

SAFE CHURCH POLICY:

A Plan to Protect Children, Youth and Adults

Listowel Mennonite Church

mandated by the congregation January, 2003

approved by church council May 1, 2003

implemented June 1, 2003

revision approved by church council November 6, 2008

Section I – STATEMENT OF POLICY

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to ensure that Listowel Mennonite Church (LMC) is a safe place for all people. The intent of the policies and procedures outlined herein is to protect children and youth from harm and abuse, adults who work with them from false allegations, and the church from unnecessary litigation.

Basis of this policy

The church has spiritual, moral, legal and societal obligations to ensure a safe environment for children and youth participating in church programs.

Spiritual and moral obligations are reflected in various scriptures¹. It is clear that God embraces children with love and places their nurture and care in our hands. As a congregation we accept this call, but recognizing the human capacity for evil, we also accept our responsibility to implement clear policies and procedures to minimize the risk of abusing those who are vulnerable.

There are also legal and societal obligations which demand that we protect children and youth. 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 faith and practices of LMC are also shaped by the following documents:

- ¢ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*²
- ¢ *Mennonite Vision Statement, Vision: Healing and Hope*³
- ¢ *Congregational Guidelines for Leaders in Youth and Children's Ministry, May, 2000*⁴.

Section II – DEFINITIONS

¹For example: "...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

²*Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, Herald Press, 1995; or, see Appendix 1 of *Congregational Guidelines for Leaders in Youth and Children's Ministry, May, 2000*.

³*Vision: Healing & Hope* 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.

⁴a document prepared by Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada., a copy of which is available in the church office and library

LMC 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)⁵, that abuse and neglect of children⁶ must be reported to civil authorities.

- a. **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 forms⁷:
 - i. **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.
 - ii. **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.
 - iii. **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.
- b. **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.
- c. **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.
- d. **Improper touching:** touching which creates feelings of violation, confusion, 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.
- e. **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 contrast, proper discipline involves establishing clear boundaries of acceptable behaviour and maintaining such behavioural expectations with firm and kind expressions of authority.
- f. **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.

⁵For more details, see the CFSA, especially section 72 (1), on the internet at

http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Statutes/English/90c11_e.htm#P1828_142873

⁶

The terms "children" or "child" refer to any person under the age of eighteen.

⁷The definitions which follow are based on those published by The Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex on their website,

http://www.caslonon.on.ca/protect_what.htm

Section III – SCREENING

LMC will:

- a. screen all children’s and youth ministry workers to a degree that is appropriate with their interaction with children⁸;
- b. require a minimum six-month waiting period before new attenders begin to work with children;
- c. do background checks, by consulting a former pastor or supervisor, of new attenders who, following the waiting period, wish to work with children or youth;
- d. record and file a summary of information received from the background checks⁹;
- e. require all persons in high and medium risk positions to sign a *Volunteer Registration Form*¹⁰ and the *Consent to Disclosure of Personal Information*¹¹, which gives permission for a police check;

High Risk Positions	Medium Risk Positions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. pastors b. elders c. youth group sponsors d. children's club leaders e. nursery helpers f. youth mentors g. Junior Church leaders h. teachers of children’s and youth Sunday School i. Vacation Bible School teachers and helpers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Sunday School superintendents b. Vacation Bible School directors c. Christian Education committee members d. music directors for children's programming e. mentoring program f. co-ordinators g. church secretary h. church custodian

Low Risk Positions: other positions within the congregation not included above

- f. keep *Volunteer Registration Forms*, reference check reports and police check reports on file indefinitely;
- g. not allow any person with a child abuse conviction to serve in any capacity where s/he could be involved with children or youth.

⁸ Screening is done by the Christian Education committee, pastor(s), elders, Gifts Discernment committee or whichever group has authority to appoint and supervise a particular position.

⁹see Appendix A

¹⁰see Appendix B

¹¹see Appendix C

Section IV – OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES

To minimize the risk of harm coming to children in the care of LMC, programs and personnel will abide by the guidelines outlined below.

General Guidelines

- a. LMC establish a Safe Church Policy Committee to implement and oversee all aspects of the policy. The SCP Committee consists of the Pastor, 2 secretarial administrators and one compliance administrator. The two secretarial administrators do all the photocopying, communicate with volunteers, oversee the background checks and maintain the secure files. The compliance administrator's role is to read the church bulletin and keep a watchful eye on all church activities with our SCP in mind.
- b. 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 kids' club, junior youth and youth activities.
- c. Consent forms¹² wherein parents give written permission for their children or youth to participate in off-site LMC group activities will be gathered and kept on file.
- d. During children's and youth activities at the church, only one entry door is to be unlocked.
- e. Sunday School superintendents shall circulate throughout the halls during Sunday School.
- f. Corporal punishment is prohibited.
- g. 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.
- h. Out-of-program or off-premises contact between children and workers is normally discouraged, recognizing, however, that the mentoring program is exempt from this and also recognizing that there may be situations where a parent requests or approves such contact.
- i. There will be at least two volunteers in the nursery when LMC is providing childcare.
- j. A sign-in/out sheet will be used in the nursery.
- k. Children will be released from the nursery only to a parent or a known, prescribed caregiver.
- l. When a person suspects abuse or harassment, s/he will follow procedures set out in Section VII of this document.

¹²see Appendix D

Guidelines for Healthy Relationships with Children and Youth

Human warmth expressed through appropriate touch can foster a sense of acceptance, belonging and significance. Inappropriate touch can create feelings of violation, confusion and isolation which 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 children 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.
- c. If you and a child need to talk to each other in confidence, avoid isolating yourselves. Have another adult present or stay within view of the group. If you and a child *must* be in a room by yourselves, leave the door open.
- d. If a child is hurting physically or feeling ill and needs to be examined, ensure that another person of the same gender as the child is present in the room with you. Do not force the child to remove clothing for an examination.
- e. If a child is sad and needs to be comforted, you may, with the child's 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. Within the context of our mentoring program, there are often situations where it is appropriate for an adult to be alone with a child. By allowing the child to participate in the mentoring program, the parent has already given written consent. Even so, in such cases, be absolutely sure that the child's parents are well aware of your plans for your time together.
- h. When supervising overnight group activities, observe extra safeguards. Ensure that congregational awareness and parental consent of the activity is clear. Under no circumstances shall an overnight event be supervised by fewer than two adults. Never allow only one adult to do bed checks. If sleeping space is to be shared, adults and children must have separate beds.
- i. Avoid situations in which you or a child may have to change clothing, such as swimsuits or sports clothes, in the other's presence.
- j. Always respect the integrity of the child. Allow the child to back away from your well-intentioned affection if s/he so wishes. Some children may feel fearful or distrustful of any physical contact. Use your common sense and good judgement to guide you in protecting the personal space and well-being of the children in your care.

Section V – PREMISES

Facilities at LMC which discourage abuse include:

- a. windows in all doors to classrooms, offices, and the nursery;
- b. a two-way glassed wall in the nursery;
- c. locked furnace rooms and supply closets;
- d. appropriately-designed washrooms;
- e. adequate lighting inside and outside the church building.

Section VI – TRAINING

LMC will:

- a. distribute copies of this policy to all households in the congregation;
- b. distribute copies of this policy to new members and attenders;
- c. introduce this policy at an initial workshop for all youth and adults of the congregation;
- d. train key members such as the Christian Education committee so they have a thorough understanding of their responsibility to maintain this policy;
- e. have the Christian Education committee conduct staff meetings at the beginning of each new Sunday School year to review this policy and to educate workers about the symptoms of abuse;
- f. keep a copy of this policy in the church office and library for easy accessibility;
- g. have other educational resource materials available in the church library.

Section VII – 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.

LMC further requires that if such suspicion involves personnel or programs under the auspices of LMC, it shall also be reported to the senior pastor and/or the Safe Church Policy Committee that LMC has put in place for the purpose of responding to such concerns.

Upon receiving a report, the pastor and/or the SCP Committee will:

- a. follow procedures as listed in detail in *Congregational Guidelines for Leaders in Youth and Children's Ministry, May, 2000*¹³;
- b. adhere to guiding principles of safety, accountability, truth, justice and restorative healing;
- c. ensure that an Abuse Incident Report form has been completed¹⁴;
- d. ensure that statutory reporting obligations are met;
- e. commit to assisting in the investigation;
- f. assure confidentiality for the benefit of both the alleged victim and the alleged offender;
- g. express LMC's concern to the complainant;
- h. co-ordinate care and support of all directly involved;
- i. suspend the alleged offender from duties, pending outcome of the investigation;
- j. refrain from admitting liability or making public statements to the media or from the pulpit without obtaining formal legal counsel;
- k. contact LMC's insurer to satisfy the statutory conditions of our liability policy and to avoid jeopardizing any available coverage response.

¹³a document prepared by Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada, a copy of which is available in the church office and library

¹⁴See Appendix E

APPENDIX A

Listowel Mennonite Church

CONFIDENTIAL

RECORD OF CONTACT WITH A REFERENCE OR CHURCH IDENTIFIED BY A CHILDREN'S OR YOUTH MINISTRY VOLUNTEER

Name of Applicant: _____

Reference or Church Contacted	Date of Contact	Person Contacting the Reference or Church	Method of Contact (telephone, letter, personal conversation)	Summary of Contact

APPENDIX B
VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION FORM
FOR MINISTRIES TO CHILDREN & YOUTH
Listowel Mennonite Church

INFORMATION RECEIVED WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

In our desire to reduce the risk of abuse within our church ministries, we believe this information is necessary to protect our children and to protect our volunteers. Thank you in advance for your understanding.

Personal Information

Full Name _____ Home Phone Number _____

Address _____ Business Phone _____

How long have you attended Listowel Mennonite Church? _____ Are you a member?

If you have attended LMC for less than five years, please provide the name, address, and phone number of your previous church(es) as well as the years you attended.

Present and Previous Experience with Youth and Children

(Please complete at least two of the three sections below. Use the reverse of this page if needed.)

1. List all previous church work involving children or youth. Please give name and address of church, pastor or supervisor, type of work and dates. Please use the reverse of this page if needed.

2. List all non-church work involving children or youth. Please give name and address of organization, supervisor, type of work and dates. Please use the reverse of this page if needed.

3. Name of another reference who is not a

relative _____

Relationship to you _____ Phone

Number _____

Volunteer's Statement

I hereby acknowledge that the information contained in this application for ministry is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give any information they may have regarding my character and fitness for children's or youth ministry and, except in the case of the conscious giving of false information, I release all such references from liability for any damage that may result from furnishing such evaluation to LMC.

I also acknowledge that I have read and I understand LMC's *Safe Church Policy: A Plan to Protect Children, Youth and Adults* and I agree to comply with the policies and procedures as outlined therein.

Volunteer's Name, printed

Signature of Volunteer

Date

APPENDIX D

BLANKET CONSENT FORM

As parent or guardian of _____

I give consent for him/her to participate in off-site youth group activities which are sponsored by Listowel Mennonite Church.

Signature of parent or guardian

Date

ONE-TIME CONSENT FORM

As parent or guardian of _____

I give consent for him/her to participate in the off-site activity sponsored by Listowel Mennonite Church to _____ on _____.

Signature of parent or guardian

Date

APPENDIX E

ABUSE INCIDENT REPORT

Date:

Time:

Location:

Details:

Other Persons Present:

Name of Person Making This Report:

Signature:

Date: