

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

Redeemer Presbyterian Church Lincoln Square (LSQ)

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, Redeemer Presbyterian Church Lincoln Square (LSQ) 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 LSQ is entitled to a safe place to worship and serve, and each of us has the duty to ensure LSQ is that safe place. Church leaders have specific responsibilities, as addressed later in this policy.

The LSQ Policy on Harassment and the Abuse of Power in the Church and Ministry Environment specifically addresses interactions and relationships among **adults** in the LSQ church and ministry environment, including church leaders and staff, members, congregants and visitors.¹

A note on children/youth: *The protection of children/youth and concerns involving children/youth are addressed by LSQ's Child Protection Policy, which can be found [here](#). 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 LSQ environment is strongly urged to call*

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

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.

2 What situations does LSQ seek to prevent and address?

LSQ, 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 name-calling, including on the basis of race, national origin, age, disability and other similar bases
- Threatening behavior
- Financial abuse
- Abuse of power by church leaders, including spiritual abuse

Note: LSQ will address reports of these behaviors when the interactions occur during an LSQ activity (such as during church, a community group meeting or volunteer activity). LSQ will attempt, when possible, to address interactions that occur outside of LSQ but involving people who are LSQ congregants or know each other because of their association with LSQ (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, LSQ leaders are required to report certain relationships to their ministry supervisors, so that the supervisor can provide accountability and proactively address any potential problems.

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 LSQ ministry environment is **strongly encouraged** to raise the situation to a Pastor, Elder, Deacon, Deaconess, or Trustee or by using this reporting [form](#). LSQ has a Safeguarding Team, 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](#). 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 LSQ or involving any Redeemer church or ministry entity,² 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 LSQ 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 LSQ 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.

² Redeemer West Side, Redeemer Downtown, Redeemer East Side, Redeemer Lincoln Square, Redeemer East Harlem, and their shared ministry entities.

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

LSQ expects its leaders and members³ to interact with others, including people outside the LSQ 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 LSQ 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. LSQ 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 LSQ.

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.

4 Response Process

How will LSQ respond to a report?

LSQ 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.

LSQ has a Safeguarding Team, composed of both men and women, to receive reports of any concerns and to respond according to LSQ's process. As needed, LSQ 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* (<https://www.pcaac.org/bco/>), 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)

³ "Members" are congregants who have completed the membership process and been admitted into church membership.

LSQ 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 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)