

## **Acton Congregational Church Allegations of Child Abuse**

The Safe Church Committee has established a procedure to investigate and resolve complaints alleging abuse or inappropriate conduct directed to a minor child by a minister, staff member, volunteer, or adult participant in any church-sponsored activity. Each report of suspected abuse or inappropriate activity shall be taken seriously, with those involved receiving compassion, sensitivity, and concern.

Complaints that a minor child has been abused or mistreated by a minister, staff member, volunteer, or adult participant in any church-sponsored activity shall be reported as soon as possible to a minister or staff member. The recipient of the complaint will immediately forward the complaint to the Safe Church Committee's Chair ([safechurch@actonc.org](mailto:safechurch@actonc.org)). Depending on the nature of the complaint, the Safe Church Committee will designate at least two appropriate individuals to investigate the allegations (herein, The Response Team). Response Team members may include the following: one or more of the ministers, staff members, members of the Safe Church Committee and/or Personnel Committee, Deacons, legal counsel, and others as deemed appropriate.

Upon receipt of the complaint, the Response Team will notify the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) and will take all reasonable precautions to ensure the child's safety.

If the Response Team determines that there is reasonable cause to suspect child abuse as defined by Massachusetts law, it will report the matter in writing to the Department of Children and Families within 48 hours of receiving the allegations and will cooperate fully with the authorities. The Response Team will also notify the church's insurance company and the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ.

The Response Team will conduct an investigation into the allegations raised in the complaint. If a church employee is the subject of the complaint, the Personnel Committee and the employee's supervisor will be notified. The person who is accused may be suspended with pay and/or have his or her church activities restricted pending the outcome of the investigation.

If the allegations involve a minister or employee of the church, the Response Team will present its findings and recommendations regarding the resolution of the complaint to the Personnel Committee and the employee's supervisor, or in the case of the Senior Minister, to the Church Council. If evidence of abuse, inappropriate conduct, or a violation of church policies is found, the minister or employee may face disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

If the allegations involve a volunteer or other participant in church activities, the Response Team will present its findings and recommendations to the Senior Minister and the Church Council, who will determine the scope of the volunteer's or participant's future participation in church activities.

The Response Team will designate one individual who will be the spokesperson for purposes of communicating with the media and the public. An individual will also be chosen to maintain careful documentation of the allegations and associated investigation and actions.

Upon completion of the investigation and resolution, all documents will be maintained by the Church Administrator in a restricted, locked file.

The church will offer pastoral care, prayer, and support for all those who may be involved in this process.