

Disciplinary Offense for Clergy: Policy and Procedures

Policy Statement

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland affirms respect, responsibility, and caring between all persons. Inappropriate conduct of church leaders, whether lay or ordained, will not be tolerated.

The disciplinary process for clergy is governed by the canons of The Episcopal Church (see link). Recent updates of these canons incorporate an underlying desire that the process be as open, receptive, transparent, and as theologically based as possible, while also respecting the dignity and confidentiality of all parties.

Prevention Through Education

The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland requires the successful completion of training courses in sexual abuse prevention for all clergy, lay employees, and anyone, including volunteers, who regularly works with children. This training must be completed within the first 6 months of service. It is suggested that lay Sunday School teachers participate in the training and we invite and encourage all adults who make decisions about or participate in programs for children to complete the training, including vestry members. For more information, visit <http://www.episcopalmaryland.org/mend.php>. In addition, *Safe-guarding God's People* addresses the ways in which adults are to be in safe and respectable relationships with one another. Clergy and other adults in positions of leadership are required to complete this training.

What Is An Offense?

An offense is defined as a violation of the standards of conduct for clergy, which require clergy to engage in certain behaviors and to refrain from others. These standards fall into two categories – Canon 3: of Accountability and Canon 4: Of Standards of Conduct (<http://www.episcopalmaryland.org/canons/title-iv-2009.pdf>).

A victim of assault or abuse can experience varying degrees of trauma and anxiety. Emotional and physical symptoms such as fear, anxiety, anger, shock, depression, insomnia, headaches and/or nausea are common. Many victims also feel guilt and self-blame, especially if the suspect is a member of the clergy. Regardless of the symptoms you experience, if you are a victim of an offense:

- Go to a hospital for immediate medical care if physical trauma has occurred. The medical staff provides medical assistance for injuries, tests for medical evidence, and resources for emotional help. Do not wash or change clothes before calling or going for help as this may destroy important evidence. The collection of medical evidence does not presume that you will press charges against the assailant. However, if you later choose to press charges, the evidence will be available.
- Report any offense of a criminal nature: You are strongly encouraged to immediately report the offense to local law enforcement officials.
- Report any offense involving an ordained member of the diocese, by contacting an intake officer as noted below.

Reporting Procedures

Anyone can report information concerning an offense. This can be in written or oral form. There is no requirement that the person providing the information identifies him/herself.

If you wish to give information regarding an offense, contact one of the following Intake Officers (IO) listed below, or call the Diocesan Center at 410-467-1399:

Ms. Gwen Spicer, cell 410-825-7676
The Rev. Canon Angela Shepherd, cell 410-703-6559
The Rev. Canon Stuart Wright, cell 410-499-7075

Someone should respond to your inquiry within 24 hours. The IO is designated by the bishop and will first determine if the information reported constitutes an offense. If so, the IO may conduct a preliminary investigation, or refer the matter to a Reference Panel (RP) as well as the Church Attorney.

The Bishop is required to provide an appropriate pastoral response to any persons who are affected by an alleged offense, including the person reporting the offense, or to the victim (if not the person reporting), or the accused.

If the Reference Panel (RP) concludes that the reported information might constitute an offense, they have a number of options based on the situation, one of which includes calling for a formal investigation through the elected Disciplinary Board of the diocese for further action.

If the IO or RP or Disciplinary Board dismisses the matter, or if the person reporting the information wishes to appeal the decision, the person should contact the IO for further action.

Anonymous Report: If a complainant wishes to remain anonymous, the Intake Officer will take a “third person” report. This report allows a person to provide a detailed report about the offense without the obligation of pursuing an investigation and/or pressing charges. The diocese can initiate an investigation only after the appointed Reference Panel has reviewed the report and has recommended this action. However, reporting is still encouraged as it may provide important information for protecting the community-at-large.

Confidentiality

Every possible effort shall be made to insure the confidentiality of information received as part of the diocesan reporting procedure. Whenever possible, the name of the complainant will be withheld if the complainant so desires. Action requiring disclosure or identification of the complainant in some manner will generally not take place without the complainant’s consent, unless it is necessary to protect the health or safety of others. If so, the complainant will be informed.

To also provide confidentiality for the accused, once a complaint is made to the IO, the complainant will not be informed of subsequent action toward the accused unless or until such point as it is appropriate to share that information.

Note: Resolutions suggesting revisions to Title IV will be presented at the 77th General Convention in July, 2012. Please return to this page for possible modifications.