



**GOOD NEWS CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

**SAFE CHURCH POLICY**

*Adopted by Council - May 2004  
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## Introduction

### Biblical and Theological Perspective

Each time a child is baptized we are reminded of these words of Jesus Christ:

“Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” (Mark 10:14) As the congregation of Good News Christian Reformed Church we respond to the following question: “Do you, the people of the Lord, promise to receive these children in love, pray for them, help instruct them in the faith, and encourage and sustain them in the fellowship of believers?” by answering: “We do, God helping us.” (Form for Baptism of Children)

Abuse... it’s a sensitive issue. An emotional issue. It’s an issue that we would rather not think about, or at least not believe that we would have to face in a Christian organization. Unfortunately, we must. Society—even the church—has become tainted by the presence of child abuse and the abuse of power involving adult parishioners. Most of us have heard stories or experienced first-hand what happens to a congregation when abuse of any kind is discovered in the church.

Worse, children’s lives have been severely and permanently damaged as a result of abuse.

That reason alone compels us to be on guard at all times, working to prevent child abuse before it occurs, and to respond to it properly if it does.” (Child Abuse Handbook, the Calvinist Cadet Corps) Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness and provide insights and tools for the prevention of and response to abuse for volunteers, staff and leaders in the church. The necessary procedures for reporting are also included.

## Theological Affirmations

1. God creates persons in the Divine image, male and female. (Genesis 1:26, 27)
2. Women and men are equal in the sight of God. (Galatians 3:28)
3. The human body is good (1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19, 2 Corinthians 6:16), and human sexuality is an integral part of our humanity. It is profoundly personal. Its physical, emotional and spiritual expression in relation to another ought to be based on a loving commitment and accountability to both God and the other.
4. Human sexuality is also social and can become the basis for oppression and injustice, violating the intention of God's loving order. (cf. 1 Corinthians 5)
5. God calls persons to wholeness through Jesus Christ and to participation in the Body of Christ, the community of faith whose quality is redemptive love. (cf. 1 John)

In light of the above, Good News CRC publicly affirms the following:

Good News Church seeks to live the new life in Christ. It is our hope that our church community will be a place of God's presence in the world. Therefore, we strive to create in our church an environment that nurtures each person's dignity and safety so that everyone can grow and mature as the Creator intended. We acknowledge, however, that we live in a broken world, and that one of the signs of that brokenness is the violation of boundaries for healthy relationships. When sin of this nature occurs, appropriate action is required. We must strive to achieve justice, protect victims, promote the healing of those who have been abused, and work towards the repentance and healing of the abuser.

## Definitions of Abuse

In order to help us determine the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships, the following definitions are given.

**Physical Abuse:** Any non-accidental human act that results in physical pain or injury to a child - whether or not it leaves a cut or wound, or a mark or a bruise. Physically abusive behaviour ranges from slapping, pushing, shoving, punching, kicking, and biting to more severe forms like choking, severe spanking, beating, hitting with an object, burning, stabbing and shooting. In other words, physical abuse is any intentional means of inflicting pain or injury to another person. It is sometimes a single event, but can also be a chronic pattern of behaviour.

**Physical Neglect:** Not doing what one is supposed to be doing to meet the physical needs of someone in his or her care. Neglect interferes with or prevents a child's normal development.

**Sexual Abuse:** The exploitation of a child or any sexual intimacy forced on a child for the sexual stimulation or gratification of another person. Child sexual abuse can refer to taking advantage of a child who is not capable of understanding sexual acts or is not capable of resisting coercion such as threats or offers of gifts. Sexual abuse may or may not involve physical contact. Examples of non-physical sexual abuse include people exposing themselves, displaying pornographic material, photographing a child for pornographic materials, obscene telephone calls, "peeping Toms," and requests to engage in sexual activity (where no physical contact occurs). Examples of sexual abuse involving physical contact, include fondling of body parts such as breasts, crotch, buttocks, or sexual organs; intercourse; oral and anal sex.

**Emotional Abuse:** Attempting to control a child's life through words, threats, and fear; destroying a child's self-worth through harassment, threats, and deprivation. Emotional abuse weakens a child's mental and physical ability to resist the abuse, cuts off his or her contacts with others, and causes a gradual loss of self-esteem - all of which reinforce a sense of helplessness and dependence on the abuser.

**Spiritual Abuse:** The mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support, or greater spiritual empowerment with the result of weakening, undermining or decreasing that person's spiritual empowerment. The individual is left bearing a weight of guilt, judgement or condemnation and confusion about their worth and standing as a Christian.

## Our Response Update

Good News Christian Reformed Church views abuse of any kind as a sin that requires responsible and immediate action. Both the church and the province of Ontario recognize every person's right to an abuse free environment. It is *law* in our province that anyone who suspects abuse involving *children up to age 16*, must report this suspicion immediately to the Children's Aid Society. Church members should not confront or talk to the suspected abuser themselves about the allegation because only a Children's Aid worker or the police may do this investigating. Good News Church members and leaders will comply with this law.

Should the abuse involve adults, or abusive events in the past where victims are now adults, suspicions and allegations of abuse should be dealt with fairly and in accordance with established guidelines. (See pages 21-23.)

Any allegation of abuse should be taken seriously and be brought confidentially to the church's Safe Church Team. Church members or victims should not confront or talk to a suspect themselves about the allegations. If the allegation of abuse is against a person in a position of trust and authority, the church council shall deal with that person according to the guidelines established by the Synods of '94 and '95. These guidelines require that the accused be suspended from the position of trust or authority without prejudice pending a hearing.

Known abusers should not be allowed to assume, or remain in positions of trust and authority in the church. Any member who is aware of such a person in such a position must take steps to assure the safety of others by informing the Safe Church Team.

Because abuse has such harmful and long lasting effects, Good News Church is committed to ongoing education in this area. Church council and leaders shall participate in educational presentations which will make them aware of the issues of abuse, including signs and symptoms. ([See Appendix A](#))

Although sin cannot be legislated out of existence, we can work together to create a safe and caring environment. Through teaching, modelling, and accountability procedures, we seek to be an expression of God's grace and His coming kingdom in the area of human relationships in a healing community seeking freedom from abuse.

## General Prevention Policies

**Volunteers** are individuals ages 18+ who serve in a child or youth program and/or who have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.

**Staff** are those individuals paid by the church to serve in a child or youth program and/or have direct contact with minors in their care or supervision.

**Children, youth, or minors** are individuals *under* sixteen years of age.

**Helpers** are individuals under 18 years of age who assist in Children's Programs. The age of helpers is defined within the guidelines of each separate program.

The following policies are for the prevention of abuse and the creation of a healthy environment.

1. **Discipline Policy:** Good News CRC has a Discipline Policy for volunteers/staff who work with youth. Volunteers/staff must agree to abide by the Discipline Policy.
2. **Risk Prevention Policy:** Good News CRC has a Risk Prevention Policy. These policies are for the specific child and youth programs - Nursery, Children's Worship and Sunday School, VBS, GEMS and Cadets, and Youth Group.
  - **Two-Person Rule** – Two volunteers (ages 18+) should be present for all programs involving youth. The two-person rule is preferred for all programs but not always feasible. Where the two-person rule is not in effect the establishment of hall monitors would be a necessity.
  - **Transportation of Children/Youth** - It would be ideal to have two adults in a vehicle when transporting children, however this is not always feasible or practical. Leaders need to be cautious and use common sense.
  - **Hall Monitors** - Hall monitors must be 18+ and agree to comply with screening policies as outlined in the policy. Currently Good News Church has Council Members fulfil this role.

**Duties include:**

- Ensuring that door stoppers are in place in the bathrooms so that those doors remain open during the service.
- Monitoring the building and the programs occurring
- Assisting children who need to leave the classroom.
- Ensuring the younger children requiring assistance in the bathroom use the nursery washroom.
- At the start of each service ensuring that two attendants are present in the nursery (two volunteers (18+) OR one volunteer 18+ and one helper (14-17)).
- Checking the parking lot periodically, welcoming latecomers, being available to assist those who leave the service.

The presence of hall monitors allows for the occasional one-to-one contacts between volunteers and children, as monitors are there to observe at a distance.

3. **Screening Policy:** Good News CRC has screening procedures for volunteers and staff. All volunteers and staff must agree to comply with Good News CRC's Safe Church Policies. A volunteer or staff person who refuses to follow prevention policies or who violates policies may be required to relinquish his or her responsibility in a child or youth program.
4. **Education Policy:** Supervisors of any program serving minors, and where possible, other volunteers and staff, will attend educational presentations on such topics as: the signs and symptoms of child abuse, awareness of abuse, reporting suspected child abuse, and the dynamics of abuse.
5. **Reporting Policy:** All staff, leaders, teachers and others in positions representing Good News CRC are required to report any suspected or alleged incidence of abuse to the Children's Aid Society and the Safe Church Team.

## **Policies for Youth Programs**

### **A. Nursery Program**

1. Nursery is for children ages 4 and below.
2. The nursery will be staffed by at least TWO attendants – either two volunteers (age 18+); or one volunteer (age 18+) and one helper (age 14 – 17). When two adult volunteers (age 18+) are not present, a hall monitor will be established.
3. Helpers (ages 14 – 17) may volunteer for service, provided that one volunteer (age 18+) is present and the hall monitor is in place. Helpers may not care for child(ren) without adult supervision.
4. Attendants may take children from the nursery only for good reason, such as in the case of illness. Any significant medical problem will be reported immediately to the child's parent(s). For children who do not require assistance in the bathroom, the attendant must remain outside the bathroom.
5. Adult attendants (ages 18 +) will assist children with washroom needs. Children unable to use main washroom unassisted will use the nursery washroom.
6. Changing of infants will be done in view of another attendant. Windows in washroom door are a necessity and should not be obstructed in any way (posters etc.).

7. Only one adult member of a family will serve in the nursery at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) will not serve in the same nursery room at the same time.
8. Only parents/guardians may pick up children from the nursery.
9. All Prevention Policies apply to the nursery program.

## **B. Children's Worship and Church School**

1. Sunday School is for children ages 4 to grade 5.
2. Only one adult member of a family will serve in a classroom at a given time. A couple (husband and wife) will not serve together in children's worship or in church school in the same classroom.
3. Whenever children's worship or church school is in session two adult volunteers/staff will be present. If this is not possible, a hall monitor will be in place. Helpers (recommended age 12+) may assist in the church school program and are not considered a replacement for an adult volunteer.
4. Only adults (ages 18+) may assist children with bathroom needs. Children requiring assistance must use the nursery washroom (possibly three and four year olds). Children who are able to use the washroom unassisted should use main washrooms. A hall monitor is available to supervise children in the hallway.
5. Children will be encouraged to use bathroom facilities before and after class.
6. Children should not leave the worship centre or classroom except for illness, bathroom needs, or other compelling reason.
7. Whenever children's worship or church school is in session, the worship Centre or classroom door should allow for an unobstructed view of the room.
8. While the appropriate display of affection between leader and child is an important part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Examples of appropriate displays of affection are a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. A leader's or a child's right to refuse any of these will be respected.
9. All Prevention Policies apply to children's worship and church school programs

## **C. Vacation Bible School**

1. All VBS classes and activities will be conducted with at least two adult volunteers/staff. When this is not possible, a hall monitor will be established. Only one member of a family will serve in a classroom at a given time

2. Volunteers/staff will not meet alone with a child without another adult or leader nearby to observe.
3. Helpers (recommended ages 12+) may volunteer to assist provided two adult volunteers (18+) are present.
4. Children will not leave their classroom except for illness, to use the bathroom, or other compelling reason.
5. Whenever VBS is in session, the classroom door should allow for unobstructed view of the room.
6. Classrooms held in off-site facilities such as Eden Homes, or the Christian schools will adhere to the same safety considerations as classrooms in the church building. Children will not meet without adequate supervision.
7. Church volunteers or staff transporting a child in a vehicle must have written parental permission to do so. A form will be signed prior to the program beginning (Example: See [Appendix J](#)).
8. All Prevention Policies apply to the VBS programs.

#### **D. GEMS and Cadets**

1. Counsellors will provide adequate supervision of the counselees. Each Cadet and GEM function will be supervised by at least two adult volunteers/staff (18+). In a classroom setting, if two adults are not present, a hall monitor will be established.
2. Helpers must be at least four years older than the oldest Cadet or GEM and may volunteer provided two adults (ages 18+) are present.
3. Counsellors and counselees may meet for one-on-one contacts. Such meetings will occur in a public place. (A Public place being somewhere where they can be easily observed - door ajar or in a main area.) One-on-one contacts should not be a consistent practice. For longer contacts, whenever possible, parents should be notified. If it is not in the best interests of the child to notify the parents, the supervisor should be notified.
4. If a child needs significant medical attention, the parent(s) will be notified immediately.
5. Cadets or GEMS should not arrive more than ten minutes before the start of the class, nor

should they stay longer than ten minutes after the class. This point should be stressed to parents as their responsibility.

6. Churches that plan Cadet and GEM activities away from the church facility, out of town, or overnight will conduct them in general compliance with the aforementioned policies. Parents must give written consent for the youth to participate in these activities. Forms to be signed at the beginning of each year. (Example: See [Appendix I](#))
7. Church volunteers or staff transporting a child in a vehicle must have written parental permission to do so. A form will be signed prior to the program beginning (Example: See [Appendix J](#)).
8. While the appropriate display of affection between counsellors and their counsees is an important part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Examples of appropriate displays of affection are a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp, or a light touch to the forearm. A counsellor's or counselee's right to refuse any of these will be respected.
9. All Prevention Policies apply to the GEMS and Cadet programs.

#### **E. Youth Group** (serves grade 9-12)

1. Each Youth Group function will be properly supervised. At least two adult volunteers/staff (ages 18+) will be present. In a classroom setting where two adults are not present, a hall monitor will be established.
2. Youth Group leaders will be at least four years older than the oldest program participant.
3. Each year youth group leaders will sponsor a class about abuse for members of the youth group. Topics for this class might include date violence, awareness of the signs of abuse, a teenager's response to a teenage victim or abuser, or prevention of abuse.
4. Youth group leaders may meet one-on-one. Any such meeting should occur in public (example: door ajar or in a main area). This should not be a consistent practice. For longer contacts, whenever possible, parents should be notified. If not in the best interests of the child to notify the parents, supervisors should be notified.
5. Regardless of the relative ages, it is never appropriate for a youth group leader and a youth group member to date each other.
6. In the context of group activities, youth group leaders will provide supervision of the youth in their care. Youth group leaders will not hold a youth group function without appropriate or

sufficient supervision. Youth group functions will not be under the supervision of only one youth group leader. These guidelines also apply to activities away from the church site.

7. Parents must give written consent for youth to participate in youth group activities. Forms to be signed at the beginning of each season (see [Appendix I](#)).
8. Church volunteers or staff transporting a child in a vehicle must have written parental permission to do so. A form will be signed prior to the program beginning (Example: See [Appendix J](#)).
9. While the appropriate display of affection is often part of conveying support and encouragement to one another, such displays can be misinterpreted. Therefore, displays of affection between a youth leader and a youth group member ought to be limited to such actions as a brief hug, an arm around the shoulder, an open-hand pat on the back, a handclasp or handshake, or a light touch to the forearm. Restrict these displays to a public area. A youth group leader's or member's right to refuse such a display of affection will be respected.
10. No persistent gift giving, phone calls, or letters of a personal nature will be directed to a youth group member by a youth group leader, or directed to a youth group leader by a youth group member.
11. All Prevention Policies apply to the youth group program.

## Discipline Policy

As adults, it is important that we model behaviour that is Christ-like. By our example we can teach children and youth what is acceptable behaviour and which behaviours do not show respect for our classmates and neighbours. An adult can stop unacceptable behaviour by intervening with a constructive form of discipline to the child/youth. The following Discipline Policy will reduce the incidence of minors being subjected to physical and verbal abuse, and will reduce the risk of volunteers/staff being accused of being abusive. It provides clear guidelines about how to administer discipline in church-sponsored child and youth programs.

1. Corporal punishment is not permitted. Corporal punishment includes, but is not limited to, slapping, hitting, pushing and touching in an aggressive manner.
2. Abusive verbal discipline is not permitted. Abusive verbal discipline includes, but is not limited to, yelling, hurling insults, verbally embarrassing a child and threatening a child expressly or by implication.
3. Parent(s) are to be informed and involved whenever a child/youth misbehaves beyond minor correction or if a pattern of misbehaviour increases.
4. Concerns about a child's behaviour or the appropriate response to a child's behaviour should be reported to the program supervisor.
5. An aide or a parent should be involved weekly in classrooms where misbehaviour is an ongoing problem.
6. Expectations of children's/youth's behaviour must reflect their age and level of comprehension. Similarly, discipline must reflect their age and level of comprehension. i.e. distract the child/youth with another activity, have the child/youth sit with one of the attendants, consider seating of children and who they are sitting beside.
7. Children are to be reminded of the kind of behaviour that is acceptable for the setting. Older children and youth may benefit from having these expectations in written form.
8. Appropriate forms of discipline are to be reviewed with volunteers/staff before church-sponsored programs begin a new season. Then periodic reminders are to be given as needed.

## Screening Policy

- **Volunteers:** To be considered for any volunteer position in the church, a person should have been a participant of the church for at least 6 months. Leaders of programs will discuss with potential volunteers the job responsibilities and suitability of individuals for positions. Those wishing to serve in a volunteer position in the church will be asked to fill in the *Code of Ethics* (See [Appendix F](#)) and will be required to have a Vulnerable Sector Check completed. This will allow the Safe Church Team to screen out any individual who may not be appropriate for involvement with youth. This would include individuals who have been convicted of abuse or assault or any crime against a minor. Any concerns the Safe Church Team has with information gathered from volunteer profiles and Vulnerable Sector Check will be brought by the Safe Church Team to Executive Council.
- **Staff Positions:** Those seeking a paid position in the church will be required to have a personal interview, and provide three references. The interview will take place by individuals appointed by church administration. The Safe Church Team will provide input to ensure questions regarding children/youth are included in the interview and in the reference process (see [Appendix H](#) as a reference). In addition, all paid staff will have a Vulnerable Sector Check after the first two screening steps are completed and will be required to sign the *Code of Ethics* ([Appendix F](#)). It is important that there is written documentation outlining that this procedure has been followed.
- **Personnel Files:** All information gathered from this screening process will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the church office with access limited to individuals of the Safe Church Team.

## Education Policy

- The Safe Church Team will assume overall responsibility for the education of the entire congregation in matters of abuse prevention and safety. The Safe Church will work with the Program Supervisors in planning specifics of this education.
- Education will be for children 4 years and older, youth, and all volunteers for children and youth.
- The entire congregation will be given opportunities to learn about abuse and abuse prevention. This includes the CRC designated Safe Church Sunday.
- Church council and leaders shall participate in educational presentations which will make them aware of the issues of abuse, including signs and symptoms.

## Social Media

Social media is a reality in today's society. The instantaneous ability to communicate electronically has significantly infiltrated our lives today and how we communicate. It is essential for the church to engage in this area and ensure we do so with integrity.

'Risk Management and Christian Ministry do go together. Managing social media risks responsibly is about building a more effective ministry, one that enables leaders, ministers and volunteers to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by electronic communication. Managing risk is not about saying "no" to the ministry opportunities offered by social media; it's about saying "yes", responsibly and wisely.' <sup>1</sup>

1. Robertson Hall Insurance, The Advantage, September 2012, edition 1 page 4

Definitions for the purpose of understanding following context:

**Normal:** Activity that happens on a regular basis is typical.

**Pattern:** A repeated Occurrence happening more than two times.

**One-Off:** Something done, or happening only once, not as part of a regular sequence.

**Closed Group:** It is known who is being communicated to. The communication involves at least two ministry leaders. The groups at least 3 people or more.

**Internal:** Communication or viewing remains within the Good News Church building.

### A. Onsite Digital Media Devices

All onsite digital media devices e.g. computers, WIFI, are controlled with pass codes. Access is limited to staff and ministry leaders for the purpose of advancing Good News Church ministries. Any usage that does not glorify the Lord and His kingdom work is not permitted.

## B. Communicating with Youth

**Texting:** Ministry leaders when using texting will normally contact youth in a closed group format. It is recognized that one-off communication can occur. If a pattern starts to develop where the communication is no longer a one-off communication the Ministry leader will address the issue by informing a second Ministry leader. The youth will be made aware of alternative healthy ways of communication.

**Emailing & Facebook:** When emailing or using Facebook private messaging with youth, a second Ministry leader and/or the parents shall be informed that the correspondence is taking place.

**Other electronic communications:** some examples but not limited to: blogging, Twitter, Pinterest or the next new thing. Youth Ministry leaders will refrain from using these as a primary form of communication.

## C. Safe Practice Guidelines

1. Communication normally should occur between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m.
2. Restrict content to facts, not feelings.
3. Questions should be kept simple requiring only a "yes" or "no" answer.
4. All obscene or bad language, bullying, off topic discussions and discrimination is prohibited. Any concerns of such conduct will be addressed by the leadership.
5. Phone calls and/or face to face meetings are utilized when dealing with emotionally charged conversation, pastoral care, counseling and/or when issues are of a confidential nature.

## D. Photography

Pictures taken for the purpose of internal poster board displays or internal power point presentations are not part of Social media. Consent from parent(s)/guardian(s) is required when the photo is of a person under 18 years. Consent can be integrated into signed registration forms, or parental permission forms. It is always best to restrict your website to using photographic images in which the individual faces of members, guests and participants are unrecognizable. For example, use of far-away shots for group activities. If a close-up shot is needed, use a stock image of a generic program participant.<sup>1 2</sup>

2. Robertson Hall Insurance, The Advantage, September 2012, edition 1, page 2

1. Any photography of individuals on the church website require specific written consent on file in the church office.
2. Ministry leaders may share photos with permission via Email. Consent from parent(s)/guardian(s) is required when the photo is of a person under 18 years. Consent can be integrated into signed registration forms or parental permission forms.

## Reporting Procedures

When volunteers, staff or leaders observe signs and symptoms of abuse or have an incidence of abuse reported to them, they shall immediately report this to the police and Children's Aid Society ("CAS"). Any member of a church community is subject to the civic duty to report under the Child and Family Services Act, Section 72 (1) which states that if a person has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection, the person must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a Children's Aid Society. The Safe Church Team must also be notified as soon as possible. There are special responsibilities imposed on professionals and officials by Section 72 (4), (6.2) which states that professional persons and officials have the same duty as any member of the public to report a suspicion that a child is in need of protection. The Act recognizes, however, that persons working closely with children have a special awareness of the signs of child abuse and neglect, and a particular responsibility to report their suspicions, and so makes it an offence to fail to report.

### Phone Numbers

London CAS: (519) 455-9000

London Police: (519) 661-5670

## Responding to signs and symptoms or a child's report of abuse

See [Appendix A](#): Signs and Symptoms of abuse

See [Appendix D](#), [Appendix E](#): Responding to a Child's Report of Abuse, and Process for Reporting All Allegations of Abuse

1. In ALL cases of suspicion of child abuse or disclosure of abuse by children, the person receiving the information, or being suspicious, should IMMEDIATELY notify the authorities, upon which they will also contact the Safe Church Team.
2. A report of incidents or observations (see [Appendix K](#)) should be completed by the initial person receiving the information.
3. A report by a volunteer or staff person should:
  - a. Indicate what the specific signs or symptoms of abuse are;
  - b. The date these symptoms were noted; and
  - c. What if any comment/response the minor had to the signs or symptoms.
4. In the case of a child reporting abuse, the volunteer or staff person should:
  - a. Indicate specifically what was told to him/her by the child;
  - b. The date of the report and the dates when the abuse allegedly occurred; and
  - c. What if any emotion/response the child had while making the complaint.

5. The Safe Church committee will support the volunteer or staff who first reported observing signs or symptom. The Safe Church committee will be notified that a report has been made and then will instruct on how to respond if the child, the parent(s), or the authorities call him/her. See [Appendix B](#): Responding to Parent(s) Who Are Notified of an Abuse Report
6. If the authorities choose to not proceed further and concern for the child remains, then the volunteer or staff who first reported observing signs or symptoms of abuse, or to whom the child disclosed allegations of abuse, should be notified that no further action will be taken. It may be advisable to keep a written log of any further signs, symptoms or complaints that reflect an ongoing pattern of abusive behaviour or may lead to detection of another difficulty in the youth's life. Of particular note would be a pattern of increased frequency or intensity of signs, symptoms or complaints of abuse.
7. After a report is filed with CAS/police, one of the members of the Safe Church Team is designated to be the liaison between the legal authorities/CAS and the church. This person also becomes the liaison between the Council/Executive and the authorities if the report leads to an investigation, criminal charges, arrest, trial, conviction, or dismissal of charges.
8. If the alleged abuser is a church leader and the abuse occurred while acting as a leader or in another context, refer to Guidelines for handling abuse allegations against a church leader by a child. If the alleged abuser is a family member and not a church leader, Church Order articles 78 through 81, are applicable (see [Appendix L](#)). If the family member is a member of another congregation, the Council of the church where his/her membership resides should initiate steps of pastoral care and/or discipline. Regardless of whom the alleged victim may be, pastoral care of the child and his/her family should begin as soon as an investigation by authorities is underway. Pastoral care also needs to be in place for the alleged abuser and his/her family as soon as the allegations have been brought forward.
9. Any written suspicion or documentation of abuse by a church leader, volunteer, or staff should be compiled and placed in a locked file by the Safe Church Team. Accessibility to this file is strictly limited to those church officials who are designated to interact with the police or CAS. Permission may be granted by Executive Council for access by a church appointed attorney or an insurance carrier representing the church. All others who gain access to this material will be considered to have breached confidentiality.
10. Disclosure to the congregation: See [Appendix C](#).

## **Guidelines for Handling Abuse Allegations against a Church Leader**

Note: Following is a consolidation of guidelines that CRC Synods have adopted over time, as a supplement to the Church Order, to equip churches to deal with an abuse allegation in a manner that is consistent with CRC beliefs and values. This version incorporates revisions made by Synod 2010 in response to recommendations from an Abuse Response Task Force.

### **A. Why a Procedure for Handling Abuse Allegations Is Necessary**

1. Many allegations of child abuse surface after a child reaches adulthood. This happens when an adult survivor of child abuse becomes separated from an abuser in adulthood. Sometimes in adulthood the adult survivor comes to recognize the behaviour done to him/her as abusive.
2. Sadly, because some church leaders have been unaware of child-abuse reporting laws and procedures, some victims have been placed at risk, some abusers have gone unnoticed, and some have not been reported to local authorities.
3. Insurance companies that handle liability policies for churches may require reasonable policies and procedures that could reduce the risk of abuse and the costly civil litigation that can, and often does, result.
4. Costly civil litigation also results in an enormous toll on the emotional well-being of the litigants and the churches they attend. Church members are often divided in their support of litigants, and they may be uncertain how to respond with Christian concern toward litigants.
5. Such a procedure is a tangible expression of the church's desire to secure justice and healing for all parties involved when allegations of abuse are made. In developing and implementing a procedure to handle abuse allegations, two great tensions exist. First, tension exists because the church wants to respond to the horror contained in the allegations and at the same time wants to protect the character, office, and family of someone who may be accused of abuse. Second, tension exists when the church wants its members to stay out of civil court and to resolve disputes in an ecclesiastical manner. Some, however, believing that the church's procedure for resolution is biased in favor of the accused, choose the civil courts for redress. Currently the majority of abuse allegations are addressed by local councils/consistories who attempt to follow the principles of Matthew 18:15-17. This approach is sound. At the same time, the consistory/council must recognize in applying these principles that a face-to-face meeting between the accused and the accuser may not be immediately advisable. When the abused is forced to face one who has dealt inappropriately with him/her, the abused may feel like a victim once again. Therefore, abused people have been unwilling to come forward with their stories even though their silence means that they cannot experience significant healing in their own lives and that an abusive spiritual leader continues to serve in a position of authority.

The guidelines below are designed to make it easier for people to come forward with their allegations of abuse. There is a set of guidelines for adults and another set for children. Both provide direction to the church for an appropriate and speedy handling of abuse allegations. The guidelines for adults require the formation of an advisory panel constituted by the local classis. This panel, composed of people with expertise in the dynamics of abuse, will be an invaluable help to the local church and to all parties involved.

We encourage all classes to form an advisory panel and remind them that the Safe Church office is available for any assistance needed to accomplish this. In both procedures it is still the local consistory that must make a decision based on information received. A number of factors must be considered when a consistory makes that decision.

Confession, repentance, forgiveness, and healing are significant ingredients in this process. Because forgiveness is at the heart of the Christian gospel, the church is sometimes tempted to believe that these matters have been resolved when forgiveness has been declared. However, if forgiveness is declared in the absence of heartfelt confession and sincere repentance, neither party is assisted. The abused experience resentment because their concerns have been dismissed so lightly; the abusers are not held accountable for their actions or the consequences of those actions and may go on to abuse again. Even when forgiveness is appropriately granted, decisions still remain about whether or not a person may continue to serve in a position of responsibility and trust in the church. When the accused is an office bearer, the Church Order gives guidance in terms of suspension/deposition; when the accused is a church leader (but not an office bearer), the same kind of questions must be considered.

Thus, council members should be knowledgeable about abuse. Members of the classical advisory panel are able to assist local councils when these matters are discussed, even in the case of children, where the panel is not convened. Confession, repentance, and forgiveness are not the end of this matter but are the beginning of a healing process.

Abuse, even the allegation of abuse, is accompanied by a great deal of pain, which permanently changes people's lives. The church in its guidelines and in its continuing ministry must facilitate healing for all parties involved. It is our prayer that the following guidelines will better equip the church to evaluate specific allegations of abuse so justice and healing may be realized.

## **B. Guidelines for Safe Church Panel Process in Response to an Abuse Allegation**

### **1. Definitions**

- a. Church Leader: Member churches and classes should be allowed some freedom in defining church leader. A member church or classis may use the definition of church leader that is consistent with its general liability policy or other insurance coverage.
- b. Misconduct: The Canadian provinces and each of the fifty United States have legal definitions of child abuse, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and physical abuse as well as a host of definitions of crimes committed against adults, including assault and battery, rape, and sexual harassment. Ecclesiastical procedures such as those outlined in Sections 2 and 3 that follow cannot measure a person's guilt by a legal standard; only civil authorities are entitled to hold a person accountable for violation of a civil or criminal code. For that reason, an ecclesiastical procedure cannot judge a person to be guilty of child abuse or rape as defined by law. An ecclesiastical procedure can, however, judge someone to be guilty of ungodly conduct, misuse of power, misuse of spiritual authority, sexually inappropriate behavior, and neglect and abuse of office. These behaviors are not violations of civil or criminal code and therefore are not subject to criminal prosecution or civil redress. They are, instead, behaviors that violate the trust and well-being of individuals and the community of believers, and they taint the office held by the offender.

The following definitions are given to further assist the churches in understanding the types of behaviors that might constitute ungodly conduct, misuse of power, sexually inappropriate behavior, and so forth:

Physical misconduct means threatened harm or non-accidental injury inflicted on a minor or legally protected adult, or offensive or harmful contact by an adult. Physical misconduct is sometimes a single event, but more often a chronic pattern of interacting with a minor or an adult.

Sexual misconduct means exploiting or grooming (preparing) a minor or an adult—regardless of consent or circumstances—for the purpose of sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy, with the result of either sexual gratification or power and control over the minor or adult; unwelcome touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between co-workers, or co-volunteers; or sexual touch, sexual activity, or emotional intimacy between a supervisor and a subordinate who serve together in a church program or church ministry.

### **2. Advisory Panel Process Guidelines when the claimant is an adult**

The guidelines in this section describe the process to be followed (1) when the claimant is an adult or (2) when the claimant comes forward as an adult with an allegation of abuse that took place

during childhood or adolescence. The guidelines for handling abuse allegations by an adult against a church leader assume the availability of an advisory panel. The role of the advisory panel is to evaluate the gravity of the allegations and the probable veracity of them. The standard of proof is that the testimony “more likely than not” supports the allegations.

Note: Provisions that specify the time to convene a meeting or the place of that meeting are only guidelines and are not requirements of the procedure.

- a. The claimant contacts the office of Safe Church Ministry or a classis safe church team for an advocate. The advocate will assist the claimant with her or his allegation by helping to compile witnesses and testimony, by attending the panel session with claimant, and by advocating for the claimant before other ecclesiastical bodies.
- b. The advocate should contact a member of the executive committee or similar committee (executive) of the accused person’s church or the chairperson of the safe church team (team) with a request to convene an advisory panel. The contact should include the allegation in writing with the names of the claimant and the accused person.
- c. The executive notifies the safe church team chairperson (or the chairperson notifies the executive) of the advocate’s contact. The executive (or chairperson) will identify the claimant, the accused person, and the allegation known at that time.

Note: The advisory panel will notify the accused person of the allegation after it has evaluated the testimony of the claimant to be both probable and serious.

- a. If a classis does not yet have a safe church team, then the advocate or the executive should contact the nearest team to convene an advisory panel (panel). A panel should convene as soon as possible after it receives a request to convene. If the accused person is an employee of the CRCNA or an agency of the CRCNA, the panel shall include an observer who is a representative of the employer to be named by the executive director of the CRCNA in consultation with any agency involved.
- b. The chairperson of the panel contacts the advocate to schedule the claimant’s meeting. The panel chooses the location and the time. The claimant and witnesses should be available for the meeting. The panelists, executive committee members, claimant, advocate, and witnesses should not publicly mention the meeting.
- c. The panel chairperson brings the panelists under a pledge of confidentiality regarding the name of the claimant, the accused person, and the details of the allegation brought forward. The claimant and witnesses may waive confidentiality of their own testimony at the conclusion of the panel process so the advocate, the panelists, and the representatives (see section 2, g below) may report on the matter when it is presented to the executive, the council, and other ecclesiastical bodies.
- d. If the executive chooses, it may appoint two representatives to observe both the claimant’s

and the accused person's meeting with the panel. A representative observer must adhere to confidentiality during the panel process.

- e. The panel receives the information presented to it by the claimant, examines the contents of written materials, questions the witnesses, and consults with experts as needed. Testimony may be in the form of written material, witnesses, notarized statements, depositions (statements taken under oath), email and other electronic communications, and personal property. When distance would make travel difficult, costly, or cause an undesirable delay in convening the panel, teleconferencing and other secure methods of communication are permissible.
- f. Following the meeting with the claimant, if the panel evaluates the allegation as both serious and probable, then the panel notifies the claimant of their evaluation and the panel moves to the next step in the advisory panel process. If, however, the allegation is not evaluated as serious or probable, then the panel ends its work. If the panel ends, it notifies the claimant and the executive. The executive may dismiss the matter or continue contact with the claimant.
- g. If the panel process continues, a panelist notifies the accused person that a claimant's advisory panel meeting took place. The panelist submits the allegations in writing to the accused person. The allegation must include specific incidents, the dates of those incidents when possible, and an indication of witnesses or corroborating evidence.
- h. The accused person has at least five (5) days after receiving the written allegation to prepare for his or her meeting with the panel. The accused person should be accompanied by a support person who is not a current or former practicing lawyer.
- i. The accused person presents his or her testimony before the same panel at a time and location chosen by the panel. The panelists, executive committee, accused person, support person, and witnesses should not publicly mention the meeting.
- j. The panel receives the information presented to it by the accused person. They examine the contents of written material, notarized statements, or depositions. They interview the accused person and witnesses, and they consult with experts as needed. When distance would make travel difficult, costly, or cause an undesirable delay in convening the panel, teleconferencing and other secure methods of communication are permissible.
- k. The accused person and witnesses may waive confidentiality of their own testimony at the conclusion of the panel process so that the panelists and the representatives may report to the executive, the council, and other ecclesiastical bodies.
- l. The panel convenes to consider the seriousness and the probability of the allegation along

with the testimonies offered by the claimant and the accused person. The panelists sign a report of their findings. If the panel hears the accused person's admission of misconduct, or if the claimant's testimony is more likely to have occurred than that of the accused person's testimony, the panel may offer specific recommendations for pastoral care and church discipline. The panel will send a copy of their report to the claimant and the accused person.

- m. The executive receives the panel's report. The chairperson presents the panel's report first; next, the advocate (or the claimant) presents to the executive; and then the representatives present to the executive. If the accused person is an ordained pastor, then a classical church visitor or member of the classical interim committee must be present when the chairperson, advocate or claimant, and the representatives meet with the executive.
- n. The executive must convene the council to bring the panel's report. At this meeting, the chairperson first presents the panel's report. Second, the council should meet with the claimant (or advocate) and the accused person individually, one after the other. Neither the claimant (advocate) nor the accused person should meet with the council prior to this meeting. Third, the representatives meet with the council.
- o. If the accused person acknowledges his or her guilt at the council meeting, the council should initiate steps of discipline by following Church Order Articles 82 and 83. When the council takes a step of discipline, it should inform the neighboring council for its concurrence, if necessary, and the congregation as well.
- p. The council has thirty days from receipt of the report to adjudicate the allegation and decide the next course of action. The council will notify in writing the claimant and the accused person of its adjudication and its next course of action. The council may conduct its own hearing into the matter, and if so, the claimant and the accused person may have legal counsel present at the council's expense. Guidance on hearing procedures can be found in the Supplement to Article 30-c of the Church Order, "Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures," Articles 2-14.
- q. If the council decides to take no further action on the report, or if the action taken by the council is contrary to the findings of the advisory panel, then the panel chairperson, after consultation with the claimant or advocate, will
  - i. submit a copy of the panel's report to the church visitors with a request for intervention; or
  - ii. Submit a copy of the panel's report to the classical interim committee with a request for intervention.
- r. If the executive does not inform the council of the panel's report, the panel chairperson or

advocate will immediately contact the church visitors or classical interim committee.

- s. The advocate and the claimant may attend any subsequent ecclesiastical meetings where the allegations are discussed, including classis, the denominational Judicial Code Committee, or the advisory committee of synod.
- t. The claimant and the accused person may appeal the decision of the council. Such appeals should be addressed to the classis, where standard appeal procedures are applied. These procedures can be found in the Supplement to Article 30-c of the Church Order, "Judicial Code of Rights and Procedures," Articles 16-27.

### **3. Five important footnotes**

- a. These are suggested guidelines. The circumstances of abuse may dictate that church officials deviate from them. In addition, state and provincial laws vary somewhat in terms of the manner in which abuse is defined and how it should be reported. The presumption should be in favor of following the guidelines in the case of each allegation of abuse; however, the church is best served by retaining legal counsel with expertise in the area to define the legal standards relevant to a particular jurisdiction. Furthermore, the director of Safe Church Ministry can be consulted regarding the application of the guidelines.
- b. The guidelines anticipate that the claimant's allegations will be disclosed to certain entities or individuals at certain times. At each stage of the proceedings outlined in the guidelines, those individuals who disclose and/or receive information relating to the allegations should use extensive precautions to ensure that the allegations and surrounding circumstances are not shared with any entities or individuals other than those expressly described under these guidelines or required by law. Accuracy is of the utmost importance in the disclosure of allegations or surrounding circumstances to those individuals or entities named in these guidelines. Wrongful or inaccurate dissemination of information can lead to adverse legal consequences.
- c. Whenever a disclosure of allegations of child abuse or assault is warranted, the disclosure must include the language of the criminal code along with the indication that criminal authorities have made the charges and will follow them up to the full extent of their capabilities. If the allegations are ungodly conduct, abuse of office, and so forth, then the disclosure must include the language of the Church Order along with the indication that church officials will follow up to the full extent of their capabilities. After a judgment on the matter is rendered, subsequent disclosure must include the language of the Church Order; an explanation of the violation(s) may be given but only with care so as to protect the identity of the victim. Failure to explain the nature of the violation enables the offender to continue a pattern of denial or minimization and promotes the perception that the matter is being covered up somehow.

- d. Member churches and classes that adopt these guidelines should check with their own legal counsel about potential liability that arises from the guidelines. By adopting the guidelines, the member church and its classis may be assuming legal obligations not dictated under the laws of their jurisdiction. The liability of the advisory panel that serves the member church or classis should also be discussed with legal counsel. A classis that forms a safe church team and advisory panel should be incorporated and should obtain legal protection for the volunteers serving on each. Finally, member churches and classes that adopt the guidelines should follow the procedures specified. Negligent failure to follow the guidelines as adopted could be a basis for potential liability.
- e. Denominational personnel should not serve on either a safe church team or an advisory panel.

### **C. Alternatives to the Advisory Panel Process**

When allegations of abuse are made against a church leader, the following procedures are listed as alternatives available to claimants and councils/consistories under CRC church order. These procedures are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Any of these alternatives should be considered only if all parties agree that such an option is preferable to the advisory panel process. It is possible, for example, that the alleged victim would find it too difficult to be in the same place with the alleged offender so that the parties are not agreed. Once an alternative has been selected, the council/consistory is to assure that the accuser and the accused are informed about their rights and responsibilities under that alternative.

1. One alternative is for the alleged victim and alleged offender to meet before witnesses (consistory/council/council's executive) to discuss the alleged abuse incident.
2. Synod has encouraged the use of Restorative Practices, which can be used in this situation, as well as in other situations which don't exactly fit the Advisory Panel Process. In addition, Restorative Practices may also be helpful after an Advisory Panel Process to foster healing.
3. Another alternative is to proceed with "informal means for resolution" as contemplated in the Preamble to the Judicial Code contained in the Supplement to Article 30-c of the Church Order. This would include meeting with "trained facilitators" or "mediators" or other "informal efforts."
4. A third alternative is the "formal hearing" described in the Judicial Code contained in the Supplement to Article 30-c of the Church Order (Articles 1-27). Here the consistory or council hears the testimony presented by the alleged victim and the alleged offender and their witnesses regarding the alleged abuse incident. This "formal hearing" is "intended to be a dispute-resolving mechanism of last resort."

#### **D. Guidelines When the Claimant Is a Child**

1. A person who receives a report of allegations of child abuse against a church leader (paid staff, office bearer, or appointed volunteer), and concludes that the allegations create a reasonable suspicion that abuse has occurred, should report the matter to local police or child protection authorities within twenty-four hours of receiving the information. In addition, a person who has knowledge of any circumstances that create a reasonable suspicion that a church leader has committed child abuse also should report the matter to local police or child-protection authorities within twenty-four hours of coming to that conclusion.
2. As soon as possible after notifying the appropriate authorities, the person who reports the matter should contact the person (hereafter, designated person) within the accused's church who has been designated to receive any report of alleged child abuse. The person who reports the matter should describe the allegations of abuse and/or the circumstances that support the allegations of abuse to the designated person. In addition, the person who reports the matter should inform the designated person if the alleged abuse occurred in the church or in connection with a church-sponsored program.
3. The designated person should contact (1) the pastor, if the minor has not implicated the pastor; (2) a member of the church's leadership team, if the minor has not implicated this team member; (3) the church's legal counsel; and (4) the church's insurance agent.

If the alleged victim and alleged abuser are not members of the same church, each church should appoint a designated person. Together, the designated persons should maintain contact about the progress of the investigation. Church officials may conduct their own investigation after civil authorities have begun theirs. However, church officials should not reveal the nature of the allegations to the alleged offender until the civil authorities have met with him or her.

4. If the alleged abuser admits wrongdoing against the victim at any stage of this process, the admission of guilt should be brought to the attention of the governing body of the church of the accused. The governing body should deliberate and determine outcomes according to established church polity and procedures.
5. When the designated person determines (1) that the authorities have concluded that the allegations merit serious investigation, or (2) that there is the possibility of formal charges, the designated person should notify the governing body of the alleged abuser's church.
  - a. The designated person should present to the governing body a written document that specifies the nature of the allegations and any information that is known.
  - b. The governing body should give the accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.

- c. In light of the information presented, the governing body should implement one or more of the following actions:
      - i. supervised contact at church between the accused and any minors;
      - ii. prohibited contact at church between the accused and accuser or between the accused and any minor in the congregation;
      - iii. Suspended responsibilities from office, position, or duty with pay, when applicable, and without prejudice pending the outcome of the investigation.
6. If and when the designated person learns that the authorities have filed criminal charges against the accused, then the designated person should report this information to the governing body of the alleged abuser's church.
  - a. The designated person should present to the governing body a written document specifying the nature of the allegations and any information that is known.
  - b. The governing body should give the accused an opportunity to respond to the allegations.
  - c. In light of the information presented, the governing body should implement the following actions:
    - i. prohibit the accused from contact with minors at church;
    - ii. And suspend the accused from office, position, or duty with pay, when applicable, and without prejudice pending the outcome of the charges.
7. When criminal proceedings have concluded, the governing body should promptly revisit the matter, whether the result is conviction, acquittal, or dropped charges. If the criminal charges are dropped or prosecution does not result in a conviction, the governing body should decide whether or not to rescind its earlier action and/or take additional action.
8. If the accused whom the governing body has previously removed or suspended from office is found not guilty of the allegations, the governing body should not reinstate the accused to his or her previous position of leadership until they, in consultation with the police and/or child protection authorities, legal counsel, and child abuse experts, deem it safe and proper to do so.
9. If the accused is found guilty, the governing body may (1) subject a determined abuser (hereafter abuser) to further suspension, deposition, or termination of employment, or (2) take such other action against the abuser as the circumstances may dictate.
10. A church leader (1) who has made a confession of child abuse, (2) who has been convicted of child abuse in a court of law, or (3) whom the governing body has adjudicated guilty of abuse of a minor should not be reinstated to the position from which he or she has been removed or suspended without the advice of the church's legal counsel.

11. The governing body should notify the congregation when a church leader is removed or suspended from office, position, or duty pending the outcome of an investigation into an allegation of child abuse. This notice should be in writing and should protect the identity and confidentiality of the accuser. This disclosure should be pastoral, objectively factual, and not exceed the scope of the information known about the matter at that time. In addition, the governing body should not attempt to state any legal conclusions about the guilt or innocence of any person unless and until the governing body determines that a church leader is an abuser.
  
12. Subject to the best interest of the abused, the governing body should notify the congregation in writing if they conclude that a church leader is an abuser. This notice should protect the identity and confidentiality of any innocent parties, including the abused person. This written communication should be pastoral and objectively factual.

Revised April 29, 2013 By SCM Advisory Committee and SCM staff

## **Guidelines for Ministerial Personnel in Their Interpersonal Relationships**

**Ministerial Personnel** are persons, ordained or non-ordained, appointed by the church to provide pastoral care, counselling, spiritual direction, or spiritual guidance (pastor, deacons, administrative elders and pastoral care elders).

### **A. Boundaries**

Establish clearly defined boundaries which you are committed to maintaining in your interpersonal relationships. It is important to recognize that the responsibility for maintaining proper boundaries lies with the church leader not the congregant/counselee.

1. Conduct counselling appointments within normally scheduled daytime hours; have evening appointments only if others are present in the building or present at the appointment.
2. Acknowledge the risk of meeting alone in the congregant or counselee's home. Church leaders may choose to bring another office bearer to such a meeting or the counselee may request the presence of another person.
3. Consider requesting that a same sex elder or pastoral care worker be assigned to someone who needs frequent visits.
4. Meet with a minor or adolescent once or twice and thereafter only with the consent and knowledge of the minor's parent or guardian. Avoid transporting a minor alone.
5. Limit the physical display of affection to a brief hug or pat on the back or forearm. To avoid misinterpretation of affection, do not give gifts to counselees or parishioners.

**B. Be accountable** to a colleague, spouse, or peer to ensure that you are maintaining proper boundaries in your interpersonal relationships. Openly discuss the threats to those boundaries with a colleague.

**C. Give adequate attention to your spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being.** Maintain a healthy attitude towards your ministry. Be alert to the dangers of negative attitudes in ministry, the potential for temptation and self-destructive behaviour. Listen to the feedback and counsel of others who supervise you or to whom you report when they express concern about your behaviours or attitudes.

**D. Be sensitive and honest about your sexuality,** and needs so that you conduct yourself in a responsible way.

**E. Conduct your office to promote the spiritual and interpersonal growth and healing of the individuals, of the congregation, and the denomination you serve.** This may take place through sermons, personal visits, planning the church's activities, developing new programs, selecting new office bearers, and training volunteers.

### **F. Confidentiality**

Pastors should assume confidentiality unless otherwise clearly defined. Church leaders should bring difficult situations to the attention of the pastor or appropriate other (council chairperson). A

confidential issue should not first be shared in an open meeting but should be brought to the attention of the pastor/council chairperson to decide how to deal with the issue. Note: Disclosure is required in the case of child abuse and suicidal or homicidal intent.

**G. Agree to do your work according to the specified guidelines of your profession/office.**

1. Not all requests by a church member are healthy and/or appropriate. It is the church leader who is responsible for knowing the difference. If unsure, seek the advice of the pastor/colleague and the Good News Safe Church Team.
2. Refrain from investigating these matters on your own: notify the Good News Safe Church Team.
3. Know the laws governing the reporting of child abuse. Failure to report may be a criminal act.
4. Keep accurate records of pastoral care sessions. The elders, deacons and pastors need to report all pastoral visits to their respective coordinating bodies. Maintain all records with utmost confidentiality.
5. Recognize when it is necessary to refer a congregant to an appropriate therapist.

## **Mandate of the Safe Church Team**

The Safe Church Team will be established as a standing committee of Good News CRC Council to oversee the implementation and continuation of the Safe Environment Policy and related Anti-abuse policies within the church. Its actions should be guided by Synodical and Classical personnel (Anti-Abuse Denominational Coordinator, Classical Abuse Response Team) and decisions (see to date: Acts of Synod 1992, 1995 & 1997).

The Safe Church Team is comprised of 3-5 knowledgeable and aware members of the congregation with at least one member being a 'professional' within the meaning of the Child and Family Services Act (1985) (e.g. nurse, teacher, child/youth worker, social worker). The makeup of the Safe Church Team will consist of male and female members with on-going terms that are open to annual renewal.

The Safe Church Team is available to anyone who has concerns or suspicions of potential or possible abuse.

1. To process all abuse allegations in accordance with the guidelines set out in this policy, making whatever necessary use of classical and denominational resources.
2. To educate the congregation and leaders about the dynamics of abuse and thereby strive for abuse prevention.
  - a. This includes:
    - b. Annual Review of policies and signing of code of ethics with leaders/volunteers
    - c. Participation/input in Abuse Awareness Sunday
    - d. Presentations at Youth programs and congregational meetings
3. To make recommendations of materials related to abuse and its prevention to the library committee.
4. To receive, review and safely store all results of Code of Ethics and Police Record Checks.
5. To ensure that all members of the team take an oath of confidentiality.
6. To ensure that there is an annual review of all abuse policies, procedures and their requirements and make subsequent recommendations to Church Council.
7. To be a resource and support to members and leaders of the congregation regarding concerns of abuse.
8. To encourage the worship committee to continue to use inclusive language in worship and to include men, women and children as participants.
9. To encourage the education committee to continue using denominationally produced course material for all groups and find innovative ways to model healthy gender identity and biblically sound role formation.

## **APPENDIX A: Signs and/or symptoms of child abuse**

### **A. Pre-school Children**

1. Regression of behaviour to an earlier stage of development e.g. baby talk, thumb sucking, wetting the bed.
2. Change of sleeping or eating habits, generally dramatic, and continuing for a period of time.
3. Change in social behaviour to becoming aggressive, or becoming withdrawn, excessive crying, or clinging.
4. Physical manifestations like loss of bowel control, bed wetting, frequent urination, headaches, stomach aches, breathing difficulties, complaints of sore throats, accompanied by gagging, stains in the child's under clothes.
5. Exhibit signs of fear around a family member or a familiar person, or fear of a familiar place or object.
6. Fear of being touched or shying away from physical contact. Resistance to being diapered or assisting in the bathroom.
7. Use of explicit language or sexual behaviour that is beyond the child's comprehension or life experience.
8. Attempting sexual behaviour with other children or attending adults.
9. Unexplained injuries and/or bruises, repeated injuries blamed on the child's carelessness, multiple bruises sustained in one event, or bruise to child's midsection, back, head, or back of thighs. Also signs of scalding, burning, or distinctive bruising e.g. in the shape of a belt buckle.
10. Name calling toward other children, bullying behaviour, sulking/brooding.

### **B. School Age Children**

1. Physical manifestations such as loss of bowel control, with addition of complaints of pain, irritation, soreness, redness on the bottom.
2. Pattern of injuries, multiple injuries, injuries about the face or neck, no complaint about an obvious physical discomfort, avoids explaining what happened.
3. Change in sleeping and eating patterns, dramatic, not of short duration.
4. Unusual fears, such as a familiar person, a particular room, a particular object, or fear of new experiences.
5. Poor concentration in the classroom.
6. Exhibits adult-pleasing behaviours, strives for perfection, acts miserable if fails.

7. Engages in self-injury; engages in excessive masturbation or masturbation in public setting.
8. Acts rageful and out of control; expresses anger through destruction.
9. Shy about physical touch.
10. Exhibits sexual behaviour beyond comprehension or maturity level. Behaves in sexual manner with other children or adults.
11. Exhibits signs of needing to be in control of others or situation; bullies others.
12. Shows hostility and distrust of adults, mood swings and irritability, and violent disruptions.
13. Acts out by hoarding food and toys, lying, stealing, assaulting.
14. Has frequent absences from school or other scheduled events either because of being punished or an attempt to hide the bruises.
15. Exhibits low self-esteem, particularly sensitive to criticism.

### **C. Adolescents**

1. Eating disorders, use of laxatives, and unexplained and dramatic changes in weight.
2. Change in sleep patterns, including excessive sleeping, sleeping during the day, and insomnia.
3. Performance in school plunges.
4. Perfectionist and excessively harsh on oneself, attempt to please adults, stunned by any form of criticism or complaint.
5. Sexually provocative- or behave in an asexual manner, denying body changes and sexual development.
6. Experimentation with drugs or alcohol.
7. Self-abusive behaviour including cutting oneself, preoccupation with danger and weapons, suicide attempts.
8. Truancy from school.
9. Cruelty to animals, bullying younger children.
10. Numb to feelings, unable to be emotionally supportive to others.
11. Few friends, changes friends often.
12. Depression and other signs of withdrawal and avoidance.
13. Pregnancy.
14. Refusing to attend to basic hygiene.
15. Rectal and vaginal infections.

**D. Parental Behaviours and Home Life**

1. Does not attend meetings about the child, does not show an interest in the child, is critical of child, not complimentary of child.
2. Constantly puts the child down, uses harsh words to describe child, uses threats and unflattering language.
3. Speaks of child as underachiever, child lets people down, child is less than brothers and sisters.
4. Speaks of child in way that sounds romantic, too grown up, too special, too sugary, and too perfect.
5. Hostile, closed-minded, overprotective, isolating; doesn't let others in to the house, won't participate in activities with other parents. Makes excuses about failing to do tasks, talks about things not being good at home.
6. Other reports of suspicious behaviour. The greatest predictor of abusive behaviour is past behaviour. Were there concerns that an older brother or sister may have been mistreated?

**APPENDIX B: Responding to Parent(s) who are notified of an abuse report**

1. Remain calm and non-judgmental.
2. Anyone who makes a report to the police or CAS is granted anonymity, so do not identify the reporter unless you are given permission to do so.
3. Do not share statements by the child to a parent or relative who is implicated by the child as an abuser; it is advisable not to share the child's statements with anyone other than the authorities until the identity of the abuser can be determined and whether or not the child can be protected from contact with that person.
4. Do not attempt to convince a parent that the alleged abuse happened or did not happen; neither should you attempt to discredit the child nor cast suspicion on to the alleged abuser.
5. Do not investigate with the parent what may be happening in the home; do not share information with a parent that has not been shared with the authorities.
6. Do not make promises to a parent about the outcome of the investigation.
7. Listen to any information the parent may offer about the incident and record it immediately after the conversation; report additional information to authorities through the reporting procedures outlined in the church's policy.
8. Assure the parent(s) of your support and ask if there are additional needs at the moment.
9. Suggest resources for the parent(s) including books or literature that may be helpful to them.
10. Allow the parent(s) to express their disbelief, anger, and grief; the parent(s) may be in shock or denial at the mention of abuse allegations.
11. Do not minimize the type of abuse, its impact on the child, or its harm to the child.
12. Assure the parent(s) of the confidential nature of the report and the need to maintain confidentiality unless disclosure is necessary to protect the well-being of other children.

## APPENDIX C: Disclosure Policy

### Disclosing Information to the Congregation

Every church faces the dilemma of disclosing incidents of abuse. On the one hand, alleged victims and their families may face embarrassment or be subject to inquisitions and requests for information, or worse yet, isolation and rejection. The alleged perpetrator and their family will fear a ruined reputation before the events are dismissed or proven in a court of law or through a formal church hearing process.

On the other hand, if no steps are taken to safeguard other church members, the church can be held liable if further abuse continues.

Some basic guidelines, then, are necessary to a) protect victims from further victimization; b) protect alleged abusers from unfair prejudice; c) prevent additional victims from being victimized; d) allow the legal or church process to take its course; e) promote healing when it is time; f) permit treatment to begin for the individuals involved.

1. The timing of the disclosure is critical. The release of some information affirms to the victim that he/she is believed. It also tells the alleged perpetrator that such acts will not be held secret.

The disclosure itself must contain fact, and not suspicion or innuendo. This does not mean that an investigation is complete; but rather, that the victim can report what the nature of the abuse was, by whom, and when.

Disclosure ought to be made as soon as possible to prevent further abuse.

2. The disclosure needs to be made by a person in the congregation unrelated to either the victim or the perpetrator (Council member). The designated individual should present the facts of the matter. Avoid interpreting, minimizing, or making suggestions how to make things okay.
3. The disclosure should not minimize the abuse that has taken place, nor the victim's response to the abuse. Likewise, the person doing the disclosing acknowledges that there is pain among many people at this point who are caught up in the situation.
4. At the time of disclosure, be prepared to distribute a written statement about what has been disclosed. Also, make available written material and resources about abuse so that the audience may be further educated.
5. The person making the disclosure ought to announce that pastoral care will be offered to

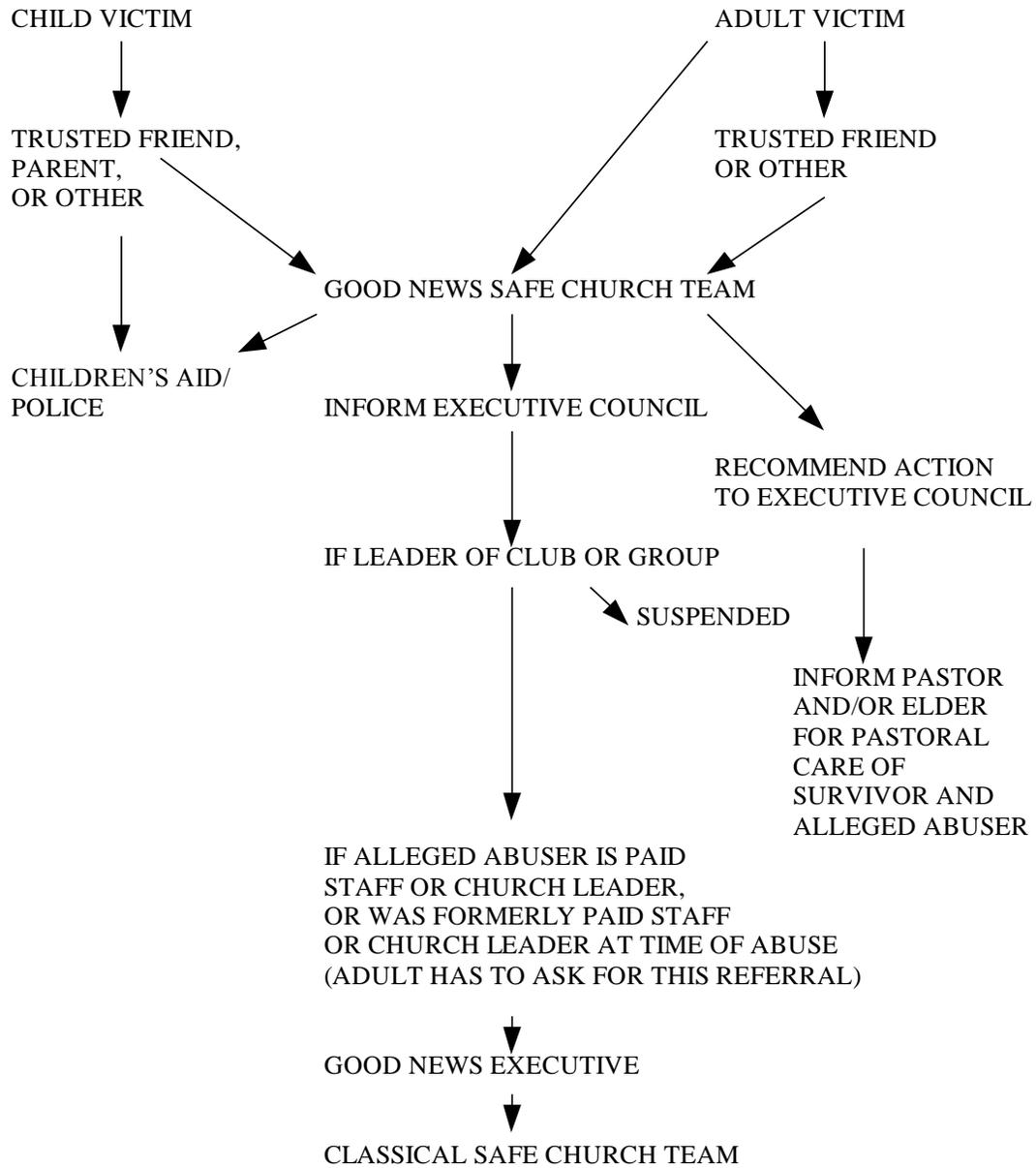
the victim and the perpetrator.

6. Subsequent disclosures will inform the congregation as to further decisions made by Council. These disclosures may be in written form.
7. The disclosure will always heavily weigh the matter of confidentiality versus secrecy. Confidentiality is never an appropriate defence for protecting a perpetrator or failing to alert vulnerable members of the congregation or community. Disclose the alleged abuser's name if:
  - a) the person has a position of leadership in the church
  - b) the person has been asked to step aside from any position in the church
  - c) the person would have contact with children or other identified vulnerable members of the church/community
  - d) the person has been arrested, removed from the family home
  - e) the person makes threats against the victim
  - f) the person continues to abuse the victim
8. Do not disclose the name of the victim.

**APPENDIX D: Responding to a child's report of abuse**

1. Take the child seriously when he/she tells the story.
2. Avoid judgmental statements, such as, "I think you had a bad dream."
3. Do not appear frightened or disgusted by the child's story since this may cause the child to stop talking or to believe you are upset with the child.
4. Do not try to convince the child that the story isn't true or that it did not happen the way the child reports it did.
5. Do not make promises to the child that you will not tell anyone what has been shared with you.
6. Remind the child that whatever happened wasn't the fault of the child.
7. Remind the child that it was a good decision to tell someone what happened to him/her.
8. Do tell the child that you want to find help, so the incident can be prevented from happening again.
9. Do not offer child a reward for telling the story or promising a gift if the child tells another adult.
10. Reassure the child that he/she is a special person who does not deserve to be hurt by anyone.
11. Do not frighten the child by talking about police involvement or medical examinations to verify the complaint; instead, share with the child that other people need to know about what happened and they will talk to the child later.
12. Do not ask the child to show you any bruises that are beneath the child's clothing; only examine those bruises which may appear on the child's skin or in the mouth; if a child insists on showing a bruise beneath the clothing, ask another adult to witness the bruise with you or tell the child you believe him/her without seeing the bruise.
13. Do not investigate the child's story; rather listen to the story and take notes immediately afterwards to refresh your memory as to what the child told you.
14. Do not tell the child he/she has been abused.
15. Offer to support the child, remind the child you care about him/her.
16. Follow through in consecutive weeks and months by speaking to the child and offering support to him/her, whether or not an investigation is being pursued.

### Appendix E Process For Reporting All Allegations of Abuse



## Appendix F: Code of ethics for volunteers and employees of Good News Church

Name:

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Position:

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Address:

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How Long a Participant of Good News Church?

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TRUE - FALSE I have read the "Safe Environment Policies for Child and Youth Programs" material and promise to implement and support the policies and directives which it contains.

TRUE - FALSE I have never been convicted of abuse or assault/or have never been convicted of any crime against a minor.

I recognize that I require a Police Record Check to serve in a volunteer or paid position within the church.

I agree to serve spiritually, with integrity, and will participate in training to enhance my ministry to children and young people.

I will not do anything that will damage a child's or youth's trust. I will try to protect them from all forms of abuse while they are in my care.

If I suspect that a child or youth may be hurt by the abusive actions or attitudes of another, I will report that suspicion to the Children's Aid Society and a Safe Church Team member, so that it can be investigated properly.

Signed:

---

Date:

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***Good News Church wishes to provide a safe, caring, and nurturing environment. We recognize the great value of volunteers and wish to support them in their roles as they minister.***

This information will be reviewed by the Safe Church Team in order to place volunteers in appropriate positions and to protect the youth programs and the church. The information may be shared as necessary with the supervisors of the youth program and the council of Good News Christian Reformed Church for the purpose of making decisions regarding the appropriateness of a volunteer.

## **APPENDIX G: Vulnerable Sector Check**

Those seeking a paid position in the church will be required to have a Vulnerable Sector Check.

All Good News Church leaders having regular contact with Youth (GEMS, Cadets, Youth Group, Sunday School, Catechism, elders) will be required to have a Police Record Check.

Cost of London Police Vulnerable Sector Check for volunteers in 2017: \$15.00.

Cost for paid staff: \$45.00

Cost of OPP Vulnerable Sector Check for volunteers in 2017: Free

Cost for paid staff: \$25

The individual must bring in a letter from church that states that the record check is for a volunteer position.

The church can ask individuals to go to the local police station and complete forms, or the church can obtain forms for volunteers, have them fill them in and the church will return forms to the local police station.

Those individuals not residing in London will have to have a Vulnerable Sector Check completed at the OPP on Exeter Road. These forms are completed free of charge for volunteers but the volunteer must bring a letter from the Safe Church Team stating that they are volunteering in a church program.

**Appendix H: Reference Contact Form**

Confidential (for use in hiring for paid positions within the church. Information/Questions contained in this form should be reviewed with applicant’s references).

Name of Applicant:

Name of Reference (if a church, identify both the church and person contacted):

Date of Contact:

Person Contacting the Reference:

Method of Contact (e.g. telephone, letter, personal conversation):

Summary of conversation concerning the applicant’s fitness and suitability for youth and children’s work:

Multiple horizontal lines for writing the summary of conversation.

To the best of the contact’s knowledge, has the applicant ever been suspected, accused, or investigated for neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, assault, or any other acts of violence against either adult or children? (If yes, please explain).

Multiple horizontal lines for providing an explanation if applicable.

Signature:

Position:

Date:

(Information storage: Once the form is completed, seal in an envelope, write the name of the individual on the envelope and give to a member of the Safe Church Team to be stored in locked cabinet in the church office).

# Appendix I: Parental Consent and Medical Form

**Good News Christian Reformed Church  
476 Clarke Rd. London, Ontario N5V 2C7**

I \_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent or Guardian)

give permission for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Minor)

to attend activities (i.e. field trips, work projects, conventions, special outings, as well as activities on the church property) sponsored by:

- \_\_\_\_\_ GEMS
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cadets
- \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Group/Study Group

I give permission to the leaders of the organization to secure needed emergency medical treatment of the minor named above, in case of accident or injury during the outings.

I give permission for the leaders of the organization to transport the minor named above to these activities. I understand that the drivers will have a valid Driver's Licence and Insurance and adequate seatbelts.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Home Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Ontario Health Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Pertinent Medical Information: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Allergies (please indicate the specifics)

\_\_\_\_\_ Food:

\_\_\_\_\_ Medicines:

\_\_\_\_\_ Insects:

\_\_\_\_\_ Current Medications: (Name, dosages, time, and other instructions)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix J: Transportation Consent Form - Vacation Bible School**

**Good News Christian Reformed Church  
476 Clarke Rd., London, Ontario N5V 2C7**

I \_\_\_\_\_

give permission for \_\_\_\_\_  
(Minor)

to be transported by the volunteers of Good News Christian Reformed Church to Good News Church and return for the Vacation Bible School program.

I understand that the driver will have a valid Driver's Licence and Insurance and adequate seatbelts.

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Home Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX L: Volunteer/Employee Applicant Interview Form

This interview form is for the purpose of recording information obtained during the interview of a prospective volunteer by the Program Supervisor. Form to be completed by Board of Administration for prospective non-ordained employees or by the Council rep/Calling Committee for prospective ordained employee. It must be kept on file permanently.

Name of Applicant being interviewed:
Applicant's Phone number:
Position being applied for:
Name of the interviewer(s):
Date of interview:
What experience do you have that is relevant to this role?
What is your volunteer experience within a church context?
What interests you in this position?
What is your availability to commit to this role? (Length, time, frequency?)
Interviewer's recommendation:
Signature of person making report:
Name of Safe Church Team member receiving this report:
Date received:

## **APPENDIX M: Church Order – Rules for Synodical Procedure (Articles 78-84)**

### **THE ADMONITION AND DISCIPLINE OF THE CHURCH**

#### **A. General Provisions**

##### **Article 78**

The purpose of admonition and discipline is to restore those who err to faithful obedience to God and full fellowship with the congregation, to maintain the holiness of the church, and thus to uphold God's honour.

##### **Article 79**

- a. The members of the church are accountable to one another in their doctrine and life and have the responsibility to encourage and admonish one another in love.
- b. The consistory shall instruct and remind the members of the church of their responsibility and foster a spirit of love and openness within the fellowship so that erring members may be led to repentance and reconciliation.

##### **Article 80**

The consistory shall exercise the authority which Christ has given to his church regarding sins of a public nature or those brought to its attention according to the rule of Matthew 18:15-17.

#### **B. The Admonition and Discipline of Members**

##### **Article 81**

- a. Members who have sinned in life or doctrine shall be faithfully disciplined by the consistory and, if they persist in their sin, shall be excluded from membership in the church of Christ.
- b. Members by baptism who have been excluded from membership in the church and who later repent of their sin shall be received again into its fellowship upon public profession of faith.
- c. Confessing members who have been excluded from membership in the church shall be received again into its fellowship upon repentance of their sin.
- d. The consistory shall inform the congregation and encourage its involvement in both the exclusion from and the readmission to membership.

##### **Supplement, Articles 78-81**

- a. Discipline shall be applied by the consistory only after an adequate investigation has been made and the member has had ample opportunity to present his/her case.
- b. A person who persistently rejects the admonition of the consistory shall be suspended from the privileges of communicant membership.

- c. A person may be excluded from membership only after the consistory has secured the approval of classis.
- d. The role of the classis in giving approval is
  - i. To judge whether proper procedure has been followed.
  - ii. To assure that adequate pastoral care has been extended to the person.
  - iii. To determine that the consistory has advanced adequate reasons for proceeding with discipline.
- e. The approval of classis does not obligate a consistory to exclude a person from membership since repentance and restoration to the full fellowship of the church are always possible.
- f. The liturgical forms and announcements for admonition and discipline may be used if the consistory judges that these will further the purposes of discipline and will serve the welfare of the congregation.

### **Article 82**

All office bearers, in addition to being subject to general discipline, are subject to special discipline, which consists of suspension and deposition from office.

### **Article 83**

Special discipline shall be applied to office bearers if they violate the Form of Subscription, are guilty of neglect or abuse of office, or in any way seriously deviate from sound doctrine and godly conduct.

### **Article 84**

Persons who have been suspended or deposed from office may be reinstated if they give sufficient evidence of repentance and if the church judges that they are able to serve effectively. Requests for reinstatement to office by those deposed for acts of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct shall be dealt with according to guidelines adopted by synod.

### **Supplement, Articles 78-84**

#### **Guidelines for Confidentiality**

Synod affirmed the necessity for strict confidentiality on the part of councils and consistories in all matters relating to admonition and discipline by recommending the following guidelines to the churches.

- a. Every church should state its membership commitments very clearly, including the expectation that all members are to participate in and be subject to the admonition and discipline of the church.
- b. Office bearers should scrupulously observe confidentiality with respect to persons who come under their counsel and discipline.
- c. Careful and confidential records should be kept whenever a discipline case reaches the level of action by the elders and/or announcements are made to the congregation.

- d. Special care should be observed in the wording of public announcements. The sin of the person should not be mentioned, but only that he/she is unrepentant.
- e. Established policies with respect to procedures and public announcements should be consistently followed by the elders of the church.

### **Supplement, Articles 82-84**

#### **The Admonition and Discipline of Office bearers**

- a. General discipline shall not be applied to an office bearer unless he/she has first been suspended from office.
- b. The appropriate assembly shall determine whether, in a given instance, deposition from office shall take place immediately, without previous suspension.
- c. Suspension/deposition of elders, deacons, and ministry associates.
  - 1) The suspension or deposition of an elder, deacon, or ministry associate shall be imposed by the council with the concurring judgement of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.
  - 2) If the neighbouring council fails to concur in the position of the council of the elder, deacon, or ministry associate involved, the latter council shall either alter its original judgement or present the case to classis.
- d. Suspension/deposition of ministers
  - 1) The suspension of a minister of the Word shall be imposed by the council of the minister's church with the concurring judgement of the council of the nearest church in the same classis.
  - 2) If the neighbouring council fails to concur in the position of the council of the minister involved, the latter council shall either alter its original judgement or present the case to classis.
  - 3) The deposition of a minister shall not be effected without the approval of classis together with the concurring advice of the synodical deputies.
- e. Ministers subject to two councils
  - 1) A minister of the Word whose membership resides with a congregation other than the calling church is subject to the admonition and discipline of the councils of both churches. Either council may initiate disciplinary action, but neither shall act without conferring with the other.
  - 2) If the councils disagree, the case shall be submitted to the classis of the calling church for disposition.
- f. The lifting of suspension is the prerogative of the assembly which imposed suspension.
- g. The council of the church which deposed the minister shall declare the deposed minister eligible to receive the call upon the affirmative judgment of the classis which approved the deposition, together with the concurrence of the synodical deputies. Upon acceptance of a call, the previously deposed minister shall be reordained.

Note: Councils and classes should take note of the regulations regarding suspension and/or

deposition from ministerial office adopted by Synod 1998 (see Acts of Synod 1998, pp. 396-99).

### **Supplement, Article 84**

#### Regulations for Reinstatement of Office Bearers Guilty of Sexual Misconduct

When a former office bearer who confessed to or was determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct leading up to suspension and deposition from office requests reinstatement:

1. Reinstatement to office shall be denied to individuals who:
  - a. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against a minor.
  - b. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct against more than one victim in a single church or community.
  - c. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct in more than one community or church.
  - d. Confessed to or are determined to be guilty of sexual misconduct and other related ungodly conduct. Examples of related ungodly conduct include but are not limited to engaging in adult or child pornography, engaging a prostitute for sexual contact, exhibitionistic or voyeuristic behavior, attending a nudist camp, sexual addiction, and so forth.
  
2. Councils and classes shall not reinstate a former office bearer suspended or deposed for sexual misconduct or ungodly conduct not covered in items 1, a-d without receiving the advice of legal counsel concerning the church's liability and the advice of a Christian licensed psychologist concerning the likelihood of an office bearer's reoffending.

Note: In Church Order Article 84 and its Supplement, the expression sexual misconduct is defined as: The sexual exploitation of a parishioner, minor or adult, regardless of age or consent, for the purposes of sexual gratification and maintaining control over the person. The expression determined abuser is defined as: An office bearer who either confesses to or is adjudicated to be guilty of sexual misconduct by a court of competent jurisdiction or an ecclesiastical assembly. (Acts of Synod 2004, pp. 611-12)

### **Appendix N: Guidelines for Handling Objectionable Behavior Directed Toward a Pastor**

(May include harassment, stalking, and other inappropriate behavior)

***Disclaimer:** These guidelines have been developed by Safe Church team members and the Safe Church Advisory Committee. They have not been officially endorsed by the CRCNA, and are designed to be used as a sample only. It is recommended that a church always obtain a legal review of its policies.*

**PREAMBLE** Pastors are often put on a pedestal. Sometimes vulnerable and/or needy parishioners become fixated on their pastor, fantasizing about either a romantic attachment towards the pastor, or attempting to exert a pseudo-control over the pastor reinforced by their vilification of the pastor to others, by threats, or by stalking.

A pastor has the right to expect that when he or she is targeted with unwanted attention or stalking, or when his/her work is being undermined by a parishioner's harassment or vilification, the office-bearers of the church will help him/her identify the problem, help him/her to ensure proper boundaries can be maintained, and generally help support the pastor in dealing with harassment or other objectionable or inappropriate behavior, which may have veered into the area of criminal behavior.

## **DEFINITIONS**

*Consistory:* The assembly of the local church composed of the minister(s) and the elders. The consistory oversees the doctrine and life of the members of the congregation and exercises admonition and discipline of the members when appropriate. In addition, the consistory provides regular pastoral care and discharges other tasks specifically related to the offices of minister and elder.

*Council:* The assembly of the local church composed of the minister(s), elders and deacons. The council is responsible for the common administration of the church and the admonition and discipline of fellow office bearers when appropriate.

*Psychological Attachment:* A clinically understood inappropriate desire for closeness with the pastor by a parishioner. Behaviors may take the nature of being excessively loving or hateful.

*Stalking:* Conduct directed at a specific person that would cause a reasonable person to feel fear. Stalking involves repeated unwanted contact or attempt at contact, e.g. calls, visits, electronic communications. (For more elaboration, see Appendix A)

*Harassment:* Continued, unwanted, inappropriate demands, threats, gestures, innuendos, remarks, jokes, slurs, displays of offensive material, or any other intimidating or assaultive behavior towards another person, or about that person to a third party. (For more elaboration, see Appendix A)

*Sexual Misconduct:* All forms of sexual assault, behaviors of a seductive or exploitative sexual nature, unwanted sexual attention, inappropriate emotional intimacy, unsuitable demands, displays of offensive material, or other related intimidating behavior, as well as sexual activity such as touching, kissing, fondling, or intercourse.

*Objectionable or Inappropriate Behavior:* Refers to behavior that may not fit accepted definitions of harassment, abuse, or misconduct, but nonetheless would cause a reasonable person to feel seriously offended and would violate the trust and well-being of individuals and the community of believers.

*Emotional Abuse:* Abuse characterized by behavior that may result in psychological trauma, including anxiety, chronic depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder. Such abuse is often associated with situations of power imbalance. The abuse may take the form of verbal and emotional cruelty.

*Power Imbalance:* The presumption of a person having greater power in a relationship due to age difference, vulnerability difference, status difference, difference in title or given authority, or other differences that make one person more likely to acquiesce to another. A pastor by virtue of position and status is assumed to have greater power than a parishioner.

### **Boundary Setting**

Since the reality of the relationship between a pastor and a parishioner assumes an imbalance of power, it is important not to confuse sexual and/or physical abuse with harassment and/or stalking behavior.

Perpetration of abuse assumes a power imbalance, where the perpetrator has more power (by virtue of age difference or difference in status and position) than the victim. It is the pastor's responsibility (by virtue of his/her position of greater power) to set and keep boundaries with a parishioner.

In the case of a parishioner who harasses and/or stalks the pastor, it is incumbent upon the council of the church to support the pastor's boundary setting, to limit such a parishioner's behavior, and protect the pastor. This may necessitate special visitation with the parishioner by council representatives in which limits are clearly stated. Limitations may be that the pastor will not visit the parishioner in his/her home, that all of the parishioner's calls are screened by the pastor's administrative assistant or spouse, or that all electronic communication from the parishioner is blocked. Pastoral discipline as a consequence to the parishioner may be appropriate if he/she does not stop the harassing behavior. A report to the police if the harassment veers into the criminal behavior of threatening and/or stalking of the pastor may also be required.

### **Confidentiality**

Complaints of this nature need to be addressed with sensitivity to those affected. Information regarding the complaint expressed among the pastor, the accused parishioner, and the members of the council, as they are drawn in to deal with the situation, must be kept in confidence.

### **Steps in dealing with complaints of a Pastor against a Parishioner**

**Step #1** – The Pastor indicates to the parishioner that the behavior must cease

The pastor must ensure that the parishioner is fully aware of the specific behavior that is objectionable and the reasons why the behavior is inappropriate, unwelcome, and must cease. It is recommended that the pastor keep a written record both of the unwanted advances, his/her response to each such behavior, and the parishioner's response to any expressed objection

**Step #2** – Determine the nature of the behavior If the objectionable behavior continues, the nature of the behavior must be assessed. Is it harassment, emotional abuse, psychological attachment, stalking, or something else? Appropriate further action depends upon the nature and severity of the behavior. The pastor may wish to consult with the council or its Executive Committee for assistance in assessing the behavior. Members of the local Safe Church team, the denominational office of Safe Church Ministry, or the office of Pastor-Church Relations may also

serve as valuable resources at this point.

**Step #3** – Ensure that the pastor and the parishioner each have appropriate support The pastor may report to the council what is going on and request that a support person be assigned to each party concerned. Of particular importance is the establishment and strengthening of appropriate boundaries between the pastor and the parishioner.

**Step #4** – A caring and confronting visit with the parishioner The pastor may ask one or two office bearers to accompany him/her in visiting with the parishioner. The purpose of the visit is to listen to the parishioner's explanation of the behavior, and to stress that the behavior is unwanted and objectionable to the pastor and must be discontinued. If the parishioner continues the objectionable behavior or disputes the interpretation of the behavior, further action needs to be taken by the council.

**Step #5** – The church council offers support and takes action if necessary If the parishioner continues the objectionable behavior, the council must exercise a plan. The plan may include a written statement of boundaries to which the parishioner agrees. Appropriate response to the pastoral needs of the pastor and the parishioner must be given attention. If necessary, discipline of the parishioner as outlined in the Church Order may be considered by the consistory. Resolution of the conflict must be sought. If the behavior is severe and illegal, a police report must be made. Protection of the privacy and professional life of the pastor must be provided through strong boundary setting, including, if needed, a Personal Protection or No Contact Order. 4

**Step #6** – Going beyond the local council If the council refuses to address the situation or refuses to stay involved to the degree the pastor needs assistance, the pastor may need to find alternative support. Options include contacting Safe Church Ministry, the Office of Pastor-Church Relations, the Regional Pastor, or Church Visitors.

### **Conclusion**

A safe church environment is the responsibility of the whole church. The pastor of a church is responsible for helping a church develop and maintain proper professional boundaries in his/her relationships with parishioners, as supervisor of other church staff, within the council and leadership of the church, and as part of the council. The council of the church must be supportive of its pastor and must ensure the administration of the church includes safe church policies and procedures. Such policies and procedures must outline expectations in the event of abuse or harassment, including the harassment of a pastor by a parishioner. Participants of a church must agree to be led by their council and pastor, and abide by the policies and procedures which the church has adopted.

## Appendix O: Covenant for Council and all Committees/Teams

### Good News CRC

#### ***Behavioural Covenants—Holy Manners for a Faith Community:***

*A behavioural covenant is a written document developed by leaders, agreed to and owned by its creators and practiced on a daily basis as a spiritual discipline. The Covenant answers the question, “How will we behave (how will we live together?) when we don’t understand each other and when we don’t agree?”*

- Gil Rendle, Behavioural Covenants in Congregations

#### ***Guidelines for Loving Relationships and Values to Guide Our Interaction***

At Good News Christian Reformed Church as a part of \_\_\_\_\_

- We seek to build each other up and not tear down.
- We respect and honour the office of all pastors, staff members and lay leaders.
- We seek to communicate clearly, completely and in a timely fashion.
- We offer our opinions with charity and humility.
- We make positive investments in each other’s lives.
- We seek to discover what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for us or for some small group in the church.
- We commit to keeping our word (i.e. what we agree to do explicitly or implicitly) and commit the understanding that integrity means “doing what we say we will do, when we say we will do it, in the manner in which it is meant to be done”. If we create an integrity gap, we will do the following:
  1. Approach the person or group with whom we have the integrity gap.
  2. Ask those involved in what ways our failure to keep our word negatively impacted them.
  3. Actively listen and ask for forgiveness
  4. Re-commit to our word in a manner that will ensure follow-through. (May need to adjust the original commitment.)
- We accept disagreement, conflict and evaluation as normal and natural. In this regard we will seek to deal constructively with disagreements or conflicts by utilizing one or all of the following (Matthew 18:15-17):
  1. Going directly to the person with whom there is a disagreement/conflict.
  2. Having an agreed upon third party meet with the conflicted persons.
  3. Agree to meet with an assigned committee to work out the disagreement or conflict.

I have read and understand this behavioural covenant and commit myself to put this into practice in all my relationships with the pastor, staff and lay leadership.

Council/Committee:

Name

Signature

Date