

# **Safe Church Policy**

Christian Reformed Church  
Of St. Albert

Revised February 2011

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## I. Introduction

The Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert (CRCSA) strives to be a place where, in the name of Jesus Christ, hope and wholeness may be found. Knowing that abuse, a prevalent and destructive evil in the world, breaks down hope and withholds wholeness, this church will not tolerate or ignore instances of abuse. Therefore, these policies and procedures are implemented for the protection of all concerned.

It is important to note that this policy requires church council and/or its pastor to report to the proper authorities without delay all cases alleging child abuse<sup>1</sup>, which includes either physical or sexual abuse. Persons entering into counselling relationships with the pastor must be made aware of this regulation. Also, they must understand that church council requires its staff to report on all of these cases.

The Safe Church Committee, comprising at a minimum of two members of the congregation as selected by church council, will be accountable to church council and responsible for administrative oversight of this policy, with office support from the administrative assistant. Any new volunteer or staff (i.e. anyone who has not already been screened in accordance with the provisions of this policy) is required to read and sign the attached Declaration to this policy.

## II. Abuse Defined

CRCSA agrees with Synod's definition of the three recognized types of abuse:

- a) **Physical Abuse** is any non-accidental act that violates the dignity and the image of God in another person, inflicting dehumanization, pain, or injury. It can also include physical neglect, which means not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care.
- b) **Emotional Abuse** is any attempt to control another person's life through words, threats, fears, and/or deprivation in such a way that it impairs a person's God-given sense of self-worth.
- c) **Sexual Abuse** is any sexual experience forced on one person by another which may or may not involve physical contact between people. Sexual abuse also includes any role-inappropriate sexual encounter, even if consensual at the time (e.g. between parent & child, teacher & student or pastor & church member during counselling).

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<sup>1</sup> In the Province of Alberta, the reporting of child abuse to Child Welfare is required by law.

### III. General Prevention Policies

*Definition* – In this policy, the term “volunteer” refers to church attendees (including members and non-members) who are in a position that involves working with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

- a) A general over-riding principle for the protection of all parties is that any volunteer or staff member should not be in a situation where he/she is alone with a child, youth, or vulnerable adult. The presence of a third party such as another volunteer or a staff member should be arranged in all circumstances as a key prevention strategy and for protection against an allegation of abuse.
- b) All volunteers, staff, and council members will be screened by reading this policy and signing the *Declaration of Agreement and Understanding of Policy*, to be reviewed with them in confidence by the Safe Church Committee of the CRCSA. Staff includes people who receive remuneration for serving in the CRCSA.
- c) New church members or attendees will not be permitted to serve in a volunteer position for a minimum period of 6 months. New volunteers will be interviewed by the Safe Church Committee. The Committee will also conduct two reference checks in accordance with paragraph (d) below.
- d) The Declaration must be signed by all volunteers involved in supervision or instruction within the CRCSA. All volunteers and staff 18 years of age and older are also required to provide a current police criminal background check. All volunteers are required to provide two references.
- e) Any information provided by volunteers, including the police criminal background check, will be placed in a secure, locked file and be accessible only to the Committee overseeing this policy. Screening documents will be retained indefinitely.
- f) Screening for an ongoing volunteer (volunteering without interruption) is required every three calendar years. He/she is not required to go through the screening process each year.
- g) All volunteers and staff will agree to adhere to the prevention policies laid out in this document. Those who refuse to observe these policies, or who violate any of them may be required to relinquish his or her responsibility in the program.
- h) Volunteers who have a previous criminal history that involves crimes of a violent or sexual nature, or that involve children, will not be allowed to volunteer with children, youth, or vulnerable adults.

- i) All volunteers and staff are expected to attend annual refresher training on abuse and its prevention, or be required to read the information on abuse within this Policy. The training session will be normally take place each September or as close to the month of September as possible, and will be organized by the Safe Church Committee.
- j) All volunteers and staff will agree to abide by the discipline policy set forth by CRCSA, as outlined on page 6 of this document.
- k) Volunteers and staff will report any suspicion of abuse to their immediate supervisor/leader, unless that person is the suspected abuser, in which case the situation should be reported directly to a member of church council.
- l) The Safe Church Committee will review this policy at a minimum every 3 years and recommend any changes to church council for adoption.

#### **IV. Procedure to Follow in Response to an Allegation of Abuse**

Should an allegation arise, the following procedure should be followed:

- a) Whoever becomes aware of an allegation must first notify, without delay, the proper civil authorities (e.g.: child abuse must be reported to Child Welfare) and at a minimum one member of church council . A written report providing all relevant details will be required so as to provide an accurate account of the incident(s).
- b) If deemed necessary, a spokesperson for media and/or legal purposes will be appointed by church council. All actions of church council will respect any actions being taken or contemplated by civil authorities.
- c) Using this document's guidelines, and with prayerful discretion, church council will decide how to respond to the allegation, and whether or not to involve the *Classic Abuse Response Team* (CART).
- d) Church council will work with CART in dealing with the case. The provisions of the Synodical Guidelines of the Christian Reformed Church, as well as the Church Order, will be followed.
- e) In the case of an allegation against a church leader, or volunteer, suspension of the person from his or her role and responsibility is immediately required. In the case of an allegation against an office-bearer, Church Order will be followed. The

implicated volunteer or staff member will not engage in any ministry of the church until the matter is resolved. CART will work with church council to provide pastoral care of the alleged victim and abuser, as well as their respective families.

- f) Every effort will be made to ensure that both parties are granted a full, fair, prompt, and confidential hearing.
- g) Procedures and guidelines for handling allegations against a church leader – both when the abuse victim is an adult and when the abuse victim is a child – are clearly set out in the agenda for Synod 1997, pages 199-206.
- h) In cases of suspected or alleged abuse, church council will give careful and immediate consideration to seeking legal advice, and will report the incident to the CRCSA's insurance company.

## **V. Discipline Policy for Volunteers / Staff**

- a) Corporal punishment (e.g.: slapping, hitting, pushing, and the like) is not permitted.
- b) Verbal and emotional abuse (e.g.: yelling, threatening, name-calling, etc.) are not acceptable means of discipline, and as such are not permitted.
- c) Volunteers and staff should discourage misbehaviour through corrective measures such as:
  - a. distracting the child with constructive activities.
  - b. reminding the child about appropriate conduct.
  - c. "time-outs" which involve isolating the child from others, but only if another volunteer is available to assist.
- d) "Time-outs" should not last longer (in minutes) than the age of the child. (e.g.: time-out for a 3-year-old should not exceed 3 minutes)
- e) Volunteers and staff should be encouraged to seek help from program supervisors if the approaches listed above do not work.
- f) Parents or guardians are to be informed whenever a child misbehaves repeatedly and does not respond to appropriate correction, as listed above.
- g) In some cases, parents and/or aides may be required to attend classes and activities to help deal with misbehaviour.

- h) When misbehaviour becomes destructive to the program being offered or to the other participants, the child may be removed from the program for a defined period of time.
- i) Appropriate forms of discipline should be reviewed by volunteers and staff on an ongoing basis.

## **VI. Transportation Guidelines**

When transporting children, youth, or vulnerable adults to and from church meetings or events, the following needs to be adhered to:

- a) Volunteers must possess a valid driver's license and insurance.
- b) Volunteers must adhere to schedules regarding arrival and departure times and inform parents of any necessary changes. Younger children kept waiting for rides can become quite anxious. Parents appreciate their children coming home on time.
- c) Volunteers must drive safely and with due care and caution, adhere to posted speed limit signs and road conditions, and ensure that the passenger arrives safely at the destination.
- d) Volunteers must travel a direct route from home to event. Errands of a personal nature should be done on personal time.
- e) Volunteers should avoid situations in which they are alone in their vehicle for a prolonged time with their passenger.

## **VII. Policies and Procedures for Abuse Prevention during Church Activities**

### ***A. Abuse Prevention Policies for Nursery Attendants:***

- a) At least two responsible attendants must be present in the nursery whenever it is in use. At least one of these people must be 18 years of age or older. Only one adult member of a family may serve in the nursery at any given time.
- b) Responsible minors are permitted to volunteer as attendants in the nursery. Their role is to assist the adult attendant by playing with children, helping with set up and clean-up of toys, and other tasks as may be required under the direction of the adult attendant.
- c) Children may only be removed from the nursery for medical or other such compelling reasons. In the case of illness or injury, a parent or guardian must be notified immediately.
- d) The door to the crib area shall remain open whenever a caregiver is inside.
- e) Children must be signed into the nursery each time. Specific instructions (e.g. bathroom/diapering needs) for the attendants must be clearly indicated on the sign-in sheet, in the space provided.
- f) If a child needs assistance in the bathroom, the nursery attendant must assist the child with the bathroom door ajar. Diapering will take place in the nursery room in the presence of another attendant.
- g) The Church Discipline Policy (Part V), on page 6 of this document, applies.

### ***B. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Teachers:***

- a) Children will be encouraged to use the bathroom before class begins. Children who need assistance will be aided with the bathroom door ajar.
- b) Children shall not leave the classroom during class except for illness, bathroom needs, or other compelling reason (e.g. injury). In the case of illness or injury, the child's parents/guardians shall be notified immediately.
- c) The Discipline Policy (Part V), on page 6 of this document, will apply to all Sunday School/Story time programs.

- d) Responsible minors are permitted to volunteer as Sunday school teachers and assistants. Their role is to assist adult teachers by helping children with crafts, stories, and other tasks as may be required. In some cases, and only at the discretion of the Sunday School Supervisor, minors will be responsible for the Sunday school class and the policies and procedures set out in this document apply. Only one responsible adult of a family (not couples) will be permitted to teach a given Sunday school class at a given time. Parents may be assisted by their children in a classroom setting.
- e) Church education classes will be conducted according to the following: “two-adult rule”, and/or “open door policy”, and/or windows in all classrooms, and/or designated monitors circulating periodically from room to room, for surveillance and to protect workers against false allegations.
- f) Parental sign-in/sign-out is required for all classes involving children younger than grade 1.

### ***C. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Leaders of Church Clubs (e.g. Friendship Club; GEMS, etc)***

- a) Leaders will not tolerate potentially abusive behaviour (e.g.: bullying, name-calling, put-downs, excessive tickling, and the like) among club members.
- b) Physical affection by leaders as expressions of encouragement and support will be limited to brief hugs, light pats on the back, shoulder or forearm, or clasping another’s hand. Overt expressions of affection, such as prolonged “bear hugs,” are deemed inappropriate. The right to refuse any physical expressions of affection will be respected by all participants.
- c) Activities will be cancelled in the event that adequate adult supervision is not available.
- d) For overnight/out-of-town trips, no less than two responsible adults (not from the same family) shall accompany the group, and a parental/guardian consent form will be required.
- e) A leader should not be left alone in a private place with a club member. When it is necessary for leaders to meet privately with members, such meetings should occur in a public place within view of other people.
- f) If medical attention is required, a parent/guardian will be notified immediately, and a minimum of one leader and another responsible individual will together attend to the member.

- g) In some cases responsible minors may assist adult leaders, (including children of the adult leaders). They are the responsibility of, and come under the direction of, the adult leaders.
- h) The Church Discipline Policy (Part V), on page 6 of this document, will apply.
- i) Transportation Guidelines (Part VI), on page 7 of this document, will be observed.

#### ***D. Abuse Prevention Policies and Procedures for Youth Group Leaders***

- a) Youth group leaders must be responsible adults. At least two youth group leaders should supervise each youth group function.
- b) A leader should not be left alone in a private place with a club member. When it is necessary for leaders to meet privately with members, such meetings should occur in a public place within view of other people.
- c) Dating and romantic relationships between youth group leaders and youth group members or their friends will not be tolerated. Youth group leaders should not give gifts of a romantic, personal nature to members of the group.
- d) Appropriate displays of affection and encouragement between leaders and members of the youth group should be limited to brief hugs, light pats to the shoulder, and the like, in public places only. Overt displays of affection, such as prolonged “bear hugs”, are deemed inappropriate. A participant’s right to refuse any form of physical affection will be respected.
- e) Abusive behaviour (e.g.: verbal abuse, put-downs, name-calling, pushing, and bullying) among members of the youth group will not be tolerated.
- f) Youth group leaders will consider offering an event each year dealing with the subject of abuse as it relates to young people. Suggested topics could include dating violence, signs of abuse, prevention of abuse, and so on.
- g) If medical attention is required, every effort will be made to ensure that a parent/guardian is notified immediately, and a minimum of one leader and another responsible individual will together attend to the youth group member.
- h) Leaders must be satisfied that parental consent has been given for youth attending any sponsored event. Written consent will be required for any overnight activities/events.

- i) The Church Discipline Policy (Part V), on page 6 of this document, will apply.
- j) Transportation Guidelines (Part VI), on page 7 of this document, will be observed.

## **VIII. Consequences of Failing to Follow Policies and Procedures set out in the Safe Church Policy**

Should church members become concerned that those involved in ministry leadership are failing to follow provisions of the Safe Church Policy, they are asked to bring those concerns to the person supervising that ministry, or to the Safe Church Committee, or to a member of church council. A first violation of the policy may be grounds for removal from the ministry position. A repeated violation will ordinarily result in removal from the position. Should the supervisor of the ministry be the subject of the concern, the issue should be brought directly to the Safe Church Committee or church council.

In all cases where an allegation is made of any violation under the sections of this policy, church council will ensure the opportunity for a full, fair, prompt and confidential hearing. (Note that the procedures to be followed in the event of an actual allegation of abuse against volunteers or church leaders are dealt with under Section IV of this policy).

## IX. Declaration of Agreement and Understanding of Policy

I have carefully read the Safe Church Policy of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert dated February 2011 and know the contents thereof. By voluntarily signing this declaration, which is a legally binding agreement, I agree to abide by the aforementioned policy's obligations and conditions.

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I understand that my name will be submitted to Council of the Christian Reformed Church of St. Albert for purposes of affirming my character and fitness for ministry. I also consent to having a police criminal background check done.

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Applicant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please Print*

**Applicant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Birth date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Male:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Female:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*MMM DD, YYYY*

**Phone number:** ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_ **Alternate:** ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) \_\_\_\_\_

**Witness' Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Please Print*

### References

1. \_\_\_\_\_ **Contact:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name Phone and Email*

2. \_\_\_\_\_ **Contact:** \_\_\_\_\_  
*Name Phone and Email*

### *Church Use Only*

**Reviewed By:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NOT Approved:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Explanation:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_