

## Home Street Mennonite Church

### Safe and Respectful Congregation Commitment

May 23, 2017

God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy, and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world.<sup>1</sup>

#### Intentions of the Policy

Because we at Home Street Mennonite Church (HSMC) are a faith community, our congregation is committed to create and conscientiously model a secure environment for ourselves and for all who pass through our doors. In this commitment, we agree to be vigilant about physical, sexual, relational, and spiritual safety.

Some people served in our congregation may be vulnerable because they are unable to speak for themselves due to such personal barriers as age, position, dis/ability, nonfluent communication, timidity, or life circumstances. This plan gives particular attention to the safety of persons who are vulnerable, and to the responsibilities of our elected, appointed and hired leaders. However, every person who enters our building or participates in our activities is encouraged to contribute to the safe environment.

Beyond setting out guidelines and procedures, by adopting this policy we commit ourselves to ongoing discernment and education. We work to cultivate Christian qualities that undergird safety and respect in our congregation and contribute to spiritual health. These include:

- a welcoming and non-judgmental attitude
- humility and consideration for others
- courageous authenticity in our relationships
- healthy respect for each person's boundaries of body, mind, and spirit
- commitment to open and direct communication, discussion and discernment, even of potentially contentious issues
- the use of honest, but supportive and compassionate words in our communication
- a commitment to listen to one another

#### 1. Attitudes and Resulting Actions

We expect those who minister in the name of the Church, or under the auspices of HSMC, to exhibit a profound respect for all, and to make relationships with God and among us valued priorities.

We study Scripture and strive to live faithfully by its guidance.

We follow the counsel of Mennonite Church Manitoba, and we respect and abide by the laws of Manitoba and Canada.

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<sup>1</sup> Vision statement of Mennonite Church Canada, adopted in 1995

We urge the transformation of attitudes that rise out of or lead to harm. For example:

- self-centred importance is transformed by humble regard for others;
- indiscrete displays of temper are transformed by a listening stance;
- prejudice is transformed by respect, regardless of social status;
- gossip, and spreading unfounded fears or rumours, are arrested by truth-telling;
- ignorance of, or disrespect for inequalities in power are challenged by insight;
- disputing the integrity or faith of those with whom we disagree is transformed by discernment that considers multiple viewpoints;
- ridicule, shame, belittling, and abusive language are rejected, while compassionate, constructive, mutual correction is affirmed;
- harassment, inappropriate touch, or abuse are not tolerated.

## 2. Personnel

All HSMC staff and volunteers who work with vulnerable people in moderate- to high-risk situations (workers including paid staff, youth sponsors, retreat leaders, personal mentors, and caregivers in private spaces) will participate in formal background screening involving, at minimum, reference checks and police vulnerable sector checks. These procedures are guided by the Safe Congregation Coordinator and will be paid by HSMC.

So that HSMC program providers are protected from encountering compromised situations, our staff and workers pledge to:

- work in mutually accountable teams;
- identify and address personal needs, reactions, and feelings by establishing supportive, accountable relationships and networks both inside and outside the congregation;
- identify potential risks of our activities, prioritizing the personal safety and the best interests of the people with whom we work;
- regularly discuss program plans and time commitments, risk and safety planning, and roles and responsibility management;
- work within the limits of our own training, competency, and position, making timely referrals to qualified professionals for financial, legal, health, or personal advice;
- maintain respectful privacy and confidentiality that do not extend to maintaining secret relationships or information;
- manage supervisory responsibilities in ethical and respectful ways;
- maintain proper professional and personal boundaries, and not to confuse them;
- participate at least once in three years in a training event concerning psychological and spiritual health;
- pass on important learnings as we mentor developing leaders.

The congregation empowers our appointed leaders to intervene in, or cancel, any HSMC events, that do not conform to these Safety Commitments.

## 3. Activities and transportation

No harassing, hazing, or indiscrete flirtatious behaviour will be permitted.

No alcohol or nonprescribed substances will be permitted on HSMC premises or at church-sponsored events.

Personal and emotional boundaries will be honoured. Reasonable efforts will be made to maintain privacy appropriate to the age and maturity of each individual. Individuals are encouraged to be open with others, and voluntarily share experiences and questions.

Children under the age of seven years will be accompanied by a responsible adult, preferably their own parent.

In planning our programs and events, we recognize that risks vary, but we pledge vigilance to minimize risk wherever and whenever possible:

**Low-risk events** (public events such as worship services, potluck dinners, or open Sunday School events): All low-risk church sponsored events will be planned with the consultation and input of a responsible adult.

**Moderate-risk events** (when vulnerable people are in groups, such as evening or weekend meetings, or workshops): These will be planned with the consultation and input of a responsible adult. They will be conducted with more than one responsible adult present at all times. Participation in moderate-risk events by minors will require parental permission. Only roadworthy passenger vehicles driven by qualified drivers will be used for transportation to off-site activities, and drivers will provide event organizers with driver license numbers and auto registration information. Regular drivers will be encouraged to participate in extra driving safety courses. People may not be transported in truck beds, campers, trailers, etc.

**High-risk events** (those that include an undressing or overnight component, or extended opportunities to be alone with vulnerable people, such as ongoing mentoring relationships, camps, retreats, or multiple-day service opportunities): These events will be planned with the consultation and input of a responsible HSMC authority. Participation by minors will require written parental permission. At least two responsible adults per ten participants (including both genders in gender-mixed events) will be present at all times. During overnight events no child under the age of twelve is permitted to sleep alone in the same room with a teen or adult, other than with his/her own guardian or family member. Adults and minors may share large sleeping spaces such as a dormitory, classroom, or gym if at least two responsible adults (of both genders in mixed settings) are present.

#### 4. Education

All HSMC members are encouraged to understand and promote the protections of the policy.

All HSMC workers, including paid staff, youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, and elected and appointed committee members, will be informed annually of the provisions of the Safe Congregation Commitment (see Appendix 1), and will discuss and sign a personal pledge to honour the policy (See Appendix 2).

Whenever possible, our ongoing programs will include safety education and information appropriate to the interests and maturity of participants, and to the topic under study.

## 5. Handling Our Response When Boundaries are Compromised

HSMC will appoint a Safe Congregation Coordinator and at least one alternate, who will report at least quarterly to Leadership Council. The congregation will be informed annually of the coordinator identities and responsibilities. Their responsibilities will include:

- arranging for reference checks and police vulnerable sector checks for the relevant leaders in moderate- and high-risk activities, supervising personnel to conduct these checks, and maintaining confidential records;
- monitoring and encouraging the efforts of participants to maintain a safe environment;
- providing guidance and discernment to anyone who asks about the policy;
- arranging for annual education of HSMC workers regarding the Safety Commitment;
- maintaining consultation with outside professionals as necessary.

When a HSMC member suspects any unsafe behaviour (past or current) toward a vulnerable individual, our first obligation is to intervene immediately, and to discuss our concerns without delay with a Safe Congregation Coordinator and/or a pastor. Allegations regarding a minor vulnerable person will be reported to police and/or child protection authorities. Recognizing the deep personal and collective crisis that reports of concern can cause for many, we try to respond with careful discernment, compassion, and good judgement.

Concerns about **uncredentialed lay leadership**: HSMC, through the Safe Congregation Coordinator, will follow the procedures outlined by Mennonite Church Manitoba as closely as is feasible. These procedures will usually include:

- the immediate, confidential suspension of responsibilities of the person against whom allegations are made, continuing until concerns are resolved;
- the appointment of supports for all persons affected by allegations, including the complainant and the person suspected and, as needed, family members;
- the appointment of an external investigator to gather evidence that either confirms or disproves the allegations, and to report to the Safe Congregation Coordinator and/or the authorities as is appropriate, within thirty days.

Concerns about **credentialed leaders** (ministers ordained or licensed by Mennonite Church Manitoba): When a HSMC member suspects any kind of risk-taking or disrespectful behaviour or misconduct by a credentialed leader, concerns will be discussed without delay with a Safe Congregation Coordinator or a pastor. Misconduct allegations will be referred by the pastor and/or the Safe Congregation Coordinator to the Ministerial Leadership Commission (MLC) of Mennonite Church Manitoba for review and investigation. HSMC will cooperate as needed with the MLC in this process.

## 6. Additional Safety Measures

The focus of this policy is safety that protects against abuse in relationships. However, HSMC, through committee structures, also attends to issues of emergency preparedness, accident and injury prevention, food safety, appropriate financial accountability, property, building, and grounds stewardship, fire prevention, and crime prevention.

## Appendix 1 - Home Street Mennonite Church Safe Congregation Education Commitments

All HSMC members are encouraged to understand and promote the protections of this commitment.

All HSMC workers, including paid staff, youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, and elected and appointed committee members, will be informed annually of the provisions of the Safe Congregation Commitment, and will discuss and sign a personal pledge to promote the protections of the policy.

Whenever possible and appropriate, our programs will include safety education information for participants.

Regular education efforts will include, but will not be limited to:

- the policy
- reasons for and goals of the commitment
- what is meant by 'respect'
- what is meant by 'vulnerability'
- healthy and unhealthy boundaries in ministry
- the limits of respectful confidentiality, and distinctions from secrecy
- assessment of low, moderate, and high risk
- checking references and arranging for police vulnerable sector checks
- the dynamics of abusive relationships, and their impact
- duties to report concerns to appropriate authorities within and outside HSMC
- to whom, and how, to report concerns
- what happens after a report

### Resources

- Canadian Centre for Child Protection <https://www.protectchildren.ca>
- Church Mutual Insurance Company safety resources - guidelines and pamphlets
- Dove's Nest <http://dovesnest.net>
- Faith Trust Institute - sexual abuse and domestic violence
- Plan to Protect free assessment <http://www.plantoprotect.com>
- Safe Church Environment of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface

Appendix 2 - Home Street Mennonite Church Personal Safety Pledge

**A. For all persons working within the programs** of Home Street Mennonite Church (HSMC):

- \_\_\_ I desire to support congregational programs through service and leadership.
- \_\_\_ Through the exercise of my responsibilities, I will do my best to contribute to a safe congregational environment.

In my actions, I commit to modelling relational safety and respect:

- \_\_\_ I will be vigilant about the physical, sexual, relational, and spiritual safety of those with whom I work.
- \_\_\_ I promise to preserve appropriate and respectful privacy of those for whom I am responsible.
- \_\_\_ I will study and follow Scripture.
- \_\_\_ When I serve in moderate- to high-risk situations, I will follow the guidance of HSMC leaders, and I agree to take the precautions described in the HSMC Safe Congregation Commitment as I plan and carry out programs.
- \_\_\_ I will speak with a HSMC pastor or Safe Congregation Coordinator as soon as I become concerned about the wellbeing or safety of a program participant.
- \_\_\_ I will exercise respect when supervising or mentoring a person learning leadership.

In my actions, I will refrain from:

- \_\_\_ using alcohol or nonprescribed substances on HSMC premises and at congregational events
- \_\_\_ flirting, harassment, and hazing;

In my attitudes:

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

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Signature

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Date

**B. For persons working with vulnerable persons** in moderate- to high-risk situations:

\_\_\_ I consent to formal background screening.

References: (Name, contact information, telephone, e-mail)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

\_\_\_ I have received information regarding police vulnerable sector checks, and will pursue that application.

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Signature

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Date