

Safeguarding Policy & Procedure Manual
Astoria Community Church
2024, Second Edition
Abbreviated Version

1 Overview

Why does our church need this policy?

God created each of us in His image and for His purposes. As His image-bearers, all people deserve to be treated with dignity, decency and respect. (Gen. 1:27, Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:10).

For this reason, Astoria Community Church (ACC) is committed to protecting everyone in our church and ministry environment from harassment and the abuse of power, and responding to any concerning or harmful situations with care for any who experience mistreatment and fairness to all involved. These commitments come from God, who loves justice, is a refuge for the hurting, and listens to the cry of the vulnerable. (Psalm 9:4-12, Psalm 46, Amos 5:24, I Peter 5:7)

Who is protected by this policy? Who has responsibilities?

Everyone at ACC is entitled to a safe place to worship and serve, and each of us has the duty to ensure ACC is that safe place. Church leaders have additional responsibilities, as discussed later in this policy.

The ACC Safeguarding Policy addresses interactions and relationships between adults and between adults and children in the ACC church and ministry environment, including church leaders and staff, members, congregants and visitors.¹

God is a refuge for those who are abused and never ignores the cry of one who is abused (Psalm 9:9, 12). Astoria Community Church is committed to being a refuge for those who are abused. We will do all we can to protect the vulnerable, care for those who are survivors, and hold abusers accountable. Abuse is not a sin like any other sin. Abuse is a particularly grievous sin (and often a crime), especially when someone in a position of power and trust violates or exploits someone who is powerless to stop it (see Ecclesiastes 4:1).

As Christians we cannot face abuse if we are in denial about the reality of abuse. Instead, Jesus calls us to be “wise as serpents.” (Matthew 10:16) We all must take responsibility to become educated about abuse and take responsibility to uphold our policy. Jesus spoke often about abuse using the metaphor of wolves, shepherds, and sheep. Jesus warned about “wolves in sheep’s clothing” who would prey upon the vulnerable (Matthew 7:15). The Bible affirms the value and dignity of children and all who are made in God’s image. God condemns abuse in all forms.

¹ ACC employees are also covered by the ACC Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policy. This policy identifies the way ACC employees are protected in the work and ministry environment and the way ACC employees are expected to interact with others.

Jesus calls every Christian and every church to walk in the light with him and “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” (Ephesians 5:11)

Our goal is to prevent and respond appropriately to abuse by becoming a community that is educated on various forms of abuse and common dynamics, clarifying appropriate boundaries, and doing the hard work of holding each other accountable. All persons should experience an environment of safety and justice and one that is free from any form of abuse, harassment, or discrimination.

By its very nature, our community includes interaction with vulnerable children and adults. Sadly, predatory individuals often seek environments with vulnerable people. Child abuse is a common reality in our world and even in churches. The data shows that 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6 men are sexually abused in the U.S. before they turn 18. Other forms of child abuse are also common. Jesus condemned anyone who would abuse a child in the strongest possible terms: “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.” (Matthew 18:6) Intimate partner violence, clergy abuse, stalking, sexual assault, and other forms of abuse against adults are also common. Jesus condemned those who used their spiritual position to exploit others (e.g. Mark 12:38-40). Abuse in all its forms is almost always perpetrated by someone known to the victim. Abusers utilize a variety of tactics to gain trust, deceive both victims and others within a community, and keep the abuse secret. This policy only states what must be lived out: as much as possible to take responsibility as individuals and as a church to prevent abuse and hold those who abuse accountable.

2 What situations does ACC seek to prevent and address?

ACC, as a mirror of God’s concern for justice and protection of the vulnerable, seeks to prevent and address any type of harassment or abuse of power in the church and ministry environment, including the following:

- Sexual harassment, including sexual jokes, repeated and unwelcome requests for dates and/or sexual contact
- Unwanted physical touch, including sexual touch and sexual violence
- Stalking
- Intimate partner violence
- Offensive jokes and derogatory name-calling, including on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, age, gender, disability and other similar bases
- Threatening behavior
- Financial abuse, such as taking money or property, forging a signature, or getting a person to sign a deed, will or power of attorney through deception, coercion or undue influence.
- Abuse of power by church leaders, including spiritual abuse

Note: ACC will address reports of these behaviors when the interactions occur during an ACC activity (such as during church, a community group meeting or volunteer activity). ACC will attempt, when possible, to address interactions that occur outside of ACC but involving people who are ACC congregants or know each other because of their association with ACC (such as two church members socializing together outside of church activities).

What is spiritual abuse?

Spiritual abuse is when a leader (pastor, elder, leader of a ministry team or community group) uses his/her position to manipulate, bully or intimidate people under the leader's authority as a means of asserting power and control. Normal pastoral / leader functions, such as talking about Biblical standards, praying for others and encouraging church involvement, are not spiritual abuse unless the leader acts cruelly or in a manipulative way.

What about abuse in romantic relationships involving church leaders?

Sadly, abuse of different kinds, including spiritual abuse, can happen when church leaders have a romantic relationship with another person in the church. For this reason, ACC leaders are required to report certain relationships to their ministry supervisors, so that the supervisor can provide accountability and proactively address any potential problems or conflicts of interests.

3 Reporting

Who should report harassment or abuse of power? How is a report made?

Anyone who experiences, observes or learns of harassment or abuse of power (or possible harassment or abuse of power) in the ACC ministry environment is strongly encouraged to raise the situation to a Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, or Trustee or by using [the ACC Reporting Form](#). ACC has a Safeguarding Team, who will be responsible for responding to any concerns or reports.

Church leaders who observe a situation of possible harassment or abuse of power or otherwise become aware of it, are required to report the situation immediately to their staff ministry supervisor (unless the report involves the supervisor) and by using [this reporting form](#). For purposes of this reporting requirement, church leaders include: Pastors, Elders, Deacons, Deaconesses, Trustees, and Small Group Leaders (those who lead community groups or groups for men, women, parents, etc.). Church leaders are required to report possible harassment or abuse of power within ACC or involving any ACC ministry, including situations that occurred in the past.

When should harassment or abuse of power be reported?

Concerns regarding harassment or abuse of power should be reported as soon as possible, to allow ACC the opportunity to address the situation, provide care to anyone hurt by the mistreatment and seek accountability for anyone who has acted wrongly.

Church leaders (as defined above) who observe or otherwise become aware of possible harassment or abuse of power are required to report the situation immediately.

Should I report if I am not certain that the situation is harassment or abuse of power?

You are strongly encouraged to report, to allow ACC to ensure that no one is being hurt or mistreated. If you are a church leader (as defined above), you are required to report, even if you are not sure of all the facts. The Safeguarding Team will take steps to find out what is happening and to determine which next steps are appropriate to ensure everyone's safety.

What about situations involving church leaders or members that took place in the past or outside of the ACC context?

ACC expects its leaders and members² to interact with others, including people outside the ACC environment, in a respectful, honoring and lawful manner. Church leaders and members are prohibited from engaging in harassment or violence of any kind, in any situation. Any reports of this behavior by ACC leaders or members, including reports of past action, will be reviewed and addressed.

Should I report to law enforcement?

Certain forms of harassment and abuse of power are also criminal acts. ACC encourages the reporting of criminal harassment or abuse to law enforcement, and will not retaliate against anyone who reports a crime to law enforcement, including if the individual who reportedly committed the crime is a church leader or member. Reports to law enforcement may be made whether or not the situation is also reported to ACC.

In NYC, crimes can be reported by contacting the NYPD at the police precinct where the crime occurred. Sexual crimes may also be reported by calling the NYPD Special Victims Division hotline at (646) 610-7272. If a person is in immediate physical danger, he/she should call 911.

² "Members" are congregants who have completed the membership process and been admitted into church membership.

4 Response Process

How will ACC respond to a report?

ACC has a process for responding to a report of harassment or abuse of power (or possible harassment or abuse of power). The process is designed to be fair to everyone involved, and to provide care and protection for anyone who has been hurt.

ACC has a Safeguarding Team, composed of both men and women, to receive reports of any concerns and to respond according to ACC's process. As needed, ACC will also seek support from consultants, trained investigators, or others experienced in responding to concerns of harassment and abuse of power in the church environment.

Certain elements of this process reflect the guidance found in the Presbyterian Church of America *Book of Church Order (BCO), Part II, The Rules of Discipline*, and others reflect the Biblical mandate to seek the peace and purity of the Church, while also upholding justice and protecting the victims in our midst. (Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 82:3, 89:14, Eph. 1 - 2)

ACC is committed to providing a timely and effective response to any report of harassment or abuse within our church and ministries. We will work to create an environment in which anyone can feel comfortable raising questions and concerns, knowing that all situations will be taken seriously, and responded to professionally and with care.

5 Safeguarding Policy & Procedure - Acknowledgment

These policies and procedures have been designed to guide and assist you when working with minors and other vulnerable populations. The following is the official receipt denoting that the individual whose signature appears below has read and understands the guidelines contained in this manual. The information establishes general practices and guidelines and should not be construed in any way as a contract of employment or continued employment. ACC reserves the right to make changes in the content or application of this program and to implement those changes with or without notice.

The terms defined herein are defined for the purposes of the program and do not suppose or establish a legal relationship. These terms are not defined for the purposes of creating a legal relationship with ACC or any related or associated entity and instead are to be used with this document.

I have received, read and understand ACC's Safeguarding Policy and Procedure Manual. I intend to follow these guidelines and to monitor and protect children, youth and vulnerable adults in my service at ACC. I understand that any action inconsistent with this manual or failure to take action mandated by this manual may result in my removal as an employee or volunteer. I understand that these policies and procedures are the property of ACC.

Full Legal Name (Please Print)

Signature

Date

6 Resources on Harassment and Abuse of Power in the Church

The PCA Ad Hoc Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault (DASA) issued an extensive report on abuse in the church context, and recommends numerous resources.
<https://dasacommittee.org/resources>

GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), www.netgrace.org.

Safe Horizon. NYC organization with resources and support related to sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking. www.safehorizon.org

The Bully Pulpit, by Michael Kruger, related to spiritual abuse

The Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network Hotline (RAINN - 1-800-656-4673)