**Valley Presbyterian Church
Safe Church Policy**

Valley Presbyterian Church, Brookfield, CT (PCUSA) ("Church") is a diverse group of people searching to know God's Will. We trust and seek to obey God embodied in Jesus Christ and manifest in the Holy Spirit at work in the world today. As a caring congregation, we seek to fulfill Christ's mission for the world and to serve the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of all who walk through our doors through trusting, learning, acting, sharing, rejoicing, and giving for God's Word. Unto that end, the members of the Church are committed to ensure that all who participate in church life can explore their relationship with God and each other as they seek to grow in faith and faithfulness in a safe, secure and nurturing environment.

We, the Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, Deacons and members of Valley Presbyterian Church intend this to be a place that is safe for all people to learn and grow in their relationship with God and with one another.

**INTRODUCTION**

The "good of the church" can never be served by overlooking an abuse of power and betrayal of trust.

This is a policy statement that is binding on all, Teaching Elders, Ruling Elders, Deacons and members of Valley Presbyterian Church when they are engaged in any activity organized, sponsored, or conducted by the Church, on or off the church property, and any person who works or acts for the Church in any capacity, whether he or she is a volunteer or paid employee or agent of the Church.

This policy is directed primarily to those situations in which a person who holds a position of authority or trust misuses that position for his or her own psychological rewards, sexual activity or gratification. In addition, this policy applies to situations where paid staff members, church members, volunteers, or visitors encounter intimidation, verbal or physical abuse from other such persons. The abuse or exploitation of another human being, especially a child (defined as a person under the age of eighteen) or other uniquely vulnerable person, is an affront to all that the Church teaches and is a violation of civil law.

**REQUIRED PRACTICES**

Our primary commitment is to support parents and families in the spiritual upbringing and nurturing of their children, while encouraging the wholeness and well-being of each child. All those who attend Valley or visit the property for other reasons, both children and adults, will be protected from intimidation, verbal or physical abuse. In order to discourage situations that may result in sexual misconduct or sexual abuse of a child or allegations thereof, the Session of the Church will seek to assure that we establish and maintain an environment in which there is only room for love, respect, tolerance and safety by executing the following practices:

1. Session will review this policy annually as reflected in the minutes.
2. Copies of this policy will be distributed to: Teaching Elder(s), current Ruling Elders, Deacons, employees, and volunteers of the church annually. All who serve within the church in a leadership capacity will be trained annually about Valley's Safe Church Policy standard of conduct and procedure.
3. This Policy will be communicated to the congregation at least once a year.
4. Our Teaching Elder(s) and Treasurer shall review at least annually the liability insurance policy of the church, ensuring that all information is correct, that coverage is adequate, and that-the Church is in full compliance with the requirements of the policy(s) held.
5. In order to reduce the risk of child sexual abuse, the following shall apply:
	* All adults (paid and volunteer) working with children (defined as people under that age of eighteen) at the church will be trained annually on the Safe Church Policy. The training will be coordinated by the Session Liaison and will address such topics as sexual misconduct, sexual abuse and its effects on children, families and the church as well as misuse of a position of authority or trust.
	* All adults (paid and volunteer) working with children will be required to complete a screening form, receive a copy of this Safe Church Policy, and read and sign the Safe Church Policy Agreement. (Appendix A)
	* Biennial background checks for all volunteers and paid staff members working with children will be completed by the Clerk of the Presbytery.
	* Any person providing assistance to children during church functions or working with children within the church should have maintained membership at the church for no less than six months.
	* At all times, we shall endeavor to have two adults working with children.
	* An adult must accompany a child leaving a classroom to use the restroom, first notifying the other adult in the classroom of their intent. The restroom stall will be checked to ensure there is no risk in its use.
	* Overnight activities and programs for children require adult chaperones and supervisors who have been approved by the Teaching Elder and the Christian Education Committee Chairperson or the adult who is organizing the activity. A non-familial adult should not be alone with a child without at least one other person present at all times, even during transport, unless prior permission is granted by a parent. Additional assistance will be provided in the nursery for the paid caregivers, as necessary.
	* When members of the church transport children for a church activity, at least one parent or guardian of the child prior to the activity must sign a permission slip. The permission slip will state that the parent/guardian is aware that a church member will transport his/her child. Should a permission slip be signed by a non-church member, the signature must be witnessed by a church member.
	* Adults who transport children for a church activity will sign a statement that she/he has not had a DWI or other misdemeanor traffic violations in the past five years.
	* Pictures and/or names of children will not be published on the Church's website unless the child's parent/guardian give prior permission by signing a statement by either the Teaching Elder, a Ruling Elder, the Christian Education Committee Chairperson, or the person responsible for the website.
6. The Session must confirm-that this Safe Church Policy is understood and supported by all Church officers, paid staff, and clergy, and that each of these persons sets a personal example in support of the Policy. This will be accomplished by the following:

The Personnel Committee will be responsible for seeing that the paid staff complete biennial background checks, annual Safe Church training, and annual signed forms. The Clerk of Session will be responsible for seeing that Session and Deacons complete annual Safe Church training and annual signed forms. The Session Liaison will be responsible for seeing that teachers, day care workers or any other members in direct contact with children complete biennial background check, annual Safe Church training and annual signed forms

1. The Clerk of Session shall maintain a file for every Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, employee, and volunteers working with children. Each file will include: a signed Safe Church Screening Form (Appendix A), a signed, annual Safe Church Agreement Form (Appendix B), and a recording that a background check has been successfully completed.
2. Should screening uncover any history of sexual misconduct or alleged sexual misconduct in terms of church or state law, the person will not be allowed to either drive, teach and/or chaperone church children.
3. Session will appoint a Response Team with no less than three members (male and female) each year in preparation for the possibility of hearing complaints under this policy. This team will be familiar with the terms of this policy as well as established procedures of the church. This team will assist in the support procedures necessary to respond to any sexual misconduct allegation.

**INFORMATION CONCERNING A SEXUAL MISCONDUCT ALLEGATION/ ACCUSATION**

**Definition of Sexual Misconduct**

Sexual misconduct is the conscious and willful use of a position of leadership, authority, or trust to solicit, encourage, or engage in sexual acts or sexual activity which violate the teaching of the Church on sexual behavior and activity, and/or violate state law regarding sexual behavior and activity. It is the duty of the minister, elder, deacon, supervisor or volunteer in authority to maintain the proper relationship.

The following list of activities and behaviors shall always be considered sexual misconduct:

* Child Sexual Abuse - Child sexual abuse is any act of intercourse, sodomy, sexual fondling, or any suggestive or degrading speech used on or in front of a child, or any use of a child for the sexual gratification of another human being whether it uses the child directly or indirectly, through pictures or other visual media. Sexual activity between a child and an adult is always considered forced whether the child gives consent or not.
* Forced Sexual Abuse - Forced sexual abuse includes rape, sexual contact using force, or the use of any threat or intimidation to gain sexual favors or activity.
* Voluntary Sexual Activity - Any voluntary sexual activity, even if there is mutual consent, is open to the charge of sexual misconduct if there is a prior relationship involving authority or trust, unless the person holding the authority or responsible for the trust relationship consults with a supervisor and the supervisor concurs in the judgment that the relationship is not exploitive.
* Sexual malfeasance is sexual conduct within a ministerial or professional relationship. Sexual conduct includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
* Sexual impropriety - Sexual advances toward those for whose spiritual welfare one is responsible by virtue of one's position in the church. Such behavior can be verbal or physical conduct of an inappropriately sexual nature (e.g. risqué jokes, innuendoes, insults, ingratiating or over-solicitous behavior, including sexually inappropriate visits and phone calls or internet communications, seductions, and fondling).
* Sexual harassment is any unwelcome sexual advance or request for sexual favors or any conduct of a sexual nature where (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment decisions affecting such individual, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment. Sexual harassment shall be considered an act of sexual misconduct when a formal accusation is filed with the Clerk of Session, or other governing body, and the procedures of this policy shall apply.
* Misuse of technology that result in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages and images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography on church property. When this includes a person under the age of eighteen, it is considered child abuse. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by a church or church entity or within the context of ministry.

**Procedures for A Reported Allegation/ Accusation**

An "allegation" is the initial report or assertion of wrongdoing; an "accusation" is the formal written complaint of wrongdoing filed by the Stated Clerk that initiates a formal process.

When there is an allegation of sexual misconduct, or other impropriety, the Session will support the accuser and/or alleged victim(s) and family by implementing the following procedures. These procedures are designed to guard the confidential nature of all such inquires, to cooperate with civil authorities and to provide a formal way to report allegations of sexual misconduct to the proper authorities or persons.

1) Any allegation of sexual misconduct is to be reported to one of the following persons, unless the allegation is against or involves in any direct way the person who would receive the report:

* Teaching Elder
* Clerk of Session
* Ruling Elder

2) Any allegation of sexual misconduct concerning a Teaching Elder should be reported to the Stated Clerk of the Presbytery within 24 hours.

3) Within 24 hours of receiving a report of an allegation of sexual misconduct that person will prepare a fully documented written report and will contact one or more of the following persons:

* The Stated Clerk of Presbytery, or the Chair of the Committee on Ministry should a clergy member be involved
* The State and Local authorities within 12 hours
* The Church's Insurance Carrier
1. Respect, Privacy and Confidentiality will be given to any allegation of sexual misconduct.
2. Procedures for investigation and discipline will be followed as outlined in the PCUSA Book of Order D-10.
3. Whenever a clergy member, paid staff person, or volunteer is involved in an allegation, that individual will be removed from the position until the investigation is completed.
4. A written summary of any proceedings will be maintained.
5. The person(s) toward whom the inappropriate behavior is directed need not be the complainant. Moreover, neither consent nor acquiescence will excuse or exonerate inappropriate behavior. At any time, the church may initiate or proceed with the formal complaint process.
6. In determining whether alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment or exploitation, consideration shall be given to the record of the alleged incident(s) as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.
7. A designated spokesperson will respond to the media. The Church will establish a written policy statement regarding its stand against the alleged abuse. This should be prepared in writing and should be the only response given to the media if such a situation should arise.
8. There is no statute of limitations as to when sexual abuse may be reported by an accuser, alleged victim(s), or family member. However, sexual abuse case charges must be filed within one year from the date the investigation committee is formed by the Presbytery. (PCUSA Book of Order D­10.0401)
9. The Church's Teaching Elder(s) and Ruling Elders, Deacons and volunteer members are required to cooperate with civil authorities.
10. The policy shall be made available to persons who claim to be victims of sexual misconduct and their families. A written acknowledgement of receipt of this policy by signature will be obtained.
11. Upon advisement of any sexual misconduct by any person in a leadership position within the Church, the Session will:
* Support the reporting of allegations of sexual misconduct.
* Follow the order of the Policy on record.
* Provide assistance and advice to anyone making an allegation of sexual misconduct, to any alleged victim(s), and to anyone who is accused.
* Consult with the Presbyter to the Spiritual Committee/Stated Clerk for guidance if formal procedures are necessary.

**ABUSE INFORMATION**

**Mandated Reporting**

The Connecticut General Statute, Section 17a-101 provides a complete list of mandated reporters.

**Child Abuse**

Apart from any legal requirements, the Church will make a report to appropriate authorities, including, but not limited to the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services, if at any time the Church has reasonable cause to believe that a minor may be an abused or neglected child. Any Teaching Elder, Ruling Elder, or Deacon of the church who becomes aware of facts or circumstances that child abuse or neglect has occurred or that there exists a substantial risk that child abuse or neglect may occur in the reasonably foreseeable future shall immediately report the matter to the Teaching Elder and Clerk of Session so that the Church may take appropriate action in a timely manner. The Connecticut Child Abuse Hotline currently is: **1-800-4-A-CHILD (1-800-422-4453).**

**Elderly Abuse .** For Department for Social Services Protective Services for the Elderly Hotline **888-385-4225**

Abuse includes, but is not limited to, willful infliction of physical pain, injury or mental anguish, or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services, which are necessary to maintain physical and mental health.

**Other Reportable Abuse**

While the State has defined abuse for the purpose of child protection statutes and mandatory reporting, other kinds of known abuse require the Church's response. The following circumstances constitute reportable abuse and require a response.

1. Child-on-child sexual activity;
2. Dangerous behaviors (hazing, truth or dare, drinking, etc.);
3. Bullying, whether child-on-child, adult-on-child, adult-on-adult;
4. Exploitation of a "vulnerable adult", physically, mentally or financially.

“Bullying” means the repeated use by one or more individuals of a written, verbal or electronic communication, such as cyberbullying, directed at or referring to another individual/s, or a physical act or gesture by one or more individuals repeatedly directed at another individual/s that:

1. Causes physical or emotional harm to paid employees of Valley or those attending Valley events (members, visitors, volunteers),
2. Places such individuals in reasonable fear of harm to themselves,
3. Creates a hostile environment for paid employees or those attending Valley events,
4. Infringes on the individual’s right to fully engage in the worship experience, or
5. Substantially disrupts the individual’s opportunity to feel safe in the church environment and be one with God.

The act of bullying explicitly includes, but is not limited to, a written, oral, or electronic communication or physical act or gesture based on any actual or perceived differentiating characteristic as outlined in Public Act 11 – 232. Incidences of such communications or actions will be brought to the attention of Session and procedures for reporting and responding to these actions will be followed in accordance with the Safe Church Policy.

All such activity shall be reported to the Teaching Elder and Clerk of Session so that the Church may take appropriate action in a timely manner.

**OTHER DICIPLINARY PROCESSES**

Other behaviors not necessarily involving children or "vulnerable adults", or which may not be considered strictly illegal, are subject to other disciplinary practices. Behaviors subject to other adjudication may include but are not limited to:

1. "Sexual harassment", whether among employees or volunteers;
2. Clergy professional boundary violations;
3. "Sexual exploitation";
4. Sexual relationships between a Minister and a minor even though permitted by law.

All such activity shall be reported in the same manner as any violation of the Code of Conduct or Ministry Standards. In the event of out-of-program circumstances where there is not an identifiable direct Minister supervisor, reports shall be made to the Teaching Elder, Clerk of Session, and/or the Personnel Committee.

Valley Presbyterian Church

Brookfield, CT

Primary Screening Form

For Working With Children or Youth

CONFIDENTIAL, Page 1 of 2

*This screening form is to be completed by all applicants for any position (volunteer or compensated) involving the supervision of minors. This is not an employment application form. This screening form is being used to obtain information which will help the church provide a safe environment for those minors who participate in our programs and use our facilities.*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Last First Middle

Identity must be confirmed with a State driver’s license or other photographic identification.

Driver’s License No. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ State of License: \_\_\_\_\_

Present Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_ ZIP: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Have you ever been convicted of, plead guilty to, or presently have any lawsuits, civil or criminal pending for any crime involving the harm, misconduct, or endangerment of a child or any other crime involving violence or abuse? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name of a church of which you are currently a member:

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

List of other churches you have attended regularly during the past five years:

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Valley Presbyterian Church

Brookfield, CT

Primary Screening Form

For Working With Children or Youth

CONFIDENTIAL, Page 2 of 2

Please list any previous work or volunteer experience that will help you in the care of VPC’s children:

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Please read and affirm the following statements:

1. The information contained in this form is correct to the best of my knowledge.
2. I have received, read, and signed a copy of the Sexual Misconduct Policy and the Reducing the Risk Policy of VPC and agree to comply with all components of the policies as stated.
3. I agree that my primary obligation is to secure the well-being of the children in my care.

Signature of Applicant: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Witnessed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**REDUCING THE RISK OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

**AT VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

We, as parents, members and leaders of Valley Presbyterian Church, are concerned about the risk of child sexual abuse. In an attempt to deter any incident of such abuse, the church has instituted a series of practices and procedures. **It is our intent that all persons serving in volunteer or paid positions that involve working with children or youth of the church review and sign the following policy prior to undertaking their responsibilities.**

1. No convicted sex offender shall serve in a volunteer or paid position that involves continuing contact with and responsibility for minors in the church school, programs or ministries of Valley Presbyterian Church.
2. Dating is forbidden between any adult worker and minor.
3. Efforts should be made to avoid situations in which an adult worker is alone with a minor.
4. Classroom doors without windows in them must remain open when minors and adults are inside the classroom.
5. Adults must use discretion in dealing with **all** minors, especially regarding physical contact. Innocent behavior can be misinterpreted. Overt displays of affection should only be made in public settings.
6. Any verbal or nonverbal sexual behavior by an adult toward a minor is inappropriate.
7. Sexual gestures or overtures by a minor toward an adult should be reported to the Pastor immediately.
8. Sexual gestures or overtures by a minor toward the Pastor should be reported to a designated member of the Personnel Committee.
9. All adult workers are to hold one another accountable by offering and accepting feedback concerning questionable behavior that could lead to a violation of one of the practices stated within this policy.
10. All adult workers are required to report suspected or known violations of one of these stated practices and procedures to the pastor or a designated member of the Personnel Committee. All allegations must also be made in writing.
11. Should you learn that any part of this policy has been violated, or that any adult worker has previously been involved in an activity involving child sexual abuse, you are required to make a confidential disclosure to one or more of the following persons the Pastor, a Ruling Elder or a designated member of the Personnel Committee. Such a disclosure should not be made to one of these persons if he/she is the accused. When the allegation is against a pastor, a confidential disclosure must also be made to the Presbytery Executive, the Stated Clerk, or a co-chair of the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery of Southern New England.
12. Clergy, paid child-care staff, and paid church school staff are designated "Mandatory Reporters" in the State of Connecticut. Mandatory Reporters are required by law to make a report to the Department of Children and Families regarding any child under the age of 18 who has been sexually abused or exploited by a person responsible for that child's care, health and welfare. Mandatory Reporters are required by law to make a report to the Department of Children and Families regarding any child under the age of 13 with a venereal disease

I have read and have received a copy of the Sexual Misconduct Policy of Valley Presbyterian Church. I have read, understand, and will support the above Reducing the Risk policy:

 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 Signature Date

Valley Presbyterian Church

21 West Whisconier Road

Brookfield, CT

**MANDATORY REPORTING OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE**

For child abuse occurring within Connecticut, contact: **1-800-842-2288**

All clergy persons, church school officials, and all child care workers are Mandated Reporters and they are required to verbally report within 12 hours, when in the course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child has been abused, neglected, or is placed in imminent risk of serious harm (CGS 17a-101a). A follow-up written report on form DCF-136 is required within 48 hours.

Ruling Elders and Deacons are also Mandated Reporters per G-4.0302

"Any member of this church engaged in ordered ministry and any certified Christian educator employed by this church or its congregations, shall report to ecclesiastical and civil legal authorities knowledge of harm, or the risk of harm, related to the physical abuse, neglect, and/or sexual molestation or abuse of a minor or an adult who lacks mental capacity when (1) such information is gained outside of a confidential communication as defined in 6-4.0301, (2) she or he is not bound by an obligation of privileged communication under law, or (3) she or he reasonably believes that there is risk of future physical harm or abuse."

**MANDATORY REPORTING OF SUSPECTED ELDER ABUSE**

For elder abuse occurring in Fairfield County, contact **1-203-251-9392**

All clergy persons are Mandated Reporters. Abuse includes, but is not limited to, willful infliction of physical pain, injury or mental anguish, or the willful deprivation by a caretaker of services which are necessary to maintain physical and mental health.

The Presbytery of Southern New England

**P. O. Box 388, Chester, CT 06412**

# REFERENCE CHECK & BACKGROUND INVESTIGATION CONSENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, hereby authorize the Presbytery of Southern New England and/or its agents to make an independent investigation of my background, references, character, past employment, education, credit, motor vehicles, criminal or police records, sexual abuse registry records, including those maintained by both public and private organizations and all public records for the purpose of confirming information and/or obtaining other information, which may be material to my qualifications for serving as a Minister of Word and Sacrament within the bounds of the Presbytery of Southern New England, and if applicable, during the tenure of my volunteering or employment with the Presbytery of Southern New England.

I understand **t**hat persons named by me who are familiar with my life, work, and service, as well as my academic and/or call process may be contacted.

I certify that (a) no civil, criminal or ecclesiastical complaint has ever been sustained or is
pending against me for sexual misconduct; (b) I have never resigned or been terminated from a position for reasons related to sexual misconduct. I understand that the information obtained may be used to deny me employment from Presbytery of Southern New England,

I release the Presbytery of Southern New England and/or its agents and any person or entity, which provides information pursuant to this authorization, from any and all liabilities, claims, or lawsuits in regards to the information obtained from any and all of the above referenced sources used.

The following is my true and complete legal name, and all information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Full name (printed)

Maiden name or other names used

Present street address How long?

City/State Zip

Former street address How long?

City/State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth Social Security # Driver’s License # and State

Signature Date

Authorization Requested by (please circle): COM CPM GP

PNC at (church): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ APNC at (church): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**The Clerk of Session shall send completed form to: clerk@psne.org, David Baer, Stated Clerk.**