators in regard to sexual matters and standards. We will provide support and assistance to parents in this important responsibility as requested.

10. Youth Ministry

- a. All volunteers must have continuously and actively attended our church for at least 6 months prior to any involvement with church school leadership or service. As circumstances may warrant, the Senior Pastor may make an exception. In these instances, the new volunteer would be paired with an experienced church member.
- b. At times, this ministry will necessarily take place in more open and informal situations than church school, therefore, attentive and careful supervision is requisite, all the more so during off-site experiences.
- c. We call attention to Practices #3 (Counseling), #4 ("2 to 1 Rule" and "1 to 1 Rule"), and #8 (Off-site Situations).

11. Adult leaders are encouraged to be sensitive to situations involving individuals regarding sexual orientation.

12. Social Media –

- a. Trinity Church recognizes the important opportunities afforded by social media sites and we encourage our employees and volunteers to participate in this Social Media Age. That said, there are some unique challenges to the emerging social media sites and Trinity Church hopes to protect both you and the church through the Social Media Supplement.

13. Congregational Awareness

- a. A copy of this policy with the Social Media Supplement will be given to each new member of the church at their Orientation Session.
- b. All in group leadership will annually review this policy and the Social Media Supplement with their membership at the beginning of the program year (September) and with newly-elected members in January.
- c. Leaders of short-term or one-time ventures will review this policy and the Social Media Supplement with their membership at the beginning of said project (e.g. missions' trips, retreats).
- d. It is the responsibility of the Associate Pastor responsible for youth and family ministry to annually monitor publicly available NJ, PA and NY registries of child sex offenders to ascertain if any such persons are involved in our children's or student ministries.

14. This policy is to be reviewed every three years.

# **SOCIAL MEDIA SUPPLEMENT TO SAFE SANCTUARIES POLICY**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As an ever-increasing number of people use and prefer digital communication over other forms, it is essential that the church be present in this mission field. Social networking sites, on-the-spot communication devices and email can enhance communication, faith sharing and deepen relationships. We will utilize technology, the Internet and all social media tools to promote Christian community and the building up of authentic relationships.

The following practices and guidelines apply principles of healthy boundaries to keep all persons safe in the virtual world of digital networking and communication. Adults engaged in ministry to youth and children should consider their relationship with the youth or child when interacting with them using digital media, and should conduct themselves in a manner that would be acceptable on church grounds.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED**

Social media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to advance interactive communication—both public and private uses—as to include Facebook, instant messaging, texting, emailing, video chat, and other emerging social media platforms. We recognize that social media is always evolving and changing; therefore, this living document will be revisited regularly as new outlets of social media emerge, and others fade.

## **CONNECTING ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

1. Adults who are willing to connect with minors on social media sites should use the following guidelines when establishing these connections:
  - a. Adults should not submit 'friend' requests to children or youth. Minors may feel like they are not able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between them and adults. Exceptions to this rule should only be made in situations when the adult's privacy settings make it difficult or impossible for the youth to find the adult's page on the site. In these circumstances, it is acceptable for an adult to request a youth as a friend, if the youth has requested that they do so.
  - b. Due to the greater potential for misinterpretation, inappropriate discussions, and inadvertent exposure of youth to inappropriate content, personal pages should be maintained appropriately. Church leaders and adult volunteers should avoid relationships with children/youth via Social Networking sites, unless an actual relationship (ministry, family friendship, etc.) already exists between them.

- c. As additional social media sites gain popularity, the Safe Sanctuaries Ministry Team reserves the right to apply this approach to the various methods of digital communication.

### **BOUNDARIES**

2. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set strict privacy settings on any personal social networking profile, making every effort to prevent youth and children from being introduced to objectionable content. Privacy settings on personal pages and information should be thoroughly scrutinized on a regular basis to prevent this information from being available to minors. In the event that a church leader or adult volunteer does not feel that they can set the proper privacy settings and/or regularly check their personal pages (2-3 times per day) for inappropriate material that might have been posted by others, they are asked to completely restrict child/youth access to their pages.
3. For the sake of their own privacy and the well-being of the child/youth participants, church leaders and adult volunteers should not add or invite children or youth to any groups, events, pages, chat rooms, etc. that are not solely dedicated to activities directly related to the children or youth ministries or ministry activities.
4. Given the continuing evolution of privacy settings and capabilities on many social networking sites, church leaders and adult volunteers must be willing to continue to educate themselves on what settings are needed to support the above recommendations. Additionally, the child and youth ministry programs should establish education for adult volunteers who wish to use social media as part of their ministry efforts.

### **COMMUNICATION**

Social media is an excellent way to quickly share both good and sad moments in a person's life with a large number of people. However, as with all forms of communication, users should be respectful of the privacy of others. This is particularly the case with youth and children's ministry leaders. Leaders should be especially mindful of how information is presented in such a permanent medium, and should never share news about another person without their express prior consent.

5. It is required to receive advance parental permission for children and youth, and personal permission for vulnerable adults in writing for:
  - a. Posting photos of participants on any websites or other social media platform, sending them emails or cell phone messages or making videos for any use;
  - b. Emailing, Instant Messaging, calling, texting, or sending data to a child, youth, or vulnerable adult by computer, cell phone; and
  - c. The sharing of any full name or contact information.

6. Use prudent judgment in the time you contact youth and children through social media, e-mail or other forms of digital communication. The "home phone rule" is a basic rule of thumb to use – normally do not text or chat with youth at a time you would not normally call their home phone line, i.e. before 9:00 AM or after 9:00 PM.

Exceptions to this rule are as follows:

- a. In emergency situations or when children or youth reach out to a church leader or adult volunteer with issues that they feel that they need to discuss immediately.
- b. During weekends, vacation times, and other times when children or youth may have parental permission to stay up later than normal, adult leaders may respond to youth-initiated communications outside of these hours, at their discretion.

In all of the exception situations, adults should use good judgment in deciding when discussions should continue or be picked up at a more appropriate time, in order to support and demonstrate good boundaries with their personal time.

7. When emailing, texting, tweeting, or Facebook messaging a minor, adults are required to notify another adult on the ministry team or pastoral staff of the contact, or post it in a public venue (i.e. a Facebook wall as opposed to a private message). This will allow adults to maintain the "two adults present" Safe Sanctuaries standard when using social media.
8. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with children and youth should consider the content and nature of any posts that will be seen or read by others. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church.
9. 'One on one' video or chat room interaction is generally not appropriate between adults and minors. Such communications should only be engaged in where no face-to-face communication is possible, such as where the youth is away for the summer in a foreign country but regularly communicates with the adult in person.
10. When the content of received communications raises concerns or questions, it should be shared with a member of the Pastoral team, and law enforcement, where appropriate.
  - a. Social Media is often not the most effective communication method for matters that are personally sensitive, emotionally charged, or that require extensive conversation. Leaders must be attentive to guiding children and youth who raise such sensitive matters toward personal or pastoral conversations.

- b. Humor and sarcasm can be easily misinterpreted, and should be used only where appropriate.

All communication sent digitally (email, social networking sites, notes or posts, etc.) may be shared or reposted to others. Adults should be mindful that comments sent to a youth may be shared by that youth in a number of ways and that misinterpretation of those comments may occur.

11. Phone conversations and face-to-face meetings are the preferred mode of communication, when responding to emotionally driven communication or pastoral emergencies, and should be used when possible to provide the appropriate level of support.

### **IDENTITY PROTECTION**

We will seek to protect the privacy and identity of all minors in our use of social media. All church leaders and adults leaders in youth and children's ministry should closely monitor the privacy settings of any posted youth images to ensure that they are not accessible to individuals who do not have permission to view them.

12. All church leaders and adult volunteers engaged in ministry with minors must not post photos or video that identify children or youth on any online site or printed publication without the written consent from a parent or legal guardian.
13. No picture, video or other image shall identify a person by more than first name, even with permission by said person or parent(s). This would not include clergy or lay staff and any special guests coming to Trinity who give permission for their full name and image to be used. Press releases are exempt from this policy.
14. Even with the written consent from a parent or legal guardian, pictures should be posted to either the Student Ministry Parents and Volunteers! closed group or on personal pages, where the privacy settings restrict viewing to only those associated with the youth ministry.
15. We strongly encourage the respect and dignity of every person depicted in an image. Only pictures depicting youth in an appropriate light should be posted. "Appropriate" pictures may include goofy pictures that the youth's parents are comfortable being posted. If a picture would make the youth feel self-conscious, vulnerable, or would subject the youth to ridicule, the picture should not be posted.



16. When checking in with any location tagging social media, only check in yourself. Never check in minors. Be sensitive to tagging or revealing other participants' locations.

#### **ADMINISTRATION OF OFFICIAL TRINITY CHURCH SOCIAL MEDIA GROUPS**

17. Each church related social media site, group or page must have a minimum of three unrelated administrators, one being the Social Media Manager and the other two who are either church leaders or adult volunteers engaged in the ministry.
18. Sites must be monitored frequently to allow for quick responses in the event urgent or crisis concerns are posted.
19. All church groups wishing to have a social media page, such as on Facebook, must have approval prior to starting the page and must adhere to all church social media policy for Facebook pages. A request should be submitted to the church office where an Administrative Assistant will keep a list of all such pages.
20. All Facebook groups and pages associated with Children's or Student Ministry areas will be designated as "closed" groups, requiring all those who wish to gain access to be approved by the page administrators.
21. Administrators, not the Social Media Manager, should review the access to the Trinity Student Ministry 'Closed' group account.
  - a. They should remove adult leaders who no longer actively participate in the children's or youth program
  - b. They should remove former youth members, and their parents, who no longer actively participate in the children's or youth program.
  - c. Active participation in the children's or youth group may include:
    - i. For former youth:
      1. Having a sibling who remains in the youth group
      2. Having a number of younger friends who participate in the youth group
      3. Regular attendance as a counselor or participant on summer mission trips, but not participating on a weekly or monthly basis
    - ii. For adults:
      1. Regular attendance as a counselor or participant on summer mission trips, but not participating on a weekly or monthly basis
      2. An established mentor/mentee role with an older youth
      3. Family relationships that essentially establish the adult in an older sibling or parental role with an active youth
      4. Youth leaders who, but for their geographic distance from Trinity, would remain involved in the lives of the youth, provided that the

youngest age the adult worked with have not matriculated out of the youth group

Any inappropriate material posted to a church related social media site, group or page must be deleted and addressed with site administrators and a pastor.

### **SOME GENERAL REMINDERS**

- When using social media, observe Wesley's General Rules and the great Commandments:
  - Do no harm
  - Do good
  - Attend to the ordinances of God
  - Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, strength, soul
  - Love your neighbor as yourself
- Remember your Christian witness and allow your use of social media to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Be careful not to reveal personal information about church members or visitors, especially prayer concerns or photos, without their permission.
- Please be respectful of your own privacy and the people you serve.
- Be mindful of how people respond to hearing sad news in such a non-personal manner. Also, it is not appropriate to share someone else's concerns or joys without their consent.
- Be careful when posting or following links that are shared with you while on Facebook, Twitter or that come through email that lead you to external websites. These are often phishing ploys to get information about you or your friends. Protect yourself and your friends by being careful about what you click on or post on a wall.
- Be truthful and positive.
- Do not impersonate anyone.
- Remember what you post may be seen by those outside the church who will evaluate our church by what you say.

All violations of the Social Media Supplement are to be reported to a member of the pastoral staff.

Approved by the Administrative Board March 2019