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Safe Workplace Policy

A policy to protect children, youth and others vulnerable to abuse, and to protect those in leadership positions from being wrongfully accused.

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Introduction:

It is the commitment of Trinity Mennonite Church (TMC) to ensure the protection of all who attend our ministries and to recognize our responsibility for the people in our care. The following procedures are intended to balance the spiritual, moral, and ethical responsibilities of TMC with its legal obligations under the laws of Canada and the Province of Alberta. It is our desire to protect all the people in our ministries from all forms of abuse, and to protect church workers from false or wrongful allegations so freeing them for ministry.

Scriptural Basis for Policy (quotations from NRSV)

1. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ... But God has so arranged the body, ... that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it."(I Corinthians 12: 12, 24b, 25, 26)

The church is called to be a light to the nations, a place where God's intentions are lived out among the community of faith. At the same time, we recognize that the church is part of an imperfect world. There are many examples of times when churches have not been places of healing and hope, but have been places of pain and suffering. While instances of abuse or other serious injury may be unlikely to occur within our congregation, we also accept our responsibility to implement clear policies and procedures to minimize the risk of such harm taking place.

2. "For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another.... Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."(Galatians 5:13; 6: 2)

As a church, we are made up of all those who walk through our doors. Our church community is a place where we experience God's grace, share God's love with each other, and respond to God's call to serve. The responsibility to provide well-trained leadership for our church activities is something we share as a congregation. It is our duty to ensure our ministry functions in ways that reflect a concern for the safety of those in our care, for those who have been hurt in church settings, and for all in need of God's healing and grace.

3. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."(Ephesians 5: 3; NIV)

Given the reality of different forms of abuse in our world, clear guidelines and procedures demonstrate that we as a church are doing all that we can to ensure such harm does not take place within our congregation. These are steps intended to reassure all those involved in our ministries that we are concerned about those who are given into our care and about who serve in our ministries.

Policy Rationale:

1. People entrusting loved ones to the care of the church will be assured that the church is a safe place.
2. Abuse has lasting and far-reaching effects, as do false allegations of abuse.
3. Children, the elderly and people with disabilities are recognized as being especially vulnerable to abuse.
4. In order to receive abuse insurance, insurers require the implementation of a policy preventing abuse.
5. Such policies are being introduced in most organizations working with children. The church should not be tardy in responding to the concerns of society.

Definitions:

The following definitions are intended to clarify understanding of the terms used in this policy. For legal definition of terms, reference to the applicable statutes and case law is recommended.

1. '***Abuse***' includes sexual, physical or emotional abuse of a person.
2. '***Sexual abuse***' means any sexual exploitation whether consensual or not. It ranges from touching of a sexual nature to sexual intercourse. In determining whether a behaviour is of a sexual nature, one should ask whether a reasonable observer looking at the behaviour in its context would conclude that it is.
3. '***Physical abuse***' means any physical force or action which results in, or may potentially result in, injury to a person and which exceeds that which could be considered reasonable discipline.
4. '***Emotional abuse***' means acts or omissions of those responsible for the care of a person that are likely to produce long term and serious emotional disorders.
5. '***Child***' is legally defined as someone under the age of 18 years. In practice, for programming, we subdivide the group into (younger) '***children***' and '***youth***'.
6. '***Allegation***' means a claim of sexual, physical or emotional abuse.
7. '***Employee***' – A person remunerated by TMC for providing requisite services.
8. '***Volunteer***' – A person providing requisite services for TMC, requested by but not remunerated by TMC. For the purposes of this document, the term "Volunteer" will be restricted to those volunteers who are operating in any positions of trust in which abuse of another person could occur. This includes, but is not limited to: Sunday School teachers, leaders of children and youth programs, counselors and those providing visitation services.
9. '***HRC***' – Human Resources Committee: a committee elected by the membership of TMC as per the directives of the TMC Constitution.

Principles of Protection Policy

TMC is committed to the following principles:

1. Every prospective Employee of TMC shall fill out an Application Form for Employment, acknowledging (s)he has been made aware of TMC's policies and procedures regarding abuse, and indicating his/her commitment to fully comply with those policies and procedures. A Police Record Check, an Education Record Check and Personal Reference Checks shall be

conducted for all prospective Employees of TMC prior to hiring. The Application Form and the results of the checks (the records) shall be retained with the Employee's employment file. The records shall be accessible by the Human Resources Committee as required.

2. Every Volunteer at TMC shall fill out a Volunteer Registration Form acknowledging (s)he has been made aware of TMC's policies and procedures regarding abuse, and indicating his/her commitment to fully comply with the policies and procedures. A Police Record Check shall be conducted for all Volunteers of TMC. The results of this check shall be retained on file. The records shall be accessible by the Human Resources Committee as required.
3. Any Employee or Volunteer with a record showing a criminal abuse violation shall not be permitted to work with children, youth or other at-risk people.
4. Training shall be provided on an annual basis to all Employees and Volunteers. This training shall be compulsory. The training will focus on understanding the nature of abuse and how to use TMC's policies and procedures to prevent abuse, and to report suspected incidents. A record of all Employees and Volunteers who have attended the training session each year shall be retained and accessible to the Human Resources Committee as required.
5. A 'Two-Adult' rule applies to programs involving children and youth. This rule states that a minimum of two screened adults must be present during any activity. This is a minimum requirement, not a maximum, as there should be sufficient adults to adequately supervise the number of participants. For programs such as Sunday School, in which more than one class is in session concurrently in different rooms with windows facing a common corridor, it shall be sufficient to have only one adult per classroom.
6. The 'Two-Adult' rule also applies to pastoral visits and counseling sessions. Either two adults must be present when pastors or deacons make pastoral care visits and when counseling takes place, or a second adult must be in the immediate vicinity. If this is not possible, the meetings should take place in a public setting. These 'Two Adult' rules reduce the risk of abuse and also reduce the risk of false accusations of abuse by individuals seeking an award or quick legal settlement.

Protection Procedures

Recruiting and Screening of Church Workers

1. The Human Resources Committee (HRC) shall be responsible to ensure prospective employees of TMC are screened.
2. Screening of prospective employees shall include having the following checks performed:
 - Police Record Check to determine if a previous criminal record exists.
 - Personal References Check to ensure the references are valid and to determine the content of those references.
 - Educational Records Check to ensure that educational records stated by prospective employee are valid.
3. The HRC shall be responsible to ensure prospective Volunteers of TMC are screened.
4. Screening of prospective Volunteers shall include having the following check performed:
 - Police Record Check to determine if a previous criminal record exists.

Management of Records

1. The HRC shall ensure that every Employee and Volunteer of TMC has a confidential Personnel File and that the records obtained during the screening process are maintained in that file.
2. Each Personnel File shall be contained in a Sealed Envelope within a locked cabinet accessible by the Pastor(s) and Administrative Assistant.
3. Personnel Files shall only be made available to those required to see them on an as-needed basis such as after an allegation has been formally filed against an Employee or Volunteer. When a sealed Personnel File is opened, two of the following personnel (neither of which is involved in the allegation) must be present: a Pastor, the Administrative Ass't, or members of the HRC.
4. Individuals are to be granted access to their personnel files upon request. This access must occur in the presence of any two of the following: a Pastor, the Administrative Ass't or members of the HRC. Nothing may be modified or removed from a Personnel File.
5. Training Records showing who has attended the annual training sessions must be kept on file, but need not be kept in sealed envelopes.
6. Records shall be maintained by the HRC and be kept indefinitely.

Ministry Requirements

1. Prior to serving in any capacity, all persons need to be accepted for ministry by the HRC. As TMC implements this Policy, current workers may continue serving.
2. No person with a criminal record of abuse will be accepted for ministry for positions where the person would work with youth, children, the disabled, or other at-risk people, or would be in a counseling relationship of any kind.

Child Protection Procedures

1. All ministry leaders working with children are to be properly identified (eg. Introduction, name tags, etc.)
2. A Registration Form for all children and youth participating in TMC ministries will be maintained. This form shall include personal information relevant to the activity, such as names, phone number and addresses of parents, information on allergies, consents, and Alberta Health Care Numbers.
3. Children are never to be dropped off at the Church, or in the nursery or classroom without a teacher/care-giver present.
4. Procedures shall be established to ensure the two-adult requirement is maintained during foreseeable events. (eg: When preschool children need assistance in the washroom, an adult may enter the washroom cubicle to assist only when a second adult is within visual contact. If this is not possible, inform another adult when taking a child to the washroom and when returning.)
5. Church activities conducted away from the church property should be pre-approved by the church leadership. Parents should be notified at least one week prior to the outing. All trips and outings must be supervised by a minimum of two approved leaders, which could include parents of participants.

6. Youth events at the church and away from the church property should be attended by two approved youth leaders. Provisions for single youth leaders to be alone with youth include:
 - a. travel by vehicle: one leader (or Pastor) may be with two or more youth members in the same vehicle while traveling to or from youth events;
 - b. in public: one youth leader (or Pastor) may be with an individual youth member if they are together in a public place such as a restaurant, coffee shop or similar establishment;
 - c. in counseling: one youth leader (or Pastor) may be “alone” with an individual youth member if there is another approved adult in the vicinity of the counseling session. This may include the Pastor’s office or a Sunday school room with an open door where the other adult is near the room but just outside of earshot.
 - d. This is a minimum standard to protect the youth leader (or Pastor) as well as the youth. Youth leaders (or Pastor) are expected to evaluate each situation where they are interacting with youth. If a situation arises where an individual youth leader (or Pastor) does not feel these measures are adequately protective, they are expected to decline/refuse to be with youth under these circumstances or they can employ additional measures by insisting on being joined by one or more additional adults at all times.

Health and Safety Guidelines

1. When a child appears to be ill or endangering the health of others, parents/guardians will be contacted to remove the child from the activity.
2. Volunteers and staff at TMC will not give or apply any medication, unless written consent is given by the parents, along with clear written instructions on procedure and frequency.
3. In an emergency, staff and volunteers will take whatever steps are necessary to obtain medical aid.

Training of Employees and Volunteers

1. It is compulsory that Employees and Volunteers receive annual training regarding this Policy and its related Procedures, as well as in the Recognition of Abuse and/or Harassment.
2. The HRC is responsible for making such training available, and for keeping records in each Employee’s and Volunteer’s Personnel Files that the training has been taken.

Monitoring of Policy

The HRC and TMC Council should review these policies and procedures on an annual basis. The following questions are to be considered:

1. Have the Employees and Volunteers received training regarding the policies?
2. Are Employees and Volunteers following the required policies and procedures?
3. What obstacles exist in complying with the policies and procedures?

4. What is the level of cooperation?
5. Do sufficient materials exist for training and information?
6. Are the policies and procedures printed and available?

Equipment and Facility Requirements

When the church plans to build new facilities or to renovate existing facilities, the following features should be considered. Where possible, these features will also be added to existing facilities, if not already in place.

Windows:

Rooms should have large interior windows that allow for easy viewing by parents and others. Doors with windows should be installed, which also provide for easy viewing. Sight lines through these windows should remain unobstructed at all times.

Washrooms:

Washrooms should be placed in close proximity to areas used by young children, to prevent the need for children to leave the immediate area. Child size toilets make it possible for children to use the washroom with little assistance.

Nursery Facilities:

Nursery change tables should be in full view. Electrical outlets must be covered or out of reach of children. Cribs and toys must meet safety standards.

Emergency Exit:

An emergency exit plan with maps and procedures is to be visible in each room. All Employees and Volunteers need to be familiar with the emergency exit plan. Procedures are to be reviewed annually for fire emergencies.

First Aid Supplies/Training

A First Aid box must be kept on hand. A sign shall be posted in the hallways identifying the location of the First Aid Box. A review of those ministry leaders holding first-aid certificates should be made before the fall programs commence.

Dealing with an Allegation or Disclosure

Identifying Abusive Situations

Those who work in settings with vulnerable persons will be trained about the indicators of possible abuse often portrayed by victims.

1. A person who believes on reasonable grounds that someone is or may be in need of protection from abuse **is required by law** to report the belief and the information upon which it is based to the appropriate agency.
2. In particular, the Alberta Child Welfare Act, (which defines a child as a person under the age of 18), states that "Any person who has reasonable and probable grounds to believe

and believes that a child is in need of protective services shall forthwith report the matter to a director."

3. If the person is alleged to have been abused by a church worker, the HRC should be advised immediately.
4. Any investigation conducted shall be conducted either by the police or by the appropriate agency.

Responding to an Allegation or Disclosure

1. When a person makes it clear he wants to be listened to, it is always appropriate to do so. At the same time, common sense should prevail, so that the response does not interfere with the police investigation. For example, asking leading questions about the details of an allegation, or showing a photograph of the alleged offender, before the police arrive will interfere with the subsequent investigation. Any person involved in responding to an allegation or disclosure should be aware that he may become a witness in a court proceeding.
2. When an allegation surfaces, the church worker shall be asked to step aside temporarily from his duties, pending the outcome of the police or social services investigation into the allegation. Paid staff will continue to receive pay, and may be assigned other duties.
3. When questionable conduct surfaces, which in and of itself would not interest the police, such as extended hugging, spending time alone with a child behind closed windowless doors, spending too much time alone with a disabled person, or any other conduct which might pose a danger to a vulnerable person, steps shall be taken to prevent a recurrence.
4. If an allegation concerning a pastoral staff member arises, the MC Alberta Board of Faith and Life shall be notified.

Assistance to the Victim and the Accused

After the allegation has been reported, the HRC will be responsible for ensuring that assistance and support is given to the victim, the accused, the person reporting, and the church body. This will be done only with the consent of the police or appropriate agency. It is recommended that, whilst avoiding conflict of interest, the Pastor and Deacons be available for on-going support to the abused individual and his/her family, and also to the accused.

Resources and Forms

Resources

"Reducing the Risk," by Richard R. Hammar, Steven W. Klipowicz, James F. Cobble Jr. (available from library in the Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre)
"Responding to Child Abuse, A Handbook", Government of Alberta, October 2005.
"Making Your Sanctuary Safe", by Deborah Gingerich, 2002
"Preventing Violence and Harassment in the Workplace" – Gov't of Alberta Employment and Immigration (Revised November 2006)

Forms

Employment Application Form:

<http://trinity.mennonitechurch.ab.ca/EmploymentApplication.docx>

Volunteer Registration Form:

<http://trinity.mennonitechurch.ab.ca/VolunteerRegistration.docx>

Registration for Children/Youth Form:

<http://trinity.mennonitechurch.ab.ca/RegistrationForChildren.docx>