

Safe Church Manual

Approved, October 17, 2016
Governing Council

The Plymouth Church in Framingham
All voices are welcome | All people are invited
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Safe Church Policy and Its Implementation

Policy Statement

The Plymouth Church in Framingham, as a member congregation of the United Church of Christ, and as an Open and Affirming congregation, has a sacred responsibility to protect the members of our community, especially the well-being of children, youth, and vulnerable adults.

The Plymouth Church is, therefore, committed to creating and maintaining a worship and work community in which members, children, friends, staff and volunteers can worship and work together in an atmosphere that is safe, both physically and psychologically, and is free of exploitation or intimidation. We strive to provide an environment that is welcoming and in which each and every person in our congregation feels valued. This includes visitors, community members, and those who use our facility.

We recognize that a culture of caring is a key aspect of our congregation's health and safety. This is especially true for the children and youth who are entrusted to our care. To that end, The Plymouth Church has established the following measures to assure that safety measures are established, exercised and periodically reviewed.

These policies and procedures apply to all events and activities which take place under the name of The Plymouth Church in Framingham, regardless of where the event takes place – on church property, at other churches, in members' homes, and on service learning trips.

Open and Affirming

We believe all people are created in the image of God, and we embrace Jesus' call to love one another. We commit ourselves to the ongoing work of being an Open and Affirming congregation. We strive, with God's grace, to welcome all persons into our community. We celebrate our differences, including age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, mental and physical ability, and spiritual tradition. We invite all to share fully the life, leadership, ministry and sacraments of this church. Trusting in the Holy Spirit, we journey together in faith.

Child Adult Safety Team

There shall be a Child Adult Safety Team (CAST) comprised of no less than three and no more than six members appointed by the Governing Council to serve for one year terms which are renewable. Ideally some of the members will have

experience, either current or past, in working with other organizations that serve children and youth.

Purpose

1. Assure that hiring procedures for employed staff are in place that provide notice to prospective employees that employment is contingent on a satisfactory background inquiry through reference checking and/or a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.
2. Recommend to the Governing Council for their approval those positions, both employed and volunteer, that require a satisfactory Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check as a condition of employment or appointment as a volunteer.
3. Recommend to the Governing Council and implement procedures for the confidential maintenance of CORI check reports and for the appropriate handling those CORI results that come back with a history. In order to provide for not only restricted knowledge of CORI check results, but also a multi-lateral approach to interpreting those results, access to CORI check results will be limited to the Senior Pastor and three members of the Child Adult Safety Team.
4. Collaborate and coordinate with the Children's Ministries Council and their staff advisor on the development and implementation of procedures that focus on the safety of children from infancy through 5th grade.
5. Collaborate and coordinate with the Youth Ministries Council and their staff advisor on the development and implementation of procedures that focus on the safety of youth from 6th through 12th grade.
6. Collaborate and coordinate with the Property Management Council and their staff advisor on the development and implementation of procedures related to building safety and security for both church and non-church groups who use and/or rent the facility.
7. Develop and disseminate appropriately the procedures for reporting suspected child abuse to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families.
8. Review at least every two years all of the responsibilities outlined above and provide a report to the Governing Council on areas of work that are going well, areas where improvements need to be made and a plan and timetable for making such improvements.
9. Develop and disseminate appropriately the relevant materials in a Safe Church Policies and Procedures Manual to be available in the office and on the website.

The Ministerial Relationship

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus taught, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” And also, “Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Matthew 25:40-45)

This parable of judgment underscores the importance that Jesus places on taking care of those who are vulnerable. In ministries ancient and modern, we seek to offer mutual support and encouragement to one another in faith, recognizing that some members of the body require and deserve special considerations.

The Ministerial Relationship is defined as the relationship between a minister and a member of the congregation. A minister is a person authorized to provide ministry on behalf of The Plymouth Church (i.e. clergy, student interns, choir directors, church staff, Officers, Faith Workshop leaders, and youth leaders, whether volunteer or paid). A member of the congregation is anyone receiving that ministry (i.e. parishioners, community members, students, employees, volunteers).¹

Within this ministerial relationship lives an uneven power distribution in which the provider has more influence and resources than the recipient. Power imbalances are relational and contextual. For example, an ordained pastor has more power over a student intern; that same intern has more power than a parishioner.

Pastoral Misconduct is any situation where a person uses the power of the ministerial role for their own personal benefit. Sexual Misconduct is any situation that includes sexualized behavior within a ministerial relationship.¹ Sexualized Behavior includes a broad range of behavior including speech, gestures, humor, and physical contact. Many behaviors which might be acceptable in other social contexts are inappropriate within the ministerial relationship. Similarly, behaviors which are appropriate (i.e. hugging) can become inappropriately sexualized by intensity, duration, or a lack of consent.¹

Definitions

The following definitions apply to the policies and procedures, but are not meant to replace common sense.

Faith Discovery: the overall program for children and youth supported and sponsored by The Plymouth Church in Framingham.

Faith Workshop: the conversations for children during Sunday morning worship (i.e. Sunday School).

¹ “Making Our Churches Safe For All: An Introduction to Abuse Prevention for Local Churches,” Insurance Board, (8) www.maineucc.org/resources/safe_church_guidelines.pdf

<u>Youth Group:</u>	the conversations for Middle School and High School youth, in separate groups and/or as a combined group.
<u>Child:</u>	individuals from infancy through fifth (5th) grade.
<u>Youth:</u>	individuals from sixth (6th) through twelfth (12th) grade.
<u>Adult:</u>	individuals over the age of eighteen (18) years old.
<u>Vulnerable Adult:</u>	a person 18 years of age or older who lacks the physical and/or cognitive capacity to offer active, informed consent and protect themselves against harm, as a result of an injury or disability; or a person 60 years of age or older with functional, physical, or mental inability to care for self.
<u>Service Animal:</u>	a dog that has been individually trained to do work or perform tasks for an individual with a disability; the task(s) performed by the dog must be directly related to the person’s disability. ²

General Building Use

Policy Statement

The Plymouth Church in Framingham is responsible for maintaining church buildings and grounds. All members and groups within the congregation and organizations seeking to rent space must understand and agree to the policies specified in “Safe Church Policy Agreement for Rentals.” ([Appendix A001](#))

Firearms

All firearms are prohibited from church property – including inside church buildings, on church grounds, and inside cars parked on church property.

Acknowledging that toy guns have the potential to be mistaken for real weapons, they are also banned.

Food Allergies

The Plymouth Church in Framingham gratefully enters into partnership with families and individuals with food allergies, so that together every person may participate in the life and ministry of the congregation to the fullest extent possible. Recognizing the church is made up of many volunteers that vary from event to event,

² “Frequently Asked Questions about Service Animals and the ADA,” Americans with Disabilities Act, www.ada.gov/regs2010/service_animal_qa.html

the ultimate responsibility for a child's safety with respect to food allergies will remain with the parent or guardian. And all foods should be considered unsafe unless specifically labeled.

Sacrament of Holy Communion

We practice an open table in which all people are welcome, though not required, to participate. Therefore, the church will provide an allergen-free bread option – free of dairy, eggs, fish, shellfish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soy – each time Communion is served. This option will be prepared specially and served separately from the rest of Communion to avoid cross-contamination.

Present practice is to offer “Edward & Sons, Organic Baked Brown Rice Snaps, Unsalted Plain” accompanied by 100% grape juice.

Family/Individual Responsibility

The family of children with food allergies and/or those individuals with food allergies will:

1. Inform the pastor(s) and leaders about the allergy and family strategies for prevention and emergency response.
2. Complete the “Registration, Medical Information, Media Release, Statements of Consents, and Permission” form.
3. Work with pastor(s) and leaders to develop church strategies for education, prevention and emergency response.
4. Remind volunteers and other adults at regular intervals, as there may be different leaders at each event.
5. Carry necessary counter medication (i.e. epinephrine autoinjector) at all times; a parent or guardian will be the only one allowed to administer counter medication unless in the case of extreme danger to the individual.

Church Responsibility

The pastor(s), staff, deacons, and leaders of the church will:

1. Provide a loving, safe, unbiased environment for persons seeking to participate in the ministries of the congregation.
2. Intervene to stop any discrimination or bullying of a child or individual for their food allergy.
3. Collect and review the “Registration, Medical Information, Media Release, Statements of Consents, and Permission” form at the start of each program year.

4. Develop, in consultation with the parents, guardians, or individual, a “food allergy action plan” in the event of a reaction; this plan will be kept on file and reviewed regularly by staff and appropriate leaders.

Smoking

The Plymouth Church is a smoke-free environment. Smoking (inclusive of cigarettes, electronic cigarettes, vapor cigarettes, pipes, and cigars) is prohibited inside all church buildings at all times.

Smoking is not permitted within 25 feet of the Sanctuary and Parish Hall buildings of The Plymouth Church, the Plymouth House Nursery School building including Ellison Hall, or the parsonage (125 Edgell Road). Designated smoking areas are provided. Violation of this rule is sufficient cause to revoke a group’s use of the facilities and/or to deny future use.

Smokers are responsible for extinguishing and appropriately disposing of cigarette butts.

Drugs and Alcohol

The sale, exchange, or use of illicit drugs (i.e. marijuana, narcotics, prescription medications, etc.) shall not be permitted at any time on church property, including the parsonage (125 Edgell Road) and surrounding parking lots.

The serving and consumption of alcohol shall comply with Massachusetts law. As such, alcohol consumption is prohibited to youth under the age of 21. This requirement will be in effect at all times and for all events under the auspices of The Plymouth Church, regardless of the location of the church event (i.e. in people’s homes or on service learning trips outside the state or the country).

Organizations and groups (including church members) renting church space will be required to hire a licensed and insured bartender for the entire duration of the event, if alcohol is to be served.

Hazardous Materials

While Plymouth Church will make every effort to keep cleaning and other hazardous materials stored out of sight of children, church property is not “baby-proofed” or “toddler-proofed.” Responsibility rests with parents and/or guardians to supervise their children when at church.

Service Dogs

Service dogs are welcome. All service dogs are expected to have vests or blankets to clearly identify them as service animals. Any state regulations that apply to Plymouth House Nursery School will remain in effect.

Pets

For allergy and other safety reasons, all animal owners should adhere to the following practices:

1. At all times, animals should be leashed, crated, or confined behind a gate in an area where they can be supervised.
2. Animals in the building must be under the owner's supervision at all times.
3. Animals outside the building are not allowed to be off leash.
4. Animals must be house-trained; owners are expected to clean up after their animals – both indoors and outdoors.
5. Owners should ask permission before allowing their animals to approach other church members or visitors.

First Aid

Complete First Aid Kits are located in the resource room, in the nursery and on the south end of the classroom corridor next to the fire extinguisher, and in the Parish Hall kitchen. Complete Kits will include³:

1. Sterilized gauze
2. Antiseptic wipes
3. Two pairs of sterile gloves
4. CPR administering mouthpiece
5. Adhesive tape and bandages (various sizes)
6. Elastic bandages
7. Instant cold packs

Basic Kits are available in every Faith Workshop classroom, and include:

1. Antiseptic wipes
2. Elastic bandages

³ “A first-aid kit can make all the difference,” Church Mutual Insurance Company
www.churchmutual.com/index.cfm?pid=2257&pageTitle=&riskalertid=27

Universal Precautions (i.e. avoiding contact with bodily fluids, by means of the wearing of protective barriers such as medical gloves) are encouraged when dealing with any body fluids.

In the event of an injury or accident, the clergy shall ensure that an “Accident/Incident Report Form” is completed. (Appendix A002) Injuries to a child or youth should be reported to the parent by the Faith Workshop leader or supervising adult.

Emergency Evacuation

Emergency exits will be clearly identified at all times. Evacuation Procedures will be posted on the wall in each classroom and in the pews in the sanctuary.

In the event of an emergency evacuation, remove all the children from the building in a quick and orderly fashion following the guidelines posted on the wall. If an evacuation is required during Faith Workshop, leaders should guide their classes; the Superintendent of the Day will assist the Nursery Attendants in removing children from the nursery.

All children and adults supervising children are to relocate themselves to the steps of Plymouth House Nursery School, which is located on the southern end of the parking lot. Look for the Blue Doors. Parents should not search for their children; they should evacuate the building safely and proceed to the Plymouth House Nursery School steps.

Ministry with Children and Youth

Policy Statement

The Plymouth Church in Framingham is committed to creating and maintaining an environment in which children, youth and adults can worship side-by-side. This means fostering opportunities for youth to participate fully in the life and ministry of the church, including peer relationships with youth their own age and intergenerational relationships with adults. It also means creating space for youth to explore their faith through service, learning and worship leadership.

In order to promote a safe and appropriate intergenerational community, we acknowledge that children and youth, by virtue of their age, are not able to offer informed consent; and so it is the responsibility of adults to uphold the highest standard of ethics and conduct in order to protect children and youth from abuse and exploitation.

Therefore, in relationships among youth and between adults and minors:

1. Sexual contact between adults and youth is never appropriate or acceptable, regardless of the conditions or circumstances.

2. Physical and/or verbal violence, harassment and intimidation are never tolerated.
3. Discrimination due to age, race, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, socioeconomic status, mental and physical ability, spiritual tradition is never permitted.

During all church-sponsored programs and in all ministerial relationships, it is never permissible for an adult to be alone with a single child or youth.

The Two-Adult Rule. For church activities in which children or youth are gathered there will be at least two (2) responsible adults per every ten (10) children or youth.

It is only ever acceptable for one adult to supervise a group of children or youth during times when the building is occupied for a church event and other adults are nearby. On such occasions, the doors must have clear windows, or may not be closed. Doors must never be locked. A designated adult will be charged with the responsibility to check in on the group at regular intervals.

After worship, when other church programming is not being provided, the supervision of children and youth is the responsibility of their parents.

Nursery Room

Drop-off/Pick-up

The nursery opens at 9:45 AM. As parents arrive they are asked to:

1. Sign the child in on the sign-in form
2. Include information on the sign-in form as to where they will be sitting during the service.
3. Notify the attendant(s) of any special needs the child may have.

The nursery will remain attended until the last child is picked up. Parent(s) are expected to pick up child(ren) directly following the service, prior to going to Coffee Hour.

Attendant(s)

There are to be at least two Nursery Attendants present in the nursery at all times. At least one of these attendants must be an Adult Leader.

The church contracts with Mother's Helpers (www.mothers-helpers.com) to be a Nursery Attendant. Mother's Helpers provide "qualified, pre-screened, adult

babysitters for children of all ages.” All helpers are over the age of 18. As a part of Mother’s Helpers’ hiring practices, each helper submits to a personal interview, and to criminal background, DMV, and reference checks.

If one of the Nursery Attendants is from Mother’s Helpers they will meet the expectations and obligations of an Adult Leader. In such cases, the second Nursery Attendant may be a youth, provided they are at least 14 years old.

Diapering

Nursery Attendants do not change diapers. If a child is in need of a diaper change the child’s parent will be notified by one of the attendants.

Snacks

Because snacks are offered, parents/guardians should be notified that the Nursery is not allergen-free.

Parental Assistance

Parents will be called out of worship for the following:

- to change a diaper
- to comfort a child who has been crying for more than ten minutes.
- to comfort a child who has been hurt or become ill.

Faith Workshop

During Faith Workshop and other Faith Discovery activities under the name of The Plymouth Church in Framingham, the following principles and procedures will be adhered to:

1. There must be two adult leaders per room. Faith Workshop leaders are expected to recruit a replacement if they are unavailable to teach.
2. At no time will an adult be alone with a single child or youth during a church activity.
3. No child will be left alone at the church building or on church property.
4. No child will leave the church building or church property on their own.
5. At no time is a classroom door permitted to be locked while the room is in use.
6. Children up through Grade 2 will be accompanied to the bathroom. The adult shall ensure that the bathroom is empty and then wait outside the door.
7. Children up through Grade 2 will not leave their classroom until picked up by a parent or other designated adult. Leaders will stay in the classroom until all of the children have been picked up.
8. Grade 3 and up can leave the room to go to the Parish Hall.

9. Adult Leaders will not leave the church premises with children during the Faith Workshop time.
10. Photocopies of “Registration, Medical Information, Media Release, Statements of Consents, and Permission” ([Appendix A003](#)) will be brought on any and all off-site activities.

Having discussed the policy and procedures above, each Faith Workshop leader will sign the “Adult Leader Covenant.” ([Appendix A004](#))

Youth Group

During Youth Group, Confirmation and all other Faith Discovery activities under the name of The Plymouth Church in Framingham, the following principles and procedures will be adhered to:

1. There must be two adult leaders.
2. At no time will an adult be alone with a child or youth during a church activity.
3. No youth will be left alone at the church building or on church property.
4. At no time is a door permitted to be locked.
5. Each youth group should develop a covenant.
6. Photocopies of “Registration, Medical Information, Media Release, Statements of Consents, and Permission” ([Appendix A003](#)) will be brought on any and all off-site activities.
7. Photocopies of “Service Learning Trip: Parental Consent and Medical Authorization” ([Appendix A011](#)) will be brought on overnight, long-distance Service Learning Trips.
8. Participation in youth group can be denied if a form is not submitted or for continued breach of the group covenant.

Adult Leaders

Adult leaders are at least 18 years of age and are at least 4 years older than the youth they are leading. Prior to working directly with youth, Adult Leaders (including Youth Ministry Council members and Confirmation mentors) must:

1. Be active participants of the Church for at least 6 months.
2. Comply with all policies, philosophies, and procedures as prescribed in this Safe Church Manual, and further agree by signing the “Plymouth Church Volunteer Consent, and Acknowledgment Form.” ([Appendix A005](#))
3. Consent to a Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check. (For further information refer to “Background Checks.”)

Drivers

Drivers who are transporting other participants during Youth Group must be at least 21 years of age. The pastor(s) and/or Adult Leader has the responsibility to determine the appropriateness of individual drivers based on the length of the trip, the age and experience of the driver and the age of the passengers.

The “Two-Adult Rule” extends to motor vehicles. An adult should not drive a child or youth alone. If it is unavoidable, express permission must be given by the parent or guardian. Any recurring arrangements should be expressed in writing. The adult should inform the parent or guardian when they have picked up the child or youth and when they have dropped the child or youth off.

Youth drivers who may be traveling by themselves and who are under 18 must meet the current regulations of Massachusetts law and have parental consent. They may not drive other participants of youth group.

All vehicles used in transporting youth and adults on Plymouth Church outings must be covered by a public liability and property damage liability insurance policy that meets or exceeds the insurance coverage required for Massachusetts.

If the vehicle to be used is designed to carry more than 15 persons (including driver), the driver must have a commercial driver’s license.

Electronic Communication and Social Media

Policy Statement

The philosophies and procedures of this Manual apply to all electronic communication and social media.

Whereas the landscape of digital platforms – texting, email, websites, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Tumblr – are in constant flux, the responsibility remains with adults to create and preserve an atmosphere that is safe, both physically and psychologically, and is free of exploitation or intimidation. We strive to provide an environment that is welcoming and in which each and every person in our congregation feels valued. Whereas the devices, from computers, to tablets, to smartphones, are increasingly sophisticated and interconnected, the responsibility remains with adults to be awake and aware of best practices.

All adults (clergy, staff, and volunteers) are expected, when representing The Plymouth Church, to conduct themselves online in accordance with the philosophies set forth in this Safe Church Manual.

Not all communication methods are equal. While each has advantages and disadvantages, there is a hierarchy of intimacy and effectiveness.

1. Face-to-Face
2. Skype/Facetime
3. Phone
4. Email
5. Texting
6. Social networking

Media Release

We understand and respect that not everyone wishes for their image to be used in the marketing and publicity of the church, both on- and offline. A person's image belongs to them; they have the right to say when and where it can and cannot be used. In the case of children especially, parents and guardians have the right to say when and where their child/ren's image can and cannot be used.

Therefore, the church will obtain permission from persons and families for the use of photos, videos, and audio recordings during church-sponsored activities in church publications, including printed materials, the church website, emails, Facebook, and slideshows. The church will also maintain a list of those persons and families who deny permission.

Children and Youth

In keeping with the philosophy of the Two-Adult Rule, electronic communication and social media should not be used for extended one-to-one communication between adults (clergy, staff, or adult leaders) and a child or youth.

Adults should not initiate a one-to-one conversation with a child or youth via text, email, or other messaging app. Adults should not make friend requests of a child or youth on Facebook or other social networking site. Adults may respond to a child or youth and may accept a friend request, but should immediately confirm with a parent or guardian to seek consent. Adults should keep a record of all digital conversations.

Mandated Reporting

The obligations of mandated reporting extend to electronic communication and social media for those clergy, staff, and adult leaders.

Confidentiality

Efforts to maintain confidentiality should continue online; however the nature of electronic communication and social media makes the guarantee of confidentiality much harder to ensure.

Background Checks

Policy Statement

The Plymouth Church in Framingham, as an organization that must comply with statutory and regulatory requirements will secure and maintain the authorization to request background checks through Department of Criminal Justice Information Services (DCJIS). Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) will be obtained for all church employees and designated volunteers.

The Senior Pastor and the Family Life Pastor and an appointed representative of the Child Adult Safety Team (CAST) will be the only people allowed to request CORI checks and review the results. They are expected to complete all the necessary paperwork and requirements as assigned by the state for that position.

Procedures

Who Receives Background Checks?

All staff will submit to a background check. Also, the following volunteer positions will submit to a background check:

- CAST members
- Adult Leaders
- Nursery Room Attendants
- Youth Council members
- Children's Ministry Council members
- Faith Workshop Coordinator
- Faith Workshop Leaders

With respect to background checks, Plymouth House Nursery School functions as a separate entity.

Requesting a Report

The chair of a search committee charged with hiring a staff person or the staff person accountable to ministries of the church involving children and youth will be responsible for giving the prospective employee the church's "CORI Request Form Cover Letter" ([Appendix A006](#)) and a "Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Acknowledgement Form" – either The Plymouth Church ([Appendix A007](#)) or the Massachusetts ([Appendix A008](#)) version. A copy of the completed and signed

“Acknowledgement Form” will be submitted to the Senior Pastor and/or CORI representative.

All forms will be attached to the completed CORI check and filed in the Office regardless of the outcome of the report.

Report Content

As a religious organization, The Plymouth Church in Framingham has access to “Required 2 Access,” which includes the following information:

- Non-conviction information
- All pending criminal charges, including cases continued without a finding of guilt, until they are dismissed
- All misdemeanor convictions and felony convictions dating from the subject’s 18th birthday
- All information relating to those offenses for which the subject was adjudicated as an adult while younger than 18 years old
- All convictions for murder, voluntary manslaughter, involuntary manslaughter, and sex offenses⁴

Clean Report

If the CORI report is “clean,” (the report shows no current arraignments or past convictions) the Senior Pastor and/or CORI Representative will notify necessary individuals.

Unclean Report

If the CORI report is “unclean,” the Senior Pastor and CORI representative will consult and reach consensus about next steps. They may decide to prevent a hire or remove a volunteer from their ministry based solely on the content of the report. For clarity and to insure compliance with all current laws and regulations, it is advised that the DCJIS be consulted – either online or by phone.

The Senior Pastor and CORI representative may choose to be more stringent than the guidelines; they may not be less stringent than the guidelines.

The candidate with an “unclean” CORI report will be given the opportunity to meet with the the Senior Pastor and CORI representative to discuss the nature of the report and to be given the opportunity to clarify them. Meetings with individuals with an “unclean” CORI report will be scheduled at a time and place that provides anonymity for the nature of the meeting.

If appropriate, such a candidate will be urged to withdraw his or her application voluntarily by a specified date in lieu of being rejected. Otherwise,

⁴ “iCORI Policy For Organizations,” Department of Criminal Justice Information Services, www.mass.gov/eopss/docs/chsb/icori-policy-trainings-organizations.pdf (Appendix A010)

candidates need to know that their application for employment (or a volunteer position) will be turned down. Such rejection becomes more public and we prefer to avoid that.

If there is a case of mistaken identity, the candidate will be informed of the recourse they have to deal with that issue, but it will not, in and of itself, alter the consensus of the CORI Team. If a candidate does not withdraw voluntarily by the specified date, the Senior Pastor and CORI representative will notify the chair of a search committee or the internal requestor that the candidate is not appropriate for the job.

If, because of timing issues, the individual is already on the job, the same process will occur with the individual’s supervisor being notified if the individual does not resign voluntarily.

Duration of Background Checks

Background checks for currently and continuously active Adult Leaders do not need be repeated. Volunteers are considered inactive after 2 years; their CORI results will be considered to have “expired.”

For clergy, the Central Association requires authorized ministers to have an up-to-date Ministerial Profile at all times; this includes a national background check every 18 months. Pastors should submit each new background check for the church’s personnel files.

iCORI (Online Access)

Users

Senior Pastor, Family Life Pastor, and CAST Representative currently have access to the iCORI system.

Account Details

Account Status:	Active
Date First Registered:	06/05/2012
Account Type:	Religious Organization
Organization Name:	The Plymouth Church in Framingham
Organization ID:	
Address:	87 Edgell Road, Framingham, MA 01701
Phone Number:	508-875-1364
Website:	www.plymouthchurchframingham.org
Federal ID:	

Frequently Asked Questions

www.mass.gov/eopss/agencies/dcjis/icori-frequently-asked-questions.html

Related Recommendations

Interviewing and Discernment

Background checks are not infallible. They cannot predict potential, first-time offenders. They cannot discern perpetrators who did not get caught or did not get convicted. Abuse frequently goes unreported.

When hiring staff, individuals and committees charged with interviewing candidates are expected to screen for potential dangers through targeted interview questions and checking references. For volunteers, similar diligence and discernment should be given before accepting a member's willingness to serve in a particular capacity.

Offer Letters

Any offer letters to prospective staff should include reference to the employment being contingent on the completion of at least a Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.

Job Descriptions

All job descriptions are written for employees, there should be a section "Employment Expectations" in which the following is included:

- Employee is expected to be familiar and comply with the Personnel Policies and Procedures, including all policies and procedures therein.
- Employee is expected to be familiar and comply with the Safe Church Manual, including all policies and procedures therein.
- Employee must submit to at least a Massachusetts Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) check.

Mandated Reporting

Am I a Mandated Reporter?

All persons ministering under the auspices of The Plymouth Church should consider themselves mandated reporters as prescribed by both federal and state law.

Mandated Reporters must report actual or suspected instances of abuse or neglect by caretakers against people who are considered to be disabled, elderly (60 or older) or children (under 18).

Children and Youth (under 18)

“Massachusetts law requires mandated reporters to immediately make an oral report to DCF when, in their professional capacity, they have reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is suffering from abuse and/or neglect. A written report is to be submitted within 48 hours.

Massachusetts law defines the following professionals as mandated reporters:

- clergy members, including ordained or licensed leaders of any church or religious body, persons performing official duties on behalf of a church or religious body, or persons employed by a religious body to supervise, educate, coach, train or counsel a child on a regular basis;
- public or private school teachers, educational administrators, guidance or family counselors;
- early education, preschool, child care or after-school program staff, including any person paid to care for, or work with, a child in any public or private facility, home or program funded or licensed by the Commonwealth, which provides child care or residential services. This includes child care resource and referral agencies, as well as voucher management agencies, family child care and child care food programs.”⁵

For further information please refer to “Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting: A Guide for Mandated Reporters.” ([Appendix A008](#))

Suicide and Other Types of Harm

Current Massachusetts law does not mandate reporting in cases of suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or dating violence. Clergy, staff, and adult leaders of The Plymouth Church are expected to report any situation where the safety and health of the child or youth is at risk.

⁵ “Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting: A Guide for Mandated Reporters,” Massachusetts Department of Children & Families. www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dcf/can-mandated-reporters-guide.pdf

Procedures for Reporting Suspected Abuse

*Abuse can be either physical or emotional
and can result from either direct abuse or neglect.*

Steps	Task
1	<p>If any child, youth, or vulnerable adult tells you about a concern that may imply abuse,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● treat what the person has said as fact ● assure the person that the abuse is not their fault ● be sympathetic, but nonjudgmental ● do NOT delve into the situation by asking questions <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If abuse is suspected, but the person has not spoken with you, proceed directly to step 2.</p>
2	<p>Upon discovery or suspicion of potential abuse, neglect, or harm, you shall write an “Immediate Incident Report” – a verbatim record of what was said, when, how, to whom, and as many details as can be remembered. The report shall be sealed and delivered to the person identified in Step 3.</p>
3	<p>Any volunteer or staff member who has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect, will inform the Senior Pastor and/or the Family Life Pastor</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>If either pastor is suspected of misconduct, the volunteer or staff member will inform the Chair of the Child Adult Safety Team.</p>
4	<p>Without conducting any investigation the pastor(s) and the Chair of the Child Adult Safety Team will meet promptly to take the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. complete the “Internal Documentation for Suspected Abuse” (see below). 2. determine if parent/guardian should be notified. 3. determine if the known facts appear to warrant a report to a state agency; a decision not to report must be unanimous. 4. determine suitable pastoral step(s) to minister to those involved and report those, as appropriate, to relevant clergy.
5	<p>If a report is deemed necessary, the Chair of the Child Adult Safety Team and/or the Senior Pastor should follow the procedures outlined by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for Mandated Reporting.⁶</p>

⁶ “Mandatory Abuse Reporting,” Mass.gov
www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/hcq/dhpl/nursing/complaint-resolution/mandatory-abuse-reporting.html

	Abuse/neglect of people 60 and over (Elder) – 800-922-2275 Abuse/neglect of people under 18 (Child) – 800-792-5200 Abuse/neglect of people considered disabled – 800-426-9009
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Further information can be found in “Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting: A Guide for Mandated Reporters.” (See Appendix A009)

Internal Documentation for Suspected Abuse

1. Name of Adult making first report
2. Phone
3. Name of person
4. Age or Grade, if appropriate
5. Parent(s) or Guardian, if appropriate
6. Phone
7. Circumstances, including date, in which adult making first report learned of or noticed signs of abuse.
8. What is the nature of the abuse and is there an alleged perpetrator?
9. Are there other children or adults that you know of who are aware of the circumstances or nature of alleged abuse described above? Who are they?
10. To the best of your knowledge, are the child’s parents aware of the information cited above?
11. Is there any other information that you think would be helpful to the Child Adult Safety Team of Plymouth Church as it considers reporting to the Department of Social Services?
12. Name of Adult gathering information
13. Date

Appendix

- A001 Safe Church Policy Agreement for Rentals
- A002 Accident/Incident Report Form
- A003 Multi-Year Registration, Medical Information, Media Release,
Statements of Consents, and Permission
- A004 Adult Leader Covenant
- A005 Volunteer Consent and Acknowledgement Form
- A006 CORI Request Form Cover Letter
- A007 CORI Acknowledgement Form (PC)
- A008 CORI Acknowledgement Form (MA)
- A009 Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting (DCF)
- A010 iCORI Policy For Organizations (DCJIS)