

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE

One West Fifty-third Street ✕ New York, New York 10019 ✕ 212-757-7013

Friday, October 28, 2022

A message from The Rector of Saint Thomas Church, the Chair of the Choir School Board of Trustees, and the Head of the Saint Thomas Choir School.

On March 18, 2021, the Rector wrote on behalf of the Wardens and Vestry of Saint Thomas Church and Choir School to inform you that we had been made aware of two sets of allegations of historic sexual abuse against minors who had attended the Choir School in the mid-1980s and early 2000's. We advised you that we had engaged the firm T&M USA, LLC to undertake a third-party investigation. A dedicated phone line and a secure email address were set up so that people could contact T&M confidentially.

Last year, the Rector began the letter about the investigation with words from the Baptismal Covenant that is renewed every Easter:

**Will you strive for justice and peace among all people,
and respect the dignity of every human being?**

***People* I will, with God's help.**

We undertook the investigation because we took seriously that vow. It disturbed us greatly to hear the stories of two former choristers. That it was many years after the incidents had happened simply confirmed to us the devastating nature of child abuse that can affect someone well into their adult years. Consistent with our reporting policy to treat all historic allegations as if they were current, in both cases, we passed on their concerns to the relevant police authorities, child protective services, and church authorities.

T&M have produced their final report that reveals four separate sets of allegations against three former Choir School faculty members and one former gentleman of the choir; three were classed as sexual abuse of a minor, and one as inappropriate boundary management. In the course of their investigation, T&M interviewed survivors, two of the named perpetrators (the other two are deceased), former students, former and current members of the faculty, staff, and administration at the Choir School, former and current employees of the Church, and other individuals outside the community. To protect their privacy, survivors are not identified by name in the report. T&M also chose not to identify the perpetrators at this time for various reasons discussed in the report, including among other things, respect for the wishes of the survivors being interviewed.

A fifth set of allegations against a former gentleman of the Choir does not appear in the report, as the survivor chose not to be interviewed, and is currently seeking redress through the courts.

We are heartbroken to learn of the pain experienced by the courageous survivors who came forward to share their stories. To them, and to those whose lives have been impacted by these heinous acts of sexual, and emotional abuse, we offer our sincere apologies. That abuse should never have happened and we are ashamed that it happened in a Christian community.

T&M reports that the survivors did not disclose what had happened to them until recently, and that the Choir School and the Church had no knowledge of these appalling breaches of trust until now. Nevertheless, as the current office holders who have been entrusted with the pastoral care of the Church and the School, we say again that we are sickened by the actions of unscrupulous people who do not represent the best of our Church and School. We are also devastated that the four former choristers mentioned in the report, and the fifth who came forward but was not interviewed, have carried these memories with them for so many years. It is our duty to ensure that this can never happen again, and to ensure that our alumni know that we care about them no matter when they left the Choir School.

To that end, although the investigation has concluded, we still encourage those with further information to report to contact Laura Kirschstein, Vice President of Sexual Misconduct Consulting & Investigations, at SaintThomas@tmusallc.com. The dedicated telephone number remains **646-445-7748**. *(Please note that this is not a 24-hour hotline and you may have to leave a message for someone to call you back. The number is only for enquiries concerning Saint Thomas Church and Choir School).*

Below, you will find a link to the T&M report. Please note that this report contains disturbing depictions of sexual abuse; discretion is advised in sharing this report with others.

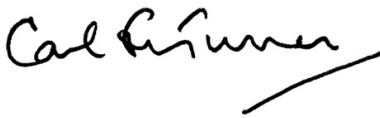
It is worth repeating what actions we have taken over the past few years, and are currently undertaking, to ensure that we have the highest regard for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults:

- The Church and the Choir School reviewed all our safeguarding policies in the light of evolving legislation from the Department of Education of the State of New York, and advice from the Episcopal Church, the National Association of Episcopal Schools, and the National Association of Independent Schools.
- As part of that review, we also invited the independent firm **Praesidium** to undertake a thorough review of historic church and school personnel files to confirm there were no additional indications of safety or abuse issues. None were found.
- The Vestry received and has begun implementing an action plan for training, evaluation, implementation, and monitoring of all aspects of safeguarding across the whole institution.
- All Vestry, clergy, senior staff, faculty, and leaders of parish guilds have been undertaking regular safeguarding training; members of the new Board of Trustees will also be expected to undergo training.
- All active volunteers of the parish are expected to undertake on-line safeguarding training provide by the Episcopal Church.

- Recruitment of staff not only includes background checks, but we also ensure that the interview process includes questions and discussion of safeguarding principles, expectations, and best practices.
- A Safeguarding monitoring committee for the whole institution meets regularly, and advises the Vestry and the Board, and all our constituent groups, how we can continue to be a place where all are safe, or as the baptismal vow puts it, where the dignity of every human being is respected.
- The Choir School complies with the mandatory reporting requirements of the State of New York when there is a suspicion that a child has been harmed or is at risk. In addition, we require the clergy and senior staff of the Church to make a report when there is a suspicion that a child has been hurt or is at risk, although they are not mandated reporters according to law.

Conclusion:

This letter does nothing to take away the pain and the anguish that was inflicted on the brave men who came forward to tell their stories, or indeed, their families or friends. Our hearts go out to them, and we want the whole community to know that belonging to our beloved church and unique choir school is as much about trust as it is about heritage. **We are committed to ensure that nothing like this can ever happen again.**



The Rev. Canon Carl F. Turner



Dr. Daniel Heischman



Mr. Christopher Seeley