

First Mennonite Church Abuse Prevention Policy

Policy Statement:

Misuse of positions of power, otherwise known as abuse, will not be tolerated by First Mennonite Church, Calgary. As a congregation we commit to not being party to secrets regarding abuse. In all our ministries, this congregation is committed to demonstrating the love of Jesus Christ so that all persons are treated with respect.

Responsibility:

The responsibility for administration of this policy resides ultimately with the Council of Church Ministries, although each member is responsible to make sure this is a safe place.

Scriptural Basis for Policy (quotations from NSRV).

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 a 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 freedoms 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)

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 those who serve in our ministries.

Policy Rationale

1. People entrusting loved ones to the care of the church must be assured that the church is a safe place.
2. Abuse has lasting and far-reaching effects, as do false allegations of abuse, not only for the immediate victim(s) but for a congregation as well.

Definitions

1. Abuse: to use wrongly, to maltreat, to injure. It is the misuse of power by a person in a position of trust. Since abuse has its roots in an imbalance of power, every person can potentially be abused given certain circumstances. In our society, however, certain groups are demonstrably more vulnerable to abuse than others. These groups include, but are not limited to children, the disabled, the elderly, people who identify as LGBTQ, and women. Abuse may take various forms
2. Physical Abuse: 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.
3. Sexual Abuse: Any sexual exploitation of a person, whether consensual or not. Abuse of another person ranges from sexually demeaning comments to exposure, inappropriate touching, and to participating in or viewing, acts of a sexual nature.
4. Emotional Abuse: a pattern of behaviour that attacks a person's emotional health/development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive, and unreasonable demands on a person. This includes verbal and nonverbal threats of physical and/or sexual harm.
5. Spiritual Abuse: occurs when religious authority or ideas are used to justify sexual, physical, emotional, or child abuse. It occurs when religious authority or ideas are used to control rather than shepherd (or guide) a person.
6. Allegation: a claim of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse by the person themselves or a person witnessing abusive behaviours.

Operational Procedures (Principles of Protection Policy)

First Mennonite Church, Calgary is committed to the following procedures and principles:

1. All those, both paid and volunteer, who work with vulnerable individuals, will receive training to understand the nature of abuse and how to carry out our policies to prevent abuse, including our reporting procedures for suspected incidents.
2. A team approach is to be used in children's and youth ministries. Normally there are to be at least two adults present for all children's, junior youth, and youth activities.
3. At least two adults will be present in the Sunday School area during Sunday School.
4. No less than two care providers shall be in the nursery, unless the only persons in the nursery are a parent and their own child. Children will not be left unsupervised in the nursery. Ushers have the responsibility to be aware of unsupervised children as well as supervision not meeting the standards of the safe church policy guidelines.
5. Consent forms wherein parents give written permission for their children or youth to participate in off-site FMC group activities will be gathered and kept on file in the Children's Worker's office and in the Sunday School Area.
6. Parental consent (usually verbal) must be obtained before transporting children other than one's own to and from offsite FMC group activities.
7. Either two adults should be present when pastors or deacons make pastoral care visits and when counselling takes place or a second adult should be in the immediate vicinity. If this is not possible the meetings should take place in a public setting. This reduces the risk of abuse and also reduces the risk of false accusations. The pastor and deacons can waive the two adult rule for their pastoral responsibilities at their discretion. If waived, a clear record of any such meetings should be maintained, and reviewed by the Deacons.
8. When a person suspects abuse or harassment, they will follow the reporting procedures of FMC

Screening, Recruitment, and Training of Volunteers and Paid Staff

The pastor and the deacons of the FMC are responsible for:

- reminding the congregation annually of our safe church policy;
 - presenting the policy to new members and regular attendees;
 - consistent application of the following recruitment and screening policies and procedures of the FMC.
1. We will screen all our workers, both paid and volunteer, for any position involving vulnerable individuals. Anyone with criminal abuse violations will not be allowed to work with vulnerable individuals;

2. Adults who attend activities with their children do not need to be screened. Screening is required only for those mandated by the Church to take responsibility for the activities. The monitoring of ‘attending adults’ is included in the responsibilities of the adults given the responsibility to lead;
3. The Christian Education superintendent will be involved in the screening of Sunday school volunteers. They will also be responsible to review the safe church policy with Sunday School volunteers.
4. Copies of the safe church policy will be distributed to all households, new members and attendees;

Identifying and Responding to Abusive Situations

1. Those who work in settings with vulnerable persons will be trained about the indicators of possible abuse often portrayed by victims. This training will be developed and overseen by the Deacons;
2. The church will be proactive in identifying and responding to questionable or inappropriate behaviour (i.e. extended hugging, spending time alone with children behind closed windowless doors, or any other questionable activity);
3. If someone suspects abuse, they shall consult with/inform the pastor or one of the deacons before making a formal report. If the pastor or deacons are suspected, the Area Pastor shall be contacted before a formal report is made;
4. Any person determining that reasonable or probable grounds exist pointing to harm or risk of harm or neglect for someone under 18, they must make a report to **Calgary and Area Child and Family Services** at (403) 297-2995. Any person failing to report may be held criminally liable;
5. Only the police or other appropriate agency will conduct investigations of allegations of abuse. If the accused is a credentialed leader, then the Area Church may also investigate based on their policies and procedures;
6. The role of the person receiving the allegation is to listen and to reassure the person that they are doing the right thing by disclosing the abuse. One of the few questions the person(s) receiving the allegations can ask is “can you tell me more?” It is the role of the investigator to ask the “who, where, when, how...” questions;
7. The church has the obligation to protect the person reporting the abuse and the alleged abuser. This means taking whatever steps necessary to prevent any further allegations of abuse from occurring. The pastor and deacons will determine what these steps will be and how widely the information needs to be disseminated in the congregation. Confidentiality will be maintained to the maximum extent possible;

8. An abuse incident report will be completed.

Premises or Equipment and Facility Requirements

1. Windows exist in all doors to classrooms, offices, and nurseries, and they shall remain uncovered;
2. Hazardous materials are stored safely and securely.
3. An annual health and safety audit of the church building will form a part of the maintenance committee's report at the annual congregational meeting.
4. A First-aid Kit shall be readily available and clearly marked.

Adopted January 31, 2015
First Mennonite Church, Calgary AGM

Appendix A

ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Date: _____ **Time:** _____

Location: _____

Details