

St. Andrew Presbyterian Church, Denton, Texas

Policy and Procedures Regarding Expectations of Members

Congregations are bound together in communion with one another, united in relationships of accountability and responsibility, contributing their strengths to the benefit of the whole, and are called, collectively, the church (G-1.0101).

The polity of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) presupposes the fellowship of women, men, and children united in covenant relationship with one another and with God through Jesus Christ. The organization rests on the fellowship and is not designed to work without trust and love (G-1.0102).

A congregation shall welcome all persons who trust in God's grace in Jesus Christ and desire to become part of the fellowship and ministry of his Church. No person shall be denied membership for any reason not related to profession of faith. The Gospel leads members to extend the fellowship of Christ to all persons. Failure to do so constitutes a rejection of Christ himself and causes a scandal to the Gospel (G-1.0302).

St. Andrew extends itself to members, visitors, and the community at large in a way that stresses hospitality and acceptance. *We proclaim that ALL people are created in the image of God and affirm that each person is a beloved child of God, worthy of God's love and grace. We welcome all, celebrating our differences while finding unity in Christ. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.* (Welcome Statement adopted by the Session, 2015).

All churches have vulnerable members – children, youth, those living with emotional distress, mental health issues, or the challenges presented by illness or injury, those with cognitive challenges, those struggling with economic challenges, and those who are visitors in our midst. While it is our intent to allow the Holy Spirit, the teachings of the church, love and respect for other members, the covenant relationship between members and personal conscience to guide individual behaviors, when the behavior of a member or attendee presents a danger to vulnerable members of our church (real or perceived by a vulnerable member) and infringes on their rights to feel safe, loved and respected, to worship and grow as members of our church family, then the offending member may have overstepped his or her rights within the covenant relationship.

As we live out our support of our vulnerable members, we have the following expectations of our members:

1. Not to use the church as a place to solicit business.
2. Not to send unwanted communication (mail, phone calls, emails, social media) to members or visitors. If a member, pastor, or employee asks (in writing) for communication to cease, the request must be respected.
3. Not to direct unwanted attention to others at church gatherings. If a member, pastor, or employee asks (in writing) for unwanted attention to cease, the request must be respected (by both sides).

It is absolutely not the intent of St. Andrew for teaching and ruling elders to routinely govern behavior among its members. When a member, visitor, clergy, or employee makes a complaint to the church regarding behavior by another member, visitor, clergy or staff member that makes him or her feel threatened or insecure, or when behavior that puts vulnerable members at risk (physically, emotionally, mentally, financially) is reported to a teaching elder of the church or a member of the session, the person to whom the behavior is reported shall inform the Pastor and Clerk of Session, the Suspected Abuse Response Persons¹ for purposes of this policy, who in turn, shall ask session to form a committee of three non-staff, non-session members of the church to investigate the complaint and make a recommendation to session as to its resolution. At least one member of the committee shall be male, and one member, female.

Anyone accused of a behavioral offense shall be considered innocent until evidence proves otherwise. If, however, sufficient evidence is found by the investigative committee that the accused offending member has put a vulnerable member at risk of harm; or has threatened, intimidated, or otherwise infringed upon the rights of another member to feel secure, loved, and supported within the body of the church and/or on church property or at church functions; or that the member has committed a crime against another member; then the session, based on the evidence and the recommendation of the committee, may choose a course of counseling for the offended member; may open a dialogue between offender and victim regarding reparations; may, in the case of a suspected crime, report the accusation to the appropriate legal authorities; and/or may ultimately determine whether it is necessary to remove the offending member from membership for the protection of the church's vulnerable members. In all of its proceedings, the session shall be guided by the disciplinary procedures set forth in the *Book of Order*, D-10.1000 – D-14.400.

Appendix

Policy Approvals

Policy approved by session March 2017

Policy amendments approved by session September 2019

Policy edits approved by session November 2021

¹ Suspected Abuse Response persons are appointed by this church as persons to whom reports or allegations of behavioral offenses will be made, and whose function it is to receive and quickly and objectively response to such reports or allegations.