

DEFINITIONS

for policies



Clarifying the language used in policies makes their implementation easier. Extensive discussion of these definitions enhances “ownership” of the policy and makes the ultimate writing of the policy less difficult.

Two concepts require extra focus:

1. Adult Protective Services and state laws protect anyone over 65 years of age (elder abuse) and anyone 18-64 years old who is dependent on someone else for their care because of mental, medical or other impairment. However, in writing policy, you might find that many seniors do not like being categorized as vulnerable simply because of their age, so the definition below sidesteps that “insult” and yet includes a church’s effort to prevent elder abuse.
2. The sample below distinguishes between levels of volunteer responsibility. Not all volunteers need to be trained or screened at the same level. If you gather policies from other churches, you will find a wide variety of definitions related to that church’s setting, culture, demographics, etc. Some use the words “regular” and “occasional” volunteer. Some use terms that could sound derogatory, so be careful. Some churches use distinctions based on number of times the person will volunteer; some use distinctions based on the responsibility level of the volunteer. Discuss this decision thoroughly—the rest of your policy development will hinge on this definition.

SAMPLE POLICY TEXT BELOW



Definitions

Adult: a person 18 years old or older.

Vulnerable Adult: any person over 18 years of age with diminished physical, mental, or emotional capacities. This includes anyone who by California law is deemed vulnerable to elder or dependent adult abuse, as well as anyone who is under extreme stress and less able to advocate for themselves.

Minor: any child from infancy to eleven (11) years old and any youth twelve (12) through seventeen (17) years old.

Staff: any person employed by the church.

Clergy: any called pastor of the church.

Volunteer: unpaid people involved in a ministry, activity or service at St. Sanctuary on or the church's behalf.

Primary Volunteers: adult volunteers who, in the normal course of their duties, are expected to be in a regular supervisory capacity, including anyone who participates in overnight activities with minors present more than twice a year and/or who provide transportation to minors or vulnerable adults without other adults in the vehicle more often three times a year.

Secondary Volunteers: volunteers who infrequently supervise or assist with supervising children or youth in ministries, programs or activities, generally no more than four times a year or for one program or activity during a year that lasts less than a month (i.e. assisting with preparation for the Christmas pageant, or teaching one "unit" of Sunday School for a month). Secondary volunteers *always* work with a primary volunteer or staff person present.

Secondary volunteers also include all persons who:

- provide transportation to children or youth without other adults in the vehicle infrequently, generally no more than four times a year
- work or assist in the nursery four or fewer times a year, whether on an emergency basis or otherwise
- participate in overnight activities with children or youth once or twice a year.

Secondary volunteers also includes teenagers (any volunteer at least twelve [12] years old or older, but under the age of eighteen [18] enlisted to assist with the care of children). They are not expected to be alone with youth in their care.

It is the policy of the church that ABUSE OR HARASSMENT OF A MINOR OR OF AN ADULT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED.

Types of Abuse:

Physical abuse the deliberate, non-accidental physical injury to a minor or adult. This also includes willful cruelty or unjustifiable punishment.

Emotional abuse: maltreatment of a minor or vulnerable adult which elicits low self-esteem, undue fear, anxiety, or shame, or other damage to a person's well-being caused by such acts as angry fault finding, humiliating and/or belittling a person for mistakes or failures, and deliberate inattention to

someone's emotional needs. Emotional abuse causes mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in a person's growth, development or psychological functioning.

Neglect: failure to provide food, clothing, shelter, health care, psychological nurturing, education, supervision, or other basic necessities. This includes failure to protect a minor or vulnerable adult from harm.

Sexual abuse: any sexual activity with a minor or vulnerable adult, which is meant to arouse or gratify the sexual desires of the adult, child or youth. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent. All sexual abuse is an exploitation of a person's vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action.

Financial abuse: taking advantage of the vulnerability of an adult by deliberate misplacement, exploitation, or wrongful temporary or permanent use of the person's belongings or funds.

Sexual Harassment: use of one's authority or power, either explicitly or implicitly, to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to punish another for his or her refusal; or the creation of an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment through verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment involves repeated or coercive sexual advances toward another person contrary to her or his wishes. It includes behavior directed at another person's sexuality or sexual orientation with the intent of intimidating, humiliating, or embarrassing 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 for instruction, employment, or participation in any church activity;
- Submission to, or rejection of, such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for 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.

California law also protects staff from harassment related to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, disability, or sexual orientation.