

Creating safe spaces in our worship communities is a ministry that we all share. Safe church policy and training is grounded in our call to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being. Our shared efforts to be aware, educate others and respond effectively provides opportunities to increase and enhance our ability to live out our Baptismal Covenant within our communities of faith and in the world beyond. One needs to look no further than the current newsfeed to understand the prevalence of sexual misconduct and the need to educate and respond to incidents. The safe church policy is the core foundation that informs our efforts to create safe spaces in our worship communities.

All dioceses of The Episcopal Church were required by General Convention to adopt by January 2019 two model policies (2015-A073 and 2015-A074) for safeguarding those in our faith communities who may be vulnerable. The policies reflect best practices and current guidance to create safe spaces for those who might be vulnerable in our shared ministry settings. The Diocese of Southern Virginia approved these policies in a combined form: The Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults now serves as the current policy for the Diocese of Southern Virginia.

As you review the policy you will note some changes over the 2013 policy. Noteworthy changes include:

- Comprehensive guidance for ministering safely to vulnerable adults.
- Increased requirement for congregations to take an active role in promoting education regarding the policy and maintenance of safe church records, including a yearly audit to be submitted to the diocese to ensure compliance with the policy.
- Key or code access to buildings requires some level of safe church training.
- Two levels of training are now offered - Universal and Specialized. The online training option will still be available; however we will continue to encourage completion of in-person classroom training.
 - Universal training (1.5 hour session) for non-supervisory program participants and for those with key or code access to buildings who have limited direct interaction with those who might be vulnerable. The training is designed to cover a broad range of topics regarding vulnerability, boundaries, inclusion, power and basic best practices to enable all to live out their Baptismal Covenant.
 - Specialized training (daylong session) for those who work directly with those who might be vulnerable, and are in supervisory, staff, or key leadership roles. This training dives deep into specifics related to sexual misconduct, boundaries, inclusion, power, pastoral relationships, and sexual harassment and addresses basic best practices for program supervision. Specialized training replaces the child and adult classroom training sessions that the diocese previously provided.
- Training recertification is now required every three years.
- Guidelines for supervision of individual programs and ministries include identification of a “responsible person.”
- Current sexual identity definitions are included, as well as a section on inclusiveness.
- Updated social media guidelines.

- Updated guidelines for offsite, and overnight programs.

You are encouraged to visit http://www.diosova.org/safe_church for additional information regarding creating safe churches. The site includes the complete policy, forms, guidance on background checks, classroom training dates/information, and directions to request on-line training.

As we partner together to create safe spaces in our churches and in ministry each church/congregation will need to do the following:

- 1- Each church/congregation will need to formally adopt the Policy for the Protection of Children, Youth and Vulnerable Adults and notify the diocese of the date the policy was adopted.
- 2- Identify an individual who will be the Safe Church Contact: responsible for safe church record keeping and tracking. The diocese will correspond with this individual and will send training completion reports to this individual as well as any updates regarding safe church issues/materials. Please provide Susan Allen sallen@diosova.org with the name, email and phone contact numbers for this designated individual.
- 3- If your church/congregation or convocation wishes to have greater flexibility in hosting Universal training sessions we can provide training so that one or two facilitators from your church/congregation or convocation can provide Universal training on site.

If you have questions or need guidance in implementing the policy please contact Lynn Farlin, Canon for Formation at lfarlin@diosova.org or 213-3377.