

Policy on Harassment and the Abuse of Power in the Church and Ministry Environment

Applies to All Redeemer West Side

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1 Overview

1-a 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. (Genesis 1:27, Galatians 6:10, Ephesians 2:10).

For this reason, Redeemer Presbyterian Church West Side (RWS)¹ is committed to protecting everyone in our church and ministry environment from harassment and 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 cries of the vulnerable. (Psalm 9:4-12, Psalm 46, Amos 5:24, I Peter 5:7)

1-b Who is protected by this policy? Who has responsibilities?

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

The RWS Policy on Harassment and the Abuse of Power in the Church and Ministry Environment specifically addresses interactions and relationships among **adults** in the RWS church and ministry environment, including church leaders and staff, members, congregants, and visitors.²

A note on children/youth: *The protection of children/youth and concerns involving children/youth are addressed by RWS's Child Protection Policy, which can be found here. ([LINK](#)) Caring for the youngest people in our church family is a God-ordained responsibility, and anyone with concerns regarding the treatment of children/youth is urged to address those immediately with a children's or youth ministry staff member. Anyone who receives a disclosure of child abuse or sees evidence of child abuse in the RWS environment is strongly urged to call 311 in NYC or the New York State Central Register (SCR) directly at 1(800) 342-3720. If the child is in immediate danger, call 911.*

¹ For purposes of this policy, RWS also includes Redeemer Counseling Services and the Center for Faith and Work.

² RWS employees are also covered by an employment policy: the Redeemer Anti-Harassment and Anti-Discrimination Policy. This policy identifies the way RWS employees are protected in the work and ministry environment and the way RWS employees are expected to interact with others.

2 Prohibited Behavior

What types of harassment and abuse of power does RWS seek to prevent and address?

RWS, 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 RWS church and ministry environment, including the following types of mistreatment.

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

2-a Sexual Harassment and Violence

Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances or other unwelcome or inappropriate behavior of a sexual nature.

Sexual harassment is committed by men and women, married and single people, and against persons of the same or opposite sex. Sexual harassment can occur in-person or virtually, or by email, text, or social media.

Sexual harassment may take different forms, including but not limited to:

- Sexual innuendo, jokes, or suggestive comments, including when the person making the statement believes he/she is being funny, rather than offensive.
- Sexual propositions.
- Threats of a sexual nature.
- Repeated, unwelcome requests for dates or expressions of romantic interest.
- Repeated, unwelcome calls, texts, social media contact.
- Display of sexual material including by email, text, and social media.
- Leering, whistling, sexual gestures.

Sexual harassment may also take the form of sexual violence or other unwanted physical contact, including:

- Any unwelcome, forced, or coerced physical contact, including touching, tickling, pinching, patting, brushing up against, hugging, or cornering a person, as well as unwelcome, unwanted, coerced, or forced kissing, groping, rape, or other physical sexual contact or violence.

Physical/sexual contact is "**coerced**" when the recipient feels he/she must comply as a condition of being involved with church activities, in order to remain safe or in order to protect his/her reputation and social connections. Coercion can also occur when the decision to comply is based on threats, lies, false promises, or repeated, unrelenting demands.

2-b Stalking

Stalking is a pattern of unwanted, fixated, and obsessive behavior that is intrusive and causes alarm, distress, or a fear of violence, including but not limited to:

- Making repeated, unwelcome phone calls/texts or sending repeated, unwelcome messages or emails (which do not have a legitimate ministry purpose).
- Following or spying on a person.
- Showing up or waiting for someone without a legitimate reason.
- Leaving unwanted items, such as presents or flowers.
- Posting information or spreading false or confidential information about a person online, in a public place, or by word of mouth.

2-c Intimate Partner Violence (Domestic Violence)

Intimate partner violence is a pattern of behavior whereby a current or former spouse or romantic partner uses tactics of control, belittling, isolation, fear, stalking, and/or intimidation to dominate, harm, degrade, or otherwise undermine the worth and agency of the other person in the relationship. Intimate partner violence can be physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, social, or financial.

2-d Non-Sexual Harassment and Violence

Non-sexual harassment consists of unwelcome behavior of any kind that has the effect of belittling, threatening, or making the church environment strained, unsafe, or intolerable for the recipient or others. This includes behavior related to someone's race, national origin, age, disability, citizenship status, military status, pregnancy, marital status, or any similar characteristic. Non-sexual harassment also includes behavior that is unrelated to these characteristics, but which harms or threatens others.

Non-sexual harassment can occur in-person or virtually, or by email, text, or social media.

Non-sexual harassment may take different forms, including but not limited to:

- Offensive jokes, slurs, or name-calling, including when the person making the statement believes he/she is being funny, rather than offensive.
- Intimidation, ridicule, or bullying.
- Physical violence or threats of violence.
- Display of offensive objects or pictures.

2-e Financial Abuse

Financial abuse is the illegal or improper use of a vulnerable person or his/her financial resources for profit or advantage. Examples include the taking of 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.

2-f Abuse of Power

Pastors, leaders, and others with power in the church can abuse this power, due to imbalances in authority, knowledge, experience, and perceived spiritual maturity. Such behavior is a violation of the trust and promises of a leader's role in congregational life and ministry.

Following are some examples of abuse of power in the church environment. This is not an exhaustive list of all possible abusive treatment.

2-f-1 Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse is when a leader (Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, leader of a ministry team or small group) uses his/her position of spiritual authority (or perceived spiritual authority) to manipulate, bully, or intimidate people under the leader's authority as a means of asserting power and control.

Some examples include:

- Using Biblical language or spiritual concepts to defend bad behavior by the leader or others;
- Using church discipline, or the threat of church discipline, as a means of controlling others and silencing disagreement with the leader;
- Using sermons, other public teaching, or public prayer to directly or indirectly criticize or "target" individuals;
- Speaking cruelly or hyper-critically to others, under the guise of spiritual authority; or
- Using coercion, threats, or manipulation to ensure a person handles certain volunteer roles, or commits to extensive service hours. This can include repeated requests, or telling the volunteer that his/her service is "God's will," or "part of being in the Redeemer family," in a way that makes the recipient feel threatened, controlled, or fearful.

The following are NOT spiritual abuse:

- The leader teaches about Biblical standards and/or appropriately confronts individuals about choices to live outside those standards. If the teaching or confrontation is cruel or manipulative, it may be spiritual abuse. However, feelings of self-doubt, defensiveness or even hurt often result from being encouraged to repent from sin or change behaviors. Experiencing these feelings does not necessarily indicate the interaction has been abusive.
- The leader encourages involvement and service, including by teaching from Scripture or discussing the responsibilities of church membership.
- The leader has an assertive personality, lacks "people skills" or leadership skills, or makes poor management decisions.

2-f-2 Misuse of Position for Personal Gain

- Using the position of power to generate any form of financial or personal gain, such as by manipulating church relationships as a means of attaining employment, securing an apartment, or gaining school admission for one's children.

2-f-3 Abuse of Power in Romantic Relationships

- Entering into a seemingly consensual romantic relationship with a person of lesser power or authority in the church, in a manner contrary to the Romantic Relationships provision, below.

- Any romantic or sexual relationship involving a married church leader and anyone in the church other than his/her spouse is automatically considered an abuse of power.
- Any romantic or sexual relationship involving a church leader with anyone else in the ministry context with less authority and power, which violates Biblical principles for sexuality and purity, will automatically be considered an abuse of power.

In each of these situations, even if the romantic or sexual relationship is initiated by a person with less authority and power, it is still the responsibility of the church leader to establish appropriate relationship boundaries and to notify the leader's supervisor, if required to do so (see below).

2-f-4 Preventing Abuse of Power in Romantic Relationships

Single RWS congregants, including leaders, are encouraged to engage in healthy and Biblical dating relationships within the ministry environment. However, because of the potential for abuse of power (see above), leaders are required to report certain relationships to their staff ministry supervisors, to ensure RWS is a safe worshipping and ministry community for everyone, and to proactively avoid potential conflicts of interest and abuse of power.³

Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses have a special responsibility to care for the church body and to seek its purity. Accordingly, Pastors, Elders, Deacons, and Deaconesses who enter into a romantic or dating relationship with any person who is connected with any Redeemer church or ministry,⁴ including other officers and leaders, are required to make their staff ministry supervisors aware of the relationship and be willing to address any conflicts of interest or potential for abuse of power. Informing the staff ministry supervisor of the relationship is a condition of the office and failure to do so may result in removal from the office.

Other leaders, such as community group and ministry team leaders, are to inform their staff ministry supervisors if a romantic or dating relationship develops with an individual under his/her ministry leadership or in his/her area of responsibility. For example, if a community group leader begins dating a member of the community group, or if a hospitality team leader begins dating a volunteer on the team, the leader's staff supervisor will be made aware of the relationship, and have the opportunity to address any conflicts of interest or potential for abuse of power. Informing the staff ministry supervisor of the relationship is a condition of the leadership position and failure to do so may result in removal from the position.

³ Certain church leaders, including Pastors, are also RWS employees. Under the requirements of the employee anti-harassment policy (see *footnote to 1-b*), Pastors and other RWS employees are required to report certain romantic relationships within the ministry environment to their staff ministry supervisors.

⁴ Redeemer West Side, Redeemer Downtown, Redeemer East Side, Redeemer Lincoln Square, Redeemer East Harlem, and their shared ministry entities.

3 Reporting

3-a 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 RWS ministry environment is **strongly encouraged** to raise the situation to a Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, or Trustee, or by using this reporting form ([FORM LINK](#)). RWS has a Safeguarding Team in place who will be responsible for responding to any concerns or reports. *(As a reminder, this policy involves behavior among adults. See page 1 of this policy for reporting concerns involving children/youth.)*

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 ([FORM LINK](#)) 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 RWS or involving any Redeemer church or ministry entity,⁵ including situations that occurred in the past.

3-b 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 RWS 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**.

3-c 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 RWS 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.

⁵ Redeemer West Side, Redeemer Downtown, Redeemer East Side, Redeemer Lincoln Square, Redeemer East Harlem, and their shared ministry entities.

3-d What about situations involving church leaders or members that took place in the past or outside of the RWS context?

RWS expects its leaders and members⁶ to interact with others, including people outside the RWS 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 RWS leaders or members, including reports of past action, will be reviewed and addressed.

3-e Should I report to law enforcement?

Certain forms of harassment and abuse of power are also criminal acts. RWS 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 RWS.

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.

⁶ “Members” are congregants who have completed the membership process and been admitted into church membership.

4 Response Process

How will RWS respond to a report?

RWS 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. RWS has in place a Safeguarding Team, composed of both men and women, who will receive reports of concerns and have the responsibility for implementing RWS's process, detailed below.

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* ([LINK](#)), 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)

RWS 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.

RWS's response process:

1. The Safeguarding Team (ST) will receive and review the report. If the accused person or reported victim is a Redeemer employee (of any Redeemer church or ministry, as defined above), the report will be forwarded to Redeemer's Human Resources Director for further action. If neither the accused person nor the reported victim is a Redeemer employee, the ST will process the report, as described below.
2. Within two business days of the ST's receipt of the report, the ST will contact the individual who reported the concern. Based on the information provided, the ST will contact others involved, including the person being accused. If a third party reported the concern, the ST will contact the reported victim.
3. The process is designed to be as transparent as possible for those involved in it. Both the reported victim and the accused person will be informed of their rights and obligations during the process and the anticipated approximate timing for RWS's response to the complaint. When appropriate, both will be advised of external legal remedies and avenues for reporting, such as making a report to law enforcement.
4. As appropriate, the ST will provide resources and support to the reported victim or others.
5. Reports will be kept confidential, except to the extent that information about the report must be shared in order to implement RWS's response and shepherding process and/or to ensure a fair and thorough investigation and the safety of others.

6. Depending on the nature of the report, an investigation may be conducted. Any investigator will be experienced in investigating the type of complaint made and may be a third-party investigator. During the investigation, the investigator will interview the reported victim, the accused person, and any relevant witnesses to determine what occurred. Church leaders with relevant information will be required to cooperate in an investigation, if called upon to do so. Church members are strongly urged to do so, as a moral obligation.
7. The investigator will provide a report (preferably written) of his/her findings to RWS.
8. RWS will review the investigator's report and findings and take appropriate action, which could include church discipline. More information about church discipline in the PCA can be found [HERE](#).
9. The reported victim and the accused person will be notified of the findings of the investigation and RWS's response.
10. As appropriate to the situation, RWS will provide additional care and support to the reported victim or others.

5 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)