

Erb Street Mennonite Church  
Waterloo, Ontario

# **Safe Church Policy**

A Plan to Protect Young People and Adults

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# **Safe Church Policy:**

## **A Plan to Protect Young People and Adults**

*First Approved by Church Ministry Council 23 May 2007*

*Revised 16 April 2015*

### **Statement Of Policy**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this document is to ensure that Erb Street Mennonite Church (hereinafter referred to as ESMC) is a safe place for all people. The intent of the policies and procedures outlined herein is to protect young people and vulnerable adults from harm and abuse. The policy also protects adults who work with these groups from false allegations, and the church from unnecessary litigation<sup>1</sup>.

#### **Basis of this Policy**

The church has spiritual, moral, legal and societal obligations to ensure a safe environment for all young people and adults participating in church programs. Spiritual and moral obligations are reflected in various scriptures<sup>2</sup>. As a congregation we accept the call to nurture and care for young people and vulnerable adults. Recognizing the human capacity for evil, the congregation accepts its responsibility to implement clear policies and procedures to minimize the risk of abusing those who are vulnerable.

There are also legal and societal obligations that demand that we protect young people and adults with special physical, psychological, and/or emotional needs and/or limitations (hereinafter referred to as vulnerable adults). As secular organizations are called to clarify and enforce procedures to ensure safe environments, so too must the church. Indeed, the church can provide positive testimony to the community by adhering to standards that are equal to or exceed society's requirements.

Beyond these obligations, the following also shapes the faith and practices of ESMC documents:

- A Plan to Protect Our Children, Youth & Leaders<sup>3</sup>
- Vision: Healing and Hope<sup>4</sup>
- Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Listowel Mennonite Church's "Safe Church Policy: A Plan to Protect Children, Youth and Adults" was used with permission as a basis for Erb Street Mennonite Church's "Safe Church Policy".

<sup>2</sup> Whoever welcomes a child welcomes me..." Matt 18:2-6; "...Let the children come to me and do not hinder them..." Mark 10:14; Luke 17:1-2; Micah 6:9; Ephesians 5:3; I Thess. 5:22; 2; II Cor. 8:9

<sup>3</sup> Document prepared by Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, a copy of which is available in the church office and/or library

<sup>4</sup> God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world. (Vision statement of Mennonite Church Canada.)

<sup>5</sup> *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Herald Press, 1995; or, see Appendix 1 of *A Plan to Protect Our Children, Youth & Leaders* (2003)

- Erb Street Mennonite Church Vision Statement (2004)<sup>6</sup>

## Definitions

*ESMC hereby adopts a policy of zero tolerance of behaviours defined below.* Further, all workers should be aware that Ontario law requires, through the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)<sup>7</sup>, that abuse and neglect of children must be reported to civil authorities.<sup>8</sup>

- 1) **Abuse:** to use wrongly, to maltreat, to injure. It is the misuse of power by a person in a position of trust. Abuse may take various forms:
  - a) **Physical abuse:** deliberate physical force or action that results, or could result, in non-accidental injury to a child or youth. It can include punching, slapping, beating, shaking, burning, biting or throwing a child. It is different from what is considered reasonable discipline.
  - b) **Emotional abuse:** a pattern of behaviour that attacks a child's emotional development and sense of self-worth. It includes excessive, aggressive or unreasonable demands that place expectations on a child beyond his or her capacity. Examples include constantly criticizing, teasing, belittling, insulting, rejecting, ignoring or isolating the child.
  - c) **Sexual abuse:** any sexual exploitation of a child, whether consensual or not, by an adult or older child. Physical, psychological or emotional coercion is intrinsic to sexual abuse. It is against the law to touch a child for a sexual purpose; to encourage or force a child to touch another person in a sexual way; to encourage or force a child to participate in any sexual activity; or tell a child to touch him or herself for an adult's or older child's sexual purposes. Sexual abuse can take many forms: for example, sexual intercourse, exposing a child's private parts, indecent phone calls, fondling for sexual purposes, watching a child undress for sexual pleasure, allowing a child to look at, or perform in, pornographic pictures or videos; or to engage in prostitution.
  - d) **Spiritual abuse:** the manipulation and exploitation of others by the misuse of spiritual privilege, authority and power.<sup>9</sup>
- 2) **Child neglect:** the failure to meet a child's basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, sleep, medical attention, education, and protection from harm. Young children should never be left unattended.
- 3) **Harassment:** repeated subtle or overt action, particularly by a person in a position of authority, which causes the recipient to feel attacked, demeaned, intimidated or manipulated.
- 4) **Improper touching:** touching that creates feelings of violation, confusion, and isolation. It may include kissing a child, coaxing a child to give a kiss, extended hugging or tickling, touching a child in any area that would be covered by a swim suit, carrying older children or having them sit on an adult's lap.
- 5) **Improper discipline:** inappropriate and harmful attempts to control a child. Improper discipline includes yelling or screaming at children, threatening them or physically hurting them. By

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<sup>6</sup> See Appendix. The vision statement is also available in the church office and/or library.

<sup>7</sup> For more details, see the CFSA, especially section 72 (1) in:  
[http://www.elaws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/90c11\\_e.htm#P1828\\_142873](http://www.elaws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/90c11_e.htm#P1828_142873)

<sup>8</sup> The terms "children", "child", "youth", "young person", "young people" refer to any person under the age of eighteen.

<sup>9</sup> The definitions of abuse contained herein are based on those definitions published by The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex.

contrast, proper discipline involves establishing clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour and maintaining such behavioural expectations with firm and kind expressions of authority.

- 6) **Assault:** to cause bodily harm by inappropriately applying force to another person; to attempt or threaten to apply force; or, to accost or impede another person while openly carrying a weapon.

## Screening

ESMC assesses the responsibility of all leaders involved with each of its events involving young people and/or vulnerable adults. Depending on this responsibility assessment, various screening procedures are necessary. Any staff person or volunteer with power or authority over young people and/or vulnerable adults will be subject to the screening assessment and procedures to a degree that is appropriate with their interaction and involvement with children, youth, and vulnerable adults<sup>10</sup>. This screening procedure includes:

- a) A minimum six-month waiting period<sup>11</sup> before new attendees begin to work with children.
- b) Conduct background checks, by consulting a former pastor or supervisor, of new attendees who, following the waiting period, wish to work with young people or vulnerable adults.
- c) Record and file a summary of information received from the background checks.<sup>12</sup>
- d) Require all persons in a high responsibility position to sign a Volunteer Covenant<sup>13</sup> as well as complete and submit a valid police check (fee reimbursable by ESMC).
- e) Keep Volunteer Covenants, reference sheets, and police check reports on file indefinitely in the church office.
- f) Not allow any person with a child abuse conviction to serve in any capacity where s/he could be involved with young persons and/or vulnerable adults.

**High Responsibility** includes:

- Any event with an overnight component.
- Any event where personnel works alone with young persons and/or vulnerable adults.
- Any even where personnel would have an opportunity to be alone with young persons and/or vulnerable adults.
- Any staff persons or volunteers who are in a position of power and/or trust, such as pastors, elders, Sunday School teachers, youth group sponsors, and visitation team members.

**Low Responsibility** includes:

- Any event where young people and/or vulnerable adults are in groups with more than one adult/personnel at all times.
- Any event where there are at least 2 adults present in Sunday School classes or on a visitation team.
- Other positions within the congregation not included above.

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<sup>10</sup> Screening and implementation procedures are conducted by and at the discretion of ESMC's Church Ministry Council, or whoever is appointed and have authority to supervise a particular position.

<sup>11</sup> The minimum period is at the discretion of ESMC's Church Ministry Council.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix for the Form **Error! Reference source not found.**

<sup>13</sup> See Appendix form **Error! Reference source not found.**

## Implementation

To minimize the risk of harm coming to young people and/or vulnerable adults in the care of Erb Street Mennonite Church, ESMC's programs and personnel will abide by the guidelines outlined below:

### General Guidelines

- a) 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 activities involving young persons and vulnerable adults. For overnight activities, there will be two adults: one male and one female.
- b) Consent forms<sup>14</sup> wherein parents give written permission for their children or youth to participate in off-site ESMC group activities will be gathered and kept on file in the church office.
- c) During children's and youth activities at the church, only one entry door is to be unlocked.
- d) Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- e) Activities that could easily lead to allegations of abuse or harassment, such as unsupervised internet access, vehicle transportation by workers alone with unrelated youth, or improperly supervised sleepovers, are to be avoided.
- f) There will be at least two volunteers in the nursery when ESMC is providing childcare.
- g) A schedule of caregivers will be posted in the nursery.
- h) Children will be released from the nursery only to a parent or a known, prescribed caregiver.
- i) It is recommended that children in Senior Kindergarten or younger are accompanied by an adult if he/she needs to leave the classroom (i.e. washroom break). In case of washroom break, the adult remains outside the bathroom, and if the child requires assistance in bathroom, appropriate precautions need to be taken.
- j) When a person suspects abuse or harassment, s/he will follow procedures set out in Section VII of this document.

### Guidelines for Nurture & Healthy Relationships with young people, and vulnerable adults

Human warmth expressed through appropriate touch can foster a sense of acceptance, belonging and significance. We recognize our calling and responsibility to model healthy relationships with Jesus Christ and with all human beings. Healthy relationships have boundaries in which the safety and well being of young people, and vulnerable adults are ensured. Inappropriate touch can create feelings of violation, confusion and isolation that leave lasting scars. It is the responsibility of adults to maintain appropriate boundaries; this is *not* the responsibility of children or youth. The following are examples of ways in which adults can show warmth to vulnerable persons while protecting their own integrity.

- a) Make a point of showing affection in open places where others can see and share in the warmth. In determining whether the touching is of a sexual or inappropriate nature, ask yourself the question, "How would a reasonable observer interpret this touch?"
- b) Classrooms and meeting places should be managed to create a feeling of public space, yet be conducive to good teaching. Leave the windows in the room uncovered and the door standing open whenever possible.

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<sup>14</sup> See Appendix for the **Error! Reference source not found.**

- c) If you and a young person or vulnerable adult need to talk to each other in confidence, avoid isolating yourselves. Have another adult present or stay within view of the group. If you both *must* be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d) If the young person or vulnerable adult is hurting physically or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same gender as the young person/vulnerable adult is present in the room with you. Do not force the person to remove clothing for an examination.
- e) If a person in your care is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with his/her permission, show support by placing your arm around a shoulder and giving a gentle hug.
- f) Be cautious about any conversations that involve sex. Children may ask honest questions about sexuality and teenagers might seek advice. Listening, with respect for the child, is appropriate. When responding, be sensitive to the values and standards that are taught in the child's home and to a discussion that may cause conflict or confusion with those standards.
- g) When supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards. Ensure that congregational awareness and parental consent of the activity is clear. Under no circumstance shall less than two adults supervise an overnight event. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks. If sleeping space is to be shared, adults and children must have separate beds.
- h) Avoid situations in which you are alone with a child/youth/vulnerable adult changing clothing, such as swimsuits or sports clothes, in each other's presence.
- i) Always respect the integrity of the person(s) in your care. Allow the person(s) to back away from your well-intentioned affection. Some people, especially children, may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact.
- j) Use your common sense and good judgment to guide you in protecting the personal space and well being of the person(s) in your care.

## Premises<sup>15</sup>

Facilities at Erb Street Mennonite Church which discourage abuse include:

- Windows in all doors to classrooms, offices, and the nursery;
- Buzzer-controlled entry system
- Appropriately-designed washrooms;
- Adequate lighting inside and outside the church building;
- Church library and website displaying Safe Church Policy

## Training

Erb Street Mennonite Church will appoint a coordinator and reference group, which will:

- a) Ensure that a current copy of this policy is on the website, all congregants know about the policy, and provide ongoing education as needed.
- b) Train key members so they have a thorough understanding of their responsibility to maintain this policy<sup>16</sup>.
- c) Orient new teachers and volunteers about this policy.

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<sup>15</sup> Safe Church guidelines related to our church facilities are monitored by the Property and Facilities Committee

<sup>16</sup> Training procedures are conducted by and at the discretion of ESMC's Church Ministry Council, or whoever is appointed and have authority to supervise a particular position.

- d) Keep a copy of this policy in the church office, library and website for easy accessibility.
- e) Ensure that a summary of this policy is available to all volunteers of children/youth Sunday School and Vacation Bible Camp each year.<sup>17</sup>

## Responding

Suspicion of abuse must be taken seriously. If suspicion arises from conversation with a child, be sure to avoid intrusive or leading questions since such questioning could interfere with an investigation and/or cause undue stress. Ontario Law requires that anyone who suspects on reasonable grounds that a child is in need of protection must forthwith report the suspicion and information on which it is based to the local child protection agency (i.e. F&CS). ESMC further requires that if such suspicion involves personnel or programs under the auspices of ESMC, it shall also be reported to the lead pastor, coordinator and/or Reference Group that ESMC has put in place for the purpose of responding to such concerns.

### **Upon receiving a report, the lead pastor, coordinator and/or Reference Group will:**

- Follow procedures as listed in detail in *A Plan to Protect Our Children, Youth & Leaders*<sup>3</sup>.
- Ensure that an *Abuse Incident Report* form<sup>18</sup> has been completed.
- Ensure that statutory reporting obligations under Ontario law are met.
- Commit to assisting in the investigation and take guidance from the investigator as to when it is appropriate to suspend the alleged offender.
- Be mindful of not interfering with the investigation.
- Make every attempt to maintain confidentiality in accordance with Ontario law.
- Express ESMC's concern for the alleged offender and alleged victim.
- Co-ordinate care and support of all directly involved.
- Suspend the alleged offender from duties, pending outcome of the investigation.
- Refrain from admitting liability or making public statements to the media without obtaining formal legal counsel.
- Share with the congregation appropriate information determined by and at the discretion of the lead pastor, Safe Spaces coordinator, and/or Reference Group.
- Contact ESMC's insurer to satisfy the statutory conditions of our liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.
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## Photos, Video and Internet

All pictures and videos taken for church purposes will be used only in ESMC media (newsletter, media presentations in worship or other church settings, church website, etc.) No names will be connected to any pictures on the website. Pictures, slide presentations, and videos will be distributed, upon request, only to the families of people shown in media. These pictures and media presentations will be released to families with the notice that these pictures are for private use only and not for distribution.

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<sup>17</sup> See **Error! Reference source not found.** in the Appendix

<sup>18</sup> See **Error! Reference source not found.** form in the Appendix

For children, youth, and vulnerable adults, parents or guardians must give permission for photos and videos to be taken. Photo/video consent forms will be collected from parents/guardians and kept on file.<sup>19</sup> Permission will last for a two-year period at which time it must be renewed.

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<sup>19</sup> See **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.** in the Appendix  
Erb Street Mennonite Church – Safe Church Policy

## **Appendix: Erb Street Mennonite Church Vision Statement (2004)**

### **ROOTED, GROWING and BRANCHING**

Erb Street Mennonite Church is a welcoming and inclusive community of diverse persons each contributing uniquely to our common purpose of following Jesus Christ.

#### **ROOTED**

Called by God, renewed by Jesus Christ, and united and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we desire to be an active spiritual presence in the Region of Waterloo.

As part of the larger Christian Church we are a living expression of Anabaptist values - revealing God's love, and demonstrating acceptance, peace, humility and hope.

Together we discern and nurture our individual and collective journey of faith through prayer, music, worship, education and bible study.

#### **GROWING**

We create a place of refuge, support and guidance, so that all persons in our congregational community may find restoration and wholeness and be equipped to pursue God's calling for their individual lives.

We commit ourselves, with God's help, to continuous spiritual growth as individuals and as a congregation.

#### **BRANCHING**

Through service and in sharing God's word with our neighbours across the street and around the world, we reflect and testify to the good news of God's love, so that we may all know God's justice and healing.