
The United Reformed Church



South Western
Synod

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To all Churches in the SW Synod

4th November 2015

It has come to our attention that many churches are struggling to follow the process of safer recruitment for volunteers. We are sympathetic to the cry that is often heard that you know all of the people well, that they have been doing the job for years, or that you do not want to offend people by asking them to complete application forms. Nevertheless, it is an essential part of making sure that our churches are safe places for all. It is a sad reality, as evidenced by the numerous stories that we hear in the press, that churches are not immune from the difficult issues when children or adults at risk have not been protected. It is true that procedures will not detect every concern - but they can help.

Equally, we want to emphasise that in the main we do know that there are so many good people who volunteer to work with children and adults at risk (previously known as vulnerable adults). We would not be able to run the amazing events we do without the goodwill of all of you who are prepared to use your skills and experience for the benefit of helping our children, adults at risk, and indeed all who attend our churches, to have a good experience of Church, and to develop a closer relationship with God.

Safer recruitment procedures are part of how we try to make sure that we are doing all that we can to protect children and adults at risk, when they are involved in the life of the church. Sadly Churches can be seen as a 'soft target' for those who wish to abuse, so following safer recruitment practice helps to deter and detect those who might see us as such. Following these procedures also helps to ensure that we have the right people with the right skills and experience to work with our children and adults at risk

If there is anyone working with children or vulnerable adults who has not been part of a safer recruitment process you should ensure that this process is done now. This is on the advice of our insurers who are interested in protecting not only children and adults at risk, but the finances of the Church. Some may recall that one of our brokers spoke at Synod about the importance of making sure these procedures are undertaken because of the possible implications insurance-wise if these procedures are not followed. This was, and is, both in respect of church finances and possible personal liability on the part of elders/trustees of the Church. Not surprisingly we would urge that these procedures are followed primarily for the protection of children and adults at risk but they do of course protect volunteers, possible reputational risk and finances.

I appreciate that alerting you to the need to undertake these checks will create work for you as churches, but I am pleased to say that we have an excellent Safeguarding Officer in Jan Murphy who will support you all she can to help you meet your duties: do contact her for help. The safeguarding part of the website is full of useful forms and, of course, we have just had copies of the Good Practice 4 Handbook which I hope you will also find useful.

Yours,

Ruth J. Whitehead

Ruth Whitehead
Moderator

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