

Charleswood Mennonite Church Safe Church Policy

To be reviewed by the Board every 3 years

A. PREAMBLE

The words of welcome on our website state:

We welcome you to our community of faith, where we strive to experience God's love and grace every day. We believe that each one of us is made in the image of God, and that we are called to walk together in service to one another and to our world.

We welcome all who seek to deepen their relationship with God, regardless of age, race, gender, or background. We believe that our diversity enriches us and helps us to better understand and appreciate the vastness of God's love.

As Anabaptists, we are committed to following Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives, including our relationships with others and our care for God's creation. We seek to live out our faith in practical ways, through acts of service, peacemaking, and justice-seeking.

Paul's instructions to the Colossians about the nature of their new life in Christ in Col. 3: 12 – 17 resonate with this commitment and thereby also become words for us. These verses call us to "clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, meekness, patience, and finally love." They also call us to bear with one another and to deal with complaints in life giving ways, all while letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts as we teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, with grateful hearts, doing all in the name, or Spirit, of Jesus.

One of the practical ways we seek to live out our faith is by doing our best to provide a safe place for all who participate in our congregational life. In this commitment, we agree to be vigilant about physical, sexual, relational and spiritual safety. (Appendix 3)

Some people served in our congregation may be vulnerable because they are unable to speak for themselves due to personal barriers such as age, position, dis/ability, non-fluent communication, timidity, or life circumstances. This plan gives particular attention to the safety of persons who are vulnerable, and to the responsibilities of our staff and volunteers. However, every person who participates in our activities is expected to contribute to the safe and caring environment. This includes exercising an awareness of and response to all kinds of harassment among us.

Beyond setting out guidelines and procedures, by adopting this policy we commit ourselves to ongoing discernment and education. Our attempts to live this way are guided by Scripture, the counsel of Mennonite Church Manitoba and the laws of Manitoba and Canada.

B. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidelines for cultivating Christian qualities at Charleswood Mennonite Church (CMC) that under-gird safety and respect in our congregation and contribute to spiritual health. These include:

- a welcoming and non-judgmental attitude toward children and adults
- humility and consideration for others

- courageous authenticity in our relationships
- healthy respect for each other's boundaries of body, mind, and spirit
- commitment to open and direct communication, discussion, and discernment
- honest, supportive communication that includes careful listening

A specific purpose is to prevent harm to children, youth and vulnerable adults participating in church programs or visiting the church and to protect adults who work with children, youth and vulnerable adults from false allegations.

A secondary purpose of this policy is to qualify for insurance coverage if there is ever a claim against our staff and volunteers, or against the congregation as a whole.

C. RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

1. **Child:** A person under the age of 18.
2. **Vulnerable Adults:** Persons 18 years of age or older who, because of their age, a disability or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent are:
 - In a position of dependence on others, or
 - Otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by a person in a position of authority or trust relative to them.
3. **Vulnerable Sector Volunteers (VSV):** Individuals who relate to children or vulnerable adults in our church programs.
4. **Safe Church Coordinator(s):** The individual(s) who co-ordinate(s) and maintain(s) the administrative aspects of the Safe Church Policy.
5. **Consent:** To permit, approve, or agree to something that is done or proposed by another. However, those working or volunteering with children, youth and vulnerable adults are considered persons in a position of trust. Due to power differentials, any relationship of a sexual nature between a leader and program participant is never considered consensual.
6. **Neglect:** The failure to meet a child's safety and basic needs, such as adequate food, clothing, shelter, sleep, schooling, medical care, and protection from harm. Neglect also includes leaving a child alone or failing to provide adequate supervision.
7. **Abuse:** an act or omission by any person where the act or omission results in:
 - a) physical injury to the child,
 - b) emotional disability of a permanent nature in the child or is likely to result in such a disability, or
 - c) sexual exploitation of the child with or without the child's consent

Different types of abuse:

- **Physical:** Any deliberate force or action that injures or could injure an individual. It includes punching, slapping, hitting, beating, shaking another person, burning, biting, or throwing, or having careless disregard for the safety of others.

- Emotional: Behaviour that deliberately seeks to erode another's self-esteem or emotional development. It includes repeated criticism, yelling, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting or isolating an individual.
 - Sexual: Any actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, including inappropriate touching, by force or under unequal or forced conditions. It includes but is not limited to sexual contact between children, youth or vulnerable persons and a person in a position of trust. It is against the law to:
 - Touch a vulnerable person for sexual purpose;
 - Encourage or force a vulnerable person to touch another person in a sexual way
 - Encourage or force a vulnerable person to participate in any sexual activity
 - Tell a vulnerable person to touch him or herself for an adult's or older child's sexual purposes.
 - Spiritual: The use of religious beliefs, values or Scriptures to threaten or harm an individual.
 - Psychological: A pattern of intentional verbal or behavioural actions or lack of actions that convey to children, youth, vulnerable persons and/or any adults the message that they are worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered, or only of value to meet someone else's needs.
8. **Harassment:** A form of discrimination that involves unwelcome or offensive conduct toward a person or group of persons. They are repeated actions that make another feel unsafe, attacked, belittled, intimidated or manipulated. Harassment may be subtle or overt, ranging from name-calling to physical confrontation. Silence, laughter or non-intervention on the part of others witnessing harassment implies indifference or implied approval and is therefore also considered a form of harassment.
9. **Sexual harassment:** Any unwelcomed, offensive, or discriminatory conduct of a sexual nature. It may be verbal, non-verbal, or physical, and may include suggestive remarks, jokes, showing offensive images, touching, leering, demands for sexual favours, or threats.
10. **Bullying:** Any repeated and unwanted action by an individual or group intending to intimidate, harass, degrade or offend. The misuse can come from a person in a position of trust, from peers to each other, or from those without positions of power. It can be verbal, physical or psychological, and may include insults, inappropriate criticism, manipulation, and threats.
11. **Cyber or online bullying** includes sending or posting cruel and intimidating messages via email, text or other electronic means, or posting them on social media sites. In the absence of face-to-face contact, it can be easier to dehumanize others.

D. PREVENTION

1. Education, training and distribution of policy

- The Safe Church policy is available to all members, attendees, or guests on the church website.
- Paper copies are available upon request.
- CMC will provide opportunities to educate, and train paid and unpaid volunteers about the symptoms of abuse and how to make CMC safer.
- Other education resource materials as well as a current paper copy of the policy will be available in the church library.

2. Documenting

Any exception to the policy and procedures should be documented in writing (email is acceptable) and sent to:

- The parents / guardians of any youth or child involved
- The Safe Church Coordinator for record-keeping purposes

3. Guidelines for Screening of Staff

All pastoral staff have completed a criminal and abuse record check through Mennonite Church Manitoba prior to being hired. The renewing of these checks as needed, but at least every 5 years, is the responsibility of staff and the congregation.

<https://www.policesolutions.ca/checks/services/winnipeg/>

4. Guidelines for Appointment of Vulnerable Sector Volunteers (and Staff)

- All volunteers who relate with children and vulnerable adults will undergo appropriate screening.
- Registration forms, the personal safety pledge, references and criminal and abuse record checks are required prior to a volunteer assuming their role.
- No volunteer shall be approved who has been convicted of a sexual offense involving children or vulnerable adults. Only the Safe Church Coordinator and Sunday School Superintendent shall have access to the volunteer's records checks.
- Prior to approval, the names of potential volunteers may be brought to the pastors by the Safe Church Coordinator, who shall then collectively decide whether it is prudent to appoint that volunteer and make appropriate notes on the Volunteer Registration Form. If anyone knows of reasons why a person would not be a suitable volunteer, further assessment should take place before approval.

5. Guidelines for Conduct of Volunteers

Volunteer Guidelines

- All Vulnerable Sector Volunteers are required to fill out the application form (Appendix 2), take the Safety Pledge (Appendix 3), and attend an annual Safe Church Policy Training (Appendix 5).
- Church activities involving children, unaccompanied by a family member, will normally involve at least 2 approved volunteers. If only 1 adult can be in a room with children, leave the door of that room open, or have a window in the door. Parents will sign an annual waiver form (Appendix 6) which allows a teacher to be the only adult in their class, based on the trust and screening of that relationship. Attendance will be taken. (Appendix 4)
- Ratios of 1 adult volunteer per 1-10 preschool children, and 1 adult volunteer per 1-15 children in Grades 1-6 are generally accepted in Manitoba's educational guidelines.
- Volunteers should always act with moral integrity, demonstrating respect and honesty toward young persons.
- Volunteers should avoid situations where activities cannot be overheard or observed.
- Volunteers should never use corporal punishment.
- Photos should only be taken with written parental consent.
- Signed annual parental waivers are required for all off-campus activities with children when a parent is not present. The signed waiver form will state:
 - Location of the activity is taking place
 - Duration of activity
 - Names of participants
 - Emergency contact information

- In the case of mentors, parents will sign an annual waiver which allows occasional times of the mentor being alone with their child, based on the trust and screening of that relationship.
- When a child or vulnerable adult is injured, appropriate treatment should be provided at the discretion of personnel in charge of the program. The volunteer should contact the parents a.s.a.p. The Safe Church Coordinator should then be informed and so they can document and preserve a record of what happened and what was done to care for the child or vulnerable adult.
- Any known or suspected abuse of children or vulnerable adults should be reported to the Safe Church Coordinator using the incident report form.

E. Responding to Allegations and Cases of Abuse

Charleswood Mennonite Church will comply with all statutory requirements related to responding to allegations of abuse. For extra guidance see Appendix 1: Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Abuse.

1. Document

Everything that happens between a volunteer and the child or vulnerable adult, as well as others involved in the situation should be documented, including as much of the conversation as possible. Only facts should be documented, rather than personal theories.

2. Handling Disclosures in a Confidential Situation

Confidentiality around any allegations of abuse or substantiated reports of abuse will be maintained within appropriate limits, with the top priority being the safety and protection of the child or vulnerable adult. Statements made to a pastor or minister are not privileged, and anything said by a complainant or an alleged offender to their pastor is admissible in court. Even if such statements were given under the impression that they would not be passed on to anyone else, the person to whom they were made could be compelled to disclose what those statements were. Where such statements disclose that a child is in need of protection, the disclosure must be reported.

3. Reporting a Known or Suspected Case of Abuse

All volunteers have a duty to report any known or suspected abuse of children or vulnerable adults to the Safe Church Coordinator, using the incident report form. The Safe Church Coordinator will report to one of the Pastors, who are then responsible for contacting the parent, unless the parent is the suspected abuser, or caregiver. Incident report forms will be stored in a confidential file. (Appendix 7)

4. Reporting a Person in Need of Protection

Section 18(1) of the Child and Family Services Act requires that “where a person has information that leads the person reasonably to believe that a child [or vulnerable adult] is or might be in need of protection as provided in section 17, the person shall forthwith report the information to an agency or to a parent or guardian of the child.”

If the situation is reported to Child and Family Services, Child and Family Services is responsible for taking action to protect the child, contacting the police, arranging a medical examination and informing the parent.

As stated, The Act requires a person to report a child in need of protection to an agency or to the parent. Section 18 (1.1) however states that the information is reported only to the agency and **NOT** reported to the parents "if the person

- a) does not know the identity of the parent or guardian
- b) has information that leads the person reasonably to believe that the parent or guardian
 - is responsible for causing the child to be in need of protection; or
 - is unable or unwilling to provide adequate protection to the child in the circumstances."

If there is doubt about reporting an incident, Child and Family Services may be contacted anonymously to describe the situation and get counsel on how to proceed.

5. Allegations of Abuse Against a volunteer

- When an allegation surfaces, the volunteer, paid or unpaid, may be asked to temporarily step aside from his/her duties.
- When questionable conduct surfaces that causes discomfort for a child, such as extended hugging, spending time alone with a child behind closed, windowless doors, spending too much time alone with a child, or any other conduct which might pose a danger to a child, steps shall be taken to prevent a recurrence.
- When questionable conduct surfaces toward a vulnerable adult, as above, appropriate steps shall be taken to prevent a recurrence.

6. Congregational Response During an Investigation

- While any police investigation is underway, CMC shall take measures to stay as far removed from the situation as possible. This is necessary from the police perspective so that the investigation is not interfered with. It is also an indication to all parties that the complaint is being investigated impartially, and that CMC is not "siding" with one party or another.
- CMC will take measures to refrain from admitting liability or making public statements to the media or from the pulpit without obtaining formal legal counsel.
- CMC will take measures to assure confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and the alleged offender.

7. Congregational Responsibility After an Investigation

- The Safe Church Coordinator, a Deacon, or Deacon designate will help the family to determine what type of support system is necessary for the complainant and volunteer, and what corrective action, if any, should be taken. Both the complainant and the accused will be given a safe outlet to express feelings, concerns and fears.
- Where a member who has been found to have committed abuse requests a transfer out, the receiving church shall be advised of the finding.

Appendices that will become live links in final document

Appendix 1

Red Cross Child Abuse Prevention Program Guidelines for Dealing with Allegations of Abuse

Handling Disclosures

- a) Listen
 - provide privacy
 - stay calm – do not express shock or anger
 - don't promise not to tell
- b) Believe
 - express belief in the person
 - reassure them that they've done the right thing by telling
 - reassure them that abuse is not their fault
- c) Affirm
 - acknowledge the feelings that they are feeling
 - it's important to convey the following:
 - "I'm glad you told me"
 - "I'm sorry this happened to you"
 - "It's important that this never happens again to you or anyone else."
 - affirm them as worthy individuals
 - avoid telling them how they should feel
 - make no presuppositions – avoid being judgmental
 - avoid projecting your own reactions onto them
 - determine their immediate need for safety and any possible medical concerns
 - do not ask leading questions or encourage a more detailed description or introduce more precise language. (Remember that it is not your job to investigate, this is the responsibility of the assigned investigators. Any help in this area could negatively affect results.)
 - allow the complainant to maintain as much control over their situation as possible (when they will tell, whether you will accompany them, etc.), telling only those who need to know.

Appendix 2

Vulnerable Sector Volunteer Application Form

In order to reduce the risk of abuse within our church ministries, this information is necessary to protect our children, vulnerable adults, and to protect our volunteers. Information received will be kept strictly confidential. Thank you in advance for your understanding and cooperation.

Application for police record check available online:

<https://www.policiesolutions.ca/checks/services/winnipeg/>

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Last Name _____

First Name _____

Address _____

Phone Numbers _____ / _____

Birth Date (Y) _____ (M) _____ (D) _____

VOLUNTEER ROLE

For what role would you like to volunteer? _____

What is your passion for serving in this role? _____

What is your length of involvement in this congregation? _____

Please name two references with whom we can check.

1. Name and contact information:

2. Name and contact information:

Police and Abuse Registry Checks (circle one): YES NO

References checked (circle one): YES NO

Appendix 3

Charleswood Mennonite Church Personal Safety Pledge

For all persons working within the programs of Charleswood Mennonite Church (CMC):

You are expected to demonstrate the following behaviours and characteristics:

- a welcoming and non-judgmental attitude toward children and adults
- humility and consideration for others
- courageous authenticity in our relationships
- healthy respect for each other's boundaries of body, mind, and spirit
- commitment to open and direct communication, discussion, and discernment
- honest, supportive communication that includes careful listening

In my actions

- ___ I desire to support congregational programs through service and leadership.
- ___ Through the exercise of my responsibilities, I will do my best to contribute to a safe congregational environment.
- ___ I will be vigilant about the physical, sexual, relational, and spiritual safety of those with whom I work.
- ___ I promise to preserve appropriate and respectful privacy of those for whom I am responsible.
- ___ When I serve in moderate- to high-risk situations, I will follow the guidance of CMC leaders, and I agree to take the precautions described in the CMC Safe Church Policy as I plan and carry out programs.
- ___ I will speak with a CMC pastor, Sunday School Superintendent, or Safe Church Coordinator as soon as I become concerned about the well-being or safety of a program participant.
- ___ I will exercise respect when supervising or mentoring a person learning leadership.

In my attitudes

- ___ I commit myself to cultivate Christian qualities that undergird safety and contribute to the health of our congregation.
- ___ I will contribute to ongoing discernment and discussion of the safe environment at CMC.

I will refrain from

- ___ using alcohol or non-prescribed substances on CMC premises and at congregational events
- ___ flirting, harassment, and hazing.

I have read, understood, and am willing to comply with this policy and its annual procedures.

Signature

Date

Appendix 4

Attendance Form

Youth or Sunday School Attendance Form (please circle which it is)

Date and time: _____

Location: _____

Staff or Volunteers: _____

[illegible]

Appendix 5

Safe Church Policy Training Attendance Form

Date and time: _____

Location: _____

Training Facilitator: _____

[illegible]

Appendix 6

Waiver Forms

Parental Permission: All members of Charleswood Mennonite Church must obtain the permission of a child's parent or guardian before spending time with a minor in an unsupervised one-to-one setting. Parents/Guardians may be asked to sign a parental permission form at the beginning of the school year to grant permission for the pastor, or a mentor etc., to transport or to connect one to one with children/youth (for example: coffee/lunch with a youth or child). Sunday school teachers must similarly obtain the permission of a child's parent to be the only adult in the classroom. The Waiver is valid for one year and can be revoked at any time.

Waiver Form

Name of Child/Youth or Vulnerable Adult: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Age: _____

I, _____ the Parent or Guardian of the
above-named child or youth give my permission to _____,
the church volunteer or staff, to transport, connect one to one, or be the only adult in the
class (please underline which permission is being granted)

Date: _____

Signed: _____

Appendix 7

Critical Incident/Suspected Abuse/Disclosure/Allegation Report Form

(please underline the type of report)

Name of Child/Youth or Vulnerable Adult _____

Date of Birth _____ Age _____

Was the individual in the care of a church program at the time of the incident? YES NO

If a Child – are they or their family under the care of Manitoba Child and Family Services? YES NO

If YES, please provide information about care that is known _____

If NO, provide information below on the Parent(s) /Legal guardian of the child

Parent(s) or Legal Guardian(s):

Name(s) _____ Contact _____

_____ Contact _____

Address _____

The Critical Incident:

Date _____ Time _____

Place _____

Description of critical Incident/Suspected Abuse/Disclosure/Allegation: (use extra pages as needed)

Person Reporting:

Signed _____ Date _____

(Program Volunteer or Pastor)

Signed _____ Date _____

(CMC Council Chair)