

# A Guide for Responding to Congregational Sexual Harassment and Abuse

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# A Guide for Responding to Congregational Sexual Harassment and Abuse

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## **WHY WAS THIS GUIDE CREATED?**

While churches are meant to be safe places of worship, refuge, community and connection, we know that churches are comprised of imperfect human beings, and that situations of sexual harassment and harm occur with more frequency than most realize. With the rise of the #MeToo and #ChurchToo movement, more individuals are starting to speak about experiences of sexual harm in their lives, including in the life of the church. That said, those harmed still face many barriers when it comes to disclosing uncomfortable or violating experiences, especially within church settings. These barriers are often due to fear — fear of not being believed, of hurting the person who acted harmfully, of creating division and conflict, of an investigation, or of retaliation (to name a few). Most often, those violated just want the situation to stop and for the impact to go away.

This resource is informed by the principles of survivor-centred care, recognizing that when the needs of those harmed are prioritized there is a greater likelihood that healing will take place and less of a likelihood that a formal, investigative process will need to occur. Adjudicative processes that mimic justice system proceedings are rarely restorative for either party and continue to be a barrier for reporting. While formal investigations are necessary in certain situations (e.g. clergy sexual misconduct), this guide explores various ways to support individuals reporting sexual harm, offering intervention strategies in cases where the harm-doer is a fellow congregant.

## **WHO CREATED IT?**

The development of this guide began in 2017 when several pastors from Mennonite Church Manitoba and MCC Manitoba's abuse response and prevention coordinator established a working group with the goal of developing a resource to help churches navigate situations of sexual harassment between church members. The working group researched documents and policies that spoke to harassment and abuse between church members, but very few offered practical guidance for how to respond in healing-centred ways. As such, David Driedger, pastor of First Mennonite Church in Manitoba, drafted a policy template based on an extensive literature review.

This guide has gone through many hands and iterations. The acknowledgement section speaks to the many minds and experts that were a part of this guide's development. The result of this collaborative effort is what you see here.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

This resource in and of itself does not solve the problem of harassment or abuse in faith communities, but its implementation can support a cultural shift where abuses of power and dignity violations are talked about and addressed in the life of the church. While there are policies for clergy sexual misconduct and child protection, there are no comprehensive policies to guide the response process of sexual harm towards adult congregants, visitors, staff or clergy by other members of the community.

What follows are recommendations for how this guide can best be used

**Infrastructure:** This guide is best used within a congregational or denominational infrastructure tasked with responding to safe church needs. We strongly encourage denominations and larger non-denominational churches to create a *Safe Church Network or Team*. In the context of a denomination, each respective church would appoint a volunteer representative to be their *Safe Church Coordinator*.<sup>1</sup> A staff member from the denominational head would organize this team of representatives. Larger non-denominational churches should have a *Safe Church Team* comprised of congregants with a heart for abuse response and prevention work.

*Safe Church Networks or Teams* serve to resource, educate and support their communities in safe church matters and healthy congregational life. The network model allows for congregants to take ownership of safe church practices while receiving support and educational opportunities via the network. The *Safe Church Coordinator (SCC)* is also an additional person with whom congregants can discuss personal matters concerning safety or harassment. When this policy refers to a *Safe Church Coordinator (SCC)*, it assumes your church has someone in this type of role.

- 1. Adaptation:** We anticipate that aspects of this guide will not reflect your church or denominational structure. As such, we encourage you to adapt it to reflect the organizational structure and roles within your church/denomination whilst maintaining the integrity of the content and processes. While this resource is free to use, we ask that you credit Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and clearly reference the original version.
- 2. Other forms of harassment or abuse:** While this guide is specific to experiences of sexual harassment or abuse, we recognize that other types of violations occur in faith communities including but not limited to racism, homophobia, bullying, online harassment, etc. Many of the guidelines and processes outlined in this resource are helpful when responding to any type of harm.
- 3. Make it public:** While we are not calling this resource a policy, it is for all intents and purposes meant to operate like one. The language of the guide is directed to both congregants who have been harmed, and to leaders who are overseeing an intervention process. Part of being a trauma-sensitive church is ensuring that people know how situations of harm will be addressed should they come forward. This guide is meant to be “adopted” by churches and made accessible to all people. In doing so, your church acknowledges the reality of sexual harm, and sets a precedent for how it will be addressed. This is part of the work of prevention.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix A.1 for information on how your church or denomination can organize and run a Safe Church Network or team.

## INTRODUCTION

Instances of sexual harassment and abuse can happen at church or among those attending church. This document is meant to help provide the support you need to both understand and respond to your experience.

This document reflects a commitment by *[insert name of specific church here]* to support all those who have experienced, have witnessed or have concerns and questions about sexual harassment and abuse within our congregation. As a church we are committed to the work of nurturing healthy and respectful relationships that embody an ethic of love. This includes i) actively responding to those in our communities who have experienced harmful or violating actions in ways that prioritize healing and safety, and ii) recognizing that the call to forgiveness has often been misused in situations of power imbalance and harm, causing re-traumatization and enabling the harm-doer to perpetuate further injury. True restoration occurs only within a culture where truth-telling, safety, support and accountability are prioritized.

Much of this guide directly addresses those who have seen or experienced sexual harassment or abuse in the church. Recognizing that the response a victim-survivor receives has a significant impact on their potential for positive recovery, the priority is to ensure that those who disclose abuse will experience support. Once a disclosure has been made this policy is intended to provide guidance and facilitation of clear, fair and supportive responses to all those involved.

### PLEASE NOTE: THIS GUIDE DOES NOT APPLY TO THE FOLLOWING SITUATIONS:

- **If the person who enacted sexual misconduct or harm is a pastor or minister, please refer to the Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure.<sup>2</sup>**
- **If you suspect or know that a child/minor is experiencing abuse, it must be reported to child welfare authorities.<sup>3</sup>**
- **Part II of this guide only applies to situations where the harm-doer is a member/congregant of the church named above.**

Nothing in this policy impacts rights you may have under the law, such as human rights legislation, occupational health and safety legislation or the Criminal Code of Canada.

#### **This document is divided into two parts:**

**Part I** outlines support and resources for those who have experienced sexual harm or abuse, focusing on ensuring that the person harmed receives the support, resources and information they need to feel safe, and journey toward healing.

**Part II** provides guidance if the situation requires an intervention on the part of the church. It outlines options for holding the harm-doer accountable and putting safety measures in place for the victim and/or broader community. *Part II* is meant to fairly address all concerns and provide support and accountability for all those involved and impacted.

<sup>2</sup> To address harassment or abuse by ordained church leaders see Mennonite Church Canada's Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure: Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure: Mennonite Church Canada/Mennonite Church USA (commonword.ca). <sup>3</sup> The definition of a minor varies according to province. Generally it is a person under 18 or 19 years of age. See here for provincial definitions: <https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/corporate/publications-manuals/operational-bulletins-manuals/refugee-protection/canada/processing-provincial-definitions-minor.html>

# **PART I**

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OR  
WITNESS OF SEXUAL  
HARASSMENT AND/OR ABUSE

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## A. Understanding What You Experienced or Saw

Did you see or experience something at church or in relation to someone who attends church that left you feeling uncomfortable, unsettled or disturbed? Did you see or experience sexual harassment or abuse? Are you not sure what to call what you saw or experienced?

“ Anything you saw or experienced that did not feel right is worth talking about with someone you trust. ”

There is a wide spectrum of experiences (sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual abuse, etc.) that impact people in a wide range of ways (irritation, discomfort, unsafe, fear, traumatized). Sexual harassment and/or abuse can be *felt* even when it is difficult to accurately *define*. It's not always easy to categorize or put a name to your experience. Sometimes all one knows is that the situation didn't or doesn't feel right, or that it left one feeling uneasy. Below are definitions that may help you name and/or make sense of your experience.

## B. Definitions

The following definitions and examples do not cover every aspect of sexual harassment and abuse but will hopefully help give you better context for what you saw or experienced.

Generally speaking, harassment and abuse revolves around power and control. This does not mean it is the *conscious intention* of the individual to gain power and control, but it nevertheless results in the feeling and experience of powerlessness; of not being able to control or have agency over one's boundaries. If, as the result of someone else's behaviour, you feel insecure, frightened, marginalized, belittled or manipulated, then you may want to consider whether you are being harassed or abused.<sup>4</sup>

**Sexual Harassment** occurs when an individual is subject to *unwanted and/or offensive* sexual advances, gestures or comments. It can occur at work, school, in stores, on the bus, at social gatherings and in churches. This behaviour can be enacted by a stranger, people we know, relatives or even close family members. It can include:

- sexually suggestive remarks, jokes or gestures
- displaying degrading pictures or objects
- unwanted physical contact such as touching, pinching, patting and/or sexual demands
- comments that demean or disrespect a person's sexual or gender identity
- grooming actions (giving of expensive gifts, situating oneself to be alone with the individual being targeted)<sup>5</sup>

**Sexual Assault** is sexual acts committed WITHOUT a person's consent or against a person's will. The absence of a "no" is not consent. Consent is clear, active, ongoing and willing. It is not silence and it is not ambiguous. Consent is not based on what someone agreed to in the past. For example,

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<sup>4</sup> While this document deals only with sexual forms of harassment and abuse, there are many other types of abuse and we encourage you to pursue a similar process as that outlined here if you are a victim of some other form of harassment or abuse, beginning with speaking about your experience with someone knowledgeable and trusted. <sup>5</sup> For more information on workplace sexual harassment, contact the Canadian Human Rights Commission at: [Canadian Human Rights Commission / Commission canadienne des droits de la personne \(chrc-ccdp.gc.ca\)](https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca)

a dating or married couple can be consensually intimate one night, but this does not mean a partner consents to the same thing next week. It can include:

- non-consensual vaginal or anal intercourse (rape)
- forcing and/or pressuring a person to perform a sexual activity
- unwanted sexual touching
- attempting or threatening rape
- refusing to use protection e.g. condom

Furthermore, where there is a significant imbalance of power due to status or role, a seemingly consensual relationship may be a breach of fiduciary<sup>6</sup> duty (for example, professor-student, therapist-client, staff-congregant).

Sexual assault is a crime in Canada. Reporting to the police is always the victim's decision, unless it involves a minor<sup>7</sup> or vulnerable<sup>8</sup> adult. In such cases, anyone who has reason to be concerned must report it to local authorities.

**Sexual Abuse** is any type of unwanted sexual contact. Most often the victim is violated repeatedly by a person who they should be able to trust, such as a family member, teacher, relative, coach or spouse. When the undesired sexual action occurs only once it is typically called sexual assault. Any type of sexual activity between an older individual and a minor is understood as child sexual abuse. It can include:

- unwanted sexual touching
- online child abuse images (child pornography); possessing, distributing or producing
- forced intercourse
- exhibitionism (showing of genitals)
- voyeurism (watching an individual in intimate acts such as getting undressed)
- unwanted exposure to pornographic material

**Sexual Exploitation** is the abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes. This includes profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another. Generally, the perpetrator will take advantage of an individual's needs and vulnerabilities for their own gain. It can include:

- trafficking of humans
- non-consensual posting or sharing of sexual images or videos
- offering something (money, opportunities, good reviews or grades) to an individual in exchange for sexual favours
- coercing an individual to share sexual images or videos
- online child abuse images

Your experience may fit into more than one category, or you may feel uncertain whether what you saw or experienced fits one of the definitions.

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<sup>6</sup> Fiduciary duty is the ethical imperative for people in positions of trust to always act in the best interest of those they serve.

<sup>7</sup> For information about age of consent see: [Age of Consent to Sexual Activity \(justice.gc.ca\)](https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/elder-aines/def/p23.html) <sup>8</sup> A vulnerable person means any adult who by nature of a physical, emotional or psychological condition is dependent on other persons for care and assistance in day-to-day living. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/fv-vf/elder-aines/def/p23.html>



*It is important to begin by trusting your experience.*

The bottom line is that if you feel unsafe, uncomfortable or distressed as a result of your experience, it is worthy of being named and speaking to someone about it.

## C. Disclosing Your Experience, or Seeking Support and/or Guidance?

Everyone has a right to address concerns over the safety and well-being of their life and of the lives of people around them. And yet, often there are reasons for not addressing these concerns including confusion about what happened, fear of what might happen if you share and a desire to protect the reputation of an individual or church. These are all understandable fears but should not keep a person from talking to trusted people about what they have seen or experienced.

Appreciation or commitment to an institution or individual should not be considered a hindrance in speaking about your experience. People and institutions can play a positive role in your life while still exhibiting harmful behaviours. Adult individuals and institutions should have the maturity and moral development to face the consequences of harassment or sexual abuse.

Reasons for disclosing are varied. You may:

- simply want leadership or someone in your church to be aware of the situation
- feel confused and need help understanding your experience
- be concerned about your safety and need support and/or protection
- want a process put in place so that the person acting harmfully is held accountable
- want to access counselling or spiritual support to discern how to proceed

**You have full autonomy in deciding how you would like to proceed.**

## D. Confidentiality

If you are seeking to talk to someone who can help you better understand your experience or what to do next, the options and resources below are available. It remains your choice as to how much and with whom you share your experience(s). No action or process will ensue without your participation and consent.

This policy commits to confidentiality around your experience. A church-leader or Safe Church Coordinator (explained under F. 2. below) may seek consultation for support, guidance and resources in order to best support you, in which case your identity will not be shared. Disclosing any personal information in an intervention process requires your consent. Confidentiality around what you disclose will be observed in all situations with the exception of the following which require mandatory reporting:

1. Suspected or reported harm to self (e.g. suicide, suicidal ideation)

2. Suspected or reported harm to others (e.g. assault or other personal injury)
3. Suspected or reported abuse or neglect of a child/minor or vulnerable person<sup>9</sup>
4. Suspected or reported abuse by a person in a position of power<sup>10</sup> which would need to be reported through the appropriate channels
5. Disclosure may be required where there is a court order forcing disclosure (this is extremely rare)
6. If an adult discloses childhood sexual abuse and the perpetrator holds a position at present day where children or vulnerable persons are in their care, CFS will need to be consulted

## E. Resource and Support Options

### 1. OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

It may be that you are not ready to speak with someone *within* the church at this time. There are many places you can go to get support and insight into your experience including:

**Please fill this section with organizations or resources that a person could access anonymously outside the church. Please include your [local sexual assault crisis centre](#). If your church has arrangements with a local counselling agency that enables congregants to access free of charge, confidential counselling, please include that information here.**

#### **MCC Abuse Response and Prevention Program**

[Abuse Response & Prevention - Manitoba MCC \(abuseresponseandprevention.ca\)](#)  
[arp@mccmanitoba.ca](mailto:arp@mccmanitoba.ca)

Available for consultation and assistance in cases of sexual harassment or abuse. Office located in Manitoba. See website for further details.

#### **Klinic Community Health - Manitoba**

[Klinic Community Health - Just Care. For Everyone.](#)

Klinic's Sexual Assault Crisis Program offers support services to anyone impacted by sexual assault, including secondary victims. They provide information on medical options, police reporting, anonymous reporting, free one-on-one counselling and advocacy support.

#### **Your Family Doctor or GP**

Ongoing experiences of sexual harassment or abuse impact one's emotional, physical and mental health. Depending on the relationship you have with your doctor, this may be a valuable and confidential place to address the effect of the situation on your health.

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<sup>9</sup> Both minor and *vulnerable* person are defined in footnotes 6 and 7 above. <sup>10</sup> This policy identifies a clergy or ministerial staff as a person in a position of power. See *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* in footnote 1 above if your experience involves a member of clergy.

## Counselling Options

Populate this section with agencies and counsellors in your province, ensuring affordable and cost-free options are included. Appendix 1. E. has a list of Manitoba specific agencies.

## Resources and Supports Related to Intimate Partner Abuse

See Appendix 1. B.

**Individual in your life** whom you trust would respond appropriately and compassionately.

## 2. WITHIN THE CHURCH

All pastoral staff should receive training on a regular basis that equips them to respond to situations of sexual harm. We encourage this to be implemented at a conference or board level. See Appendix 1 for training recommendations.

If your church does not have a female in a pastoral or leadership role, please identify a female congregant or member of church council who can fulfill the role of being a designated member of the response team.

List the names of the response team/leadership body here.

### Pastoral Staff

You may decide to talk to a pastor or spiritual care staff at your church. Your pastors should be trained in how to respond to disclosures of sexual harm and assist you in finding the resources and support you need. If your church has only male leaders and you are not comfortable sharing your experience with them, there should be an appointed female congregant who can hear your experience and connect you with appropriate support and resources.

### Safe Church Coordinator

A Safe Church Coordinator is a position held by a congregant, board member, or staff person within your community. If your church has only male leaders, this position should be held by a female. This person oversees and ensures that appropriate abuse response and prevention training and resourcing is occurring within the church. They are also appointed to receive disclosures or concerns of sexual harm/harassment by congregants. These coordinators would be members of a provincial/denominational Safe Church Network and receive ongoing training and resourcing. See Appendix 1.G. for more information on the importance of this type of denominational infrastructure and how it can best be implemented.

## 3. MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT

Depending on your experience you may have medical concerns or questions about the possible involvement of law enforcement. Your local sexual assault crisis centre has trained counsellors who can support you in navigating options related to medical or police assistance. Please see Appendix 1.D. for more information.

## F. Harm-Doer Accountability and/or Putting Safety Measures in Place

This section outlines options for holding the harm-doer accountable and/or putting safety measures in place. It is intended to fairly address all concerns and provide support and accountability for all those involved and impacted.

If you would like action taken within the church to address the situation, you will need to write up your experience and/or speak to an appointed person within the church who can assist you. You may consider raising your concerns together with an advocate or seeking counsel outside the church before approaching the church for remedial action.

If you are ready to proceed with disclosing an event of sexual harassment or abuse to the appropriate individuals (see E.2) in the congregation you can consider the following options.

### 1. ANONYMOUS REPORTING

You have the option of an anonymous report.

It is, however, important to be aware that anonymous reports are problematic because they limit the church's ability to respond or investigate thoroughly. Further, since the complainant's identity is unknown, they cannot be consulted in the process. That being said, the church would still prefer to know if there is a problem and if you are not comfortable identifying yourself, you can choose the anonymous report option.

The church will determine if there should be an investigation of the issues complained about and typically, if the allegation is serious, will approach the person about whom the anonymous report has been made. Other potential witnesses will be interviewed.

If there is an anonymous report of child abuse, abuse of a vulnerable adult or other criminal activity, the church will comply with legal requirements regarding reporting (as previously noted above). In any event, the information from an anonymous report will be retained on file. Such information may prove useful if other reports regarding similar incidents or individuals surface.

If, at a later time, you would like to claim the report and remove anonymity in light of changed circumstances, additional events or other reports, that remains your choice.

Anonymous reports will be kept within the local congregation for a period of 50 years. See Appendix 2 for anonymous report form.

### 2. REPORTING AS A WITNESS

If you witnessed what you consider to be harassment or sexual abuse between congregational members/participants, you are encouraged to fill out a report and speak to those designated above in section E.2. When possible, it is preferred that the witness make the potential victim aware of their intention to report. If a witness report is made it will be the responsibility of the leadership body to contact the identified victim and offer support as laid out under 3. Disclosing as a Victim (below).

If the victim decides to proceed with their own report this will begin the process outlined under 3. Disclosing as a Victim (below).

### 3. DISCLOSING AS A VICTIM

Your safety and well-being are a priority. When you speak to someone from the designated leadership list in section E.2. they will offer to connect you with an advocate/support person<sup>11</sup> who can help you assess and explore the following items. If you prefer to address these items with your pastor, that is fine as well.

**Safety:** Initial safety planning will be set in place. This should include an exploration of all the spaces in which you might interact with the harm-doer and how it will be dealt with.

**Support:** You should receive resource and support options both from within and outside the church including, but not limited to:

- practical and/or financial assistance
- counselling options
- resource options
- support/advocacy person

**Exploration of recourse:** Discuss potential options for addressing the harm-doer, ensuring the behaviour stops and future safeguarding. What are your needs? <sup>12</sup>

**Assistance in filling out a formal report** (optional): A formal report is necessary if you want the church to actively respond to your disclosure and intervene (see options below) or if you want the church to keep a record of the harm-doer's behaviour.

If you do not wish for the leadership body to take any active steps in response to your disclosure, that is to be respected. However, if what you share falls under the guidelines for mandatory reporting or poses a significant safety concern for the congregation (due to the severity of the incident or position of the person), some form of action will likely need to be taken. The leadership body should consult with MCC's Abuse Response and Prevention Network,<sup>13</sup> who can provide counsel on how to proceed. No action should be taken without you first being informed so that you can speak to any fears or concerns you have.

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**11** Note to Church Leadership: Typically, it is best when the support/advocate person is not connected to the church or a friend/family member of the victim. The support person is available to walk with them throughout any proceeding processes. You can also contact MCC's Abuse Response and Prevention network for resources on victim advocacy. They may also have individuals they can refer to offer support. **12** Note to church leadership: This references the need for the church to be aware of labour laws regarding any recourse for non-credentialed employees. **13** Abuse Response & Prevention - Manitoba MCC ([abuseresponseandprevention.ca](http://abuseresponseandprevention.ca))

## **PART II**

# CHURCH RESPONSE TO REPORTS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT OR ABUSE

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There are a variety of ways the church can respond to disclosures of harassment and abuse. The response will need to follow very closely from the particular circumstances of each incident. There are, however, some broad guidelines and intervention strategies that can help guide the process.

For the purposes of clarity this section will use the following terminology:

- **Complainant** refers to the person who claims to have experienced harassment or sexual abuse.
- **Witness** refers to someone who claims to have witnessed harassment or sexual abuse.
- **Respondent** refers to the person accused of harassment or sexual abuse.
- **Leadership body** refers to those in the congregation designated to receive and respond to reports of harassment and sexual abuse as noted in E.2.<sup>14</sup>

## A. Informal Process: Verbal Request Acknowledging Harassment and Commitment to Changed Behaviour

If the goal of disclosing is so that the harm-doer is made aware that their behaviour constituted harassment (again, harassment is primarily defined by the complainant's experience of behaviour as harassment), so that they commit to refrain from such behaviour, then a plan of clear communication and accountability will be developed between the *complainant* and *leadership body*.

The meeting with the *respondent* will include at minimum a description of the incident(s), how it impacted the *complainant* and a clear request for this behaviour to cease immediately. This meeting can be concluded with a request for the *complainant* to sign a statement of mutually agreed upon behaviour as well as an offer of further resourcing or supports for the *respondent*<sup>15</sup> for the purposes of greater insight and awareness.

The *complainant* should not be under any obligation to have a face-to-face meeting with the *respondent*. However, if the *complainant* would like to personally address their concerns to the *respondent* either in person or through written communication, that remains their choice. Continued support and/or advocacy should be offered in assisting them with this process.

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<sup>14</sup> If your church does not have a Safe Church Coordinator this body would be comprised of a minister and a member of church council that brings gender parity. <sup>15</sup> In situations where the respondent's behaviour may be due in part to cognitive or developmental challenges, a community support plan may include alternate opportunities for the respondent in order to remain involved in church activities. This is only necessary in activity contexts where the possibility of further harassment is possible.

## B. Formal Congregational Response

If the *complainant* requests a more thorough process and feels it can be accomplished within the resources of the congregation<sup>16</sup>, a plan will be developed. Choosing this route does not restrict the *complainant* from utilizing outside resources if at any time they deem this would be helpful. In this process the *leadership body* commits to a process that will include but not be limited to the following:

The *leadership body*, with input from the *complainant*, will discern whether the church has the resources to carry forward a formal process or will require external third-party assistance.

Situations that would likely require third-party investigation are:

- Where there are significant safety concerns for the *respondent(s)* and/or congregation given the nature and/or severity of disclosure.
- Where the *complainant* is a paid staff of the church or holds a lay-leadership role (e.g., church council, deacon), resulting in a conflict of interest.

The following steps are to be followed whether conducted by the leadership/response team or an external third-party contact. If a third party is to conduct this process, the leadership body should decide which, if any, of the following steps they will be involved with and ensure the third party understands which of these pieces are theirs to oversee. *If the third party's process differs from the steps outlined below, the complainant should receive a thorough explanation as to how it will differ and why.*

1. The *leadership body* will take (or update) a detailed incident report from the *complainant*. In addition to relevant details of the event(s) in question, a preliminary response plan will be developed in consultation with the *complainant*. This response plan will include but not be limited to:
  - A. a section on how the experience impacted the *complainant* that will be communicated to the *respondent*.
  - B. initial safety plan addressing matters of church attendance and expectation of behaviour. This can include whether or not the *complainant* wants to be physically present in the same space as the *respondent* at church events.
  - C. a statement of expectation regarding future behaviour of *respondent* which could include:
    - i. clarifying behaviour deemed inappropriate
    - ii. scheduling of attendance so that both parties will not be present at the same time and/or event/service
    - iii. request of acknowledgement of behaviour and apology

Once accepted by the complainant and the leadership body this report and preliminary response plan will be kept on file.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> If the victim prefers a response that is NOT adjudicative (i.e. investigation) but the church does not have the personnel or resources to carry out a formal process, please consult with a third party such as Mediation Services who can advise a process. These types of resolutions require participation from the harm-doer. <sup>17</sup> Keeping files is an extremely sensitive matter. If the disclosure is adequately addressed in relation to both complainant and respondent and no further incidents occur the file will simply be kept in confidence within congregational leadership. The severity or pattern of disclosures may warrant having the file kept in the denominational office and be transmitted to other congregations to which the respondent moves. Understanding that there may be disputes between complainant and respondent, both statements of the incidents in question will be kept together in the file.

2. The *leadership body* will discuss with the *complainant* any matters of concern with respect to confidentiality. While utmost care will be taken to protect *complainant* confidentiality, in order to ensure the safety of others and to prevent recurrence, circumstances may require the sharing of confidential information to appropriate parties (e.g. contents of a police report or threats of violence that may affect others). If this is the case, the complainant will be made aware of who is being notified and why.
3. The *leadership body* will offer to provide a support person to the *complainant*, if this has not already been done. The *leadership body* will also offer to provide a person to walk along with the *respondent*, if this has not already been done. It is important for those who assume these roles to have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Refer to Appendix 1. for resources on how to offer support.
4. Two members of the *leadership body* will take the statement developed with the *complainant* and present it to the respondent. In this initial meeting the leadership members will:
  - A. first present the event as the *complainant* experienced it
  - B. ask the *respondent* to make an account of their experience of the event in question
  - C. communicate any clear expectations made by the *complainant*
  - D. ask that the respondent refrain from directly communicating to the *complainant* until further notice and outline consequences of breaching this request
  - E. offer relevant resources to support the *respondent* in matters of care, insight, and behaviour. See Appendix 1.
  - F. inform the *respondent* of the further steps (outlined in #5. of this section) that will be taken
  - G. once accepted by the *respondent* a record of the report is to be kept on file
5. It is hoped that the *respondent* will be cooperative. If the *respondent* refuses to cooperate, denies the claims, contacts the *complainant* directly or refuses to adhere to suggestions of changed behaviour and attendance, then the *leadership body* will communicate this to the *complainant* and consider how to proceed. This is a difficult situation and if further conversations do not clarify the situation, third-party assistance will likely be required. It is recommended that if MCC Abuse Response and Prevention Program<sup>18</sup> has not yet been contacted, that they are contacted and brought in for consultation.
6. After the initial meeting with the *respondent*, the *leadership body* will consult with the *complainant* to reassess the initial statement of response and develop a longer-term plan which will include a minimum frequency of check-ins for both *complainant* and *respondent*. Check-ins will seek to offer further support (including the offer of outside support i.e. counselling, etc.) and a chance to revisit the initial statement of expectations and discern whether further changes need to be made.

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<sup>18</sup> Abuse Response & Prevention - Manitoba MCC ([abuseresponseandprevention.ca](http://abuseresponseandprevention.ca)) provides consultation to churches in cases of harassment and abuse.

## C. Response Required by Law

If a disclosure indicates that vulnerable people or a child and/or youth is experiencing abuse or is at risk of being harmed, it needs to be reported to Child and Family Services. In cases where it is unclear whether or not a minor is at risk, you can contact CFS anonymously and inquire.

If an adult discloses sexual assault or abuse it is their choice whether to report their experience to the police. In cases where an adult discloses assault or abuse that occurred when they were a child, it remains their choice whether to report their experience to the police. The only exception is when the offending party has access to vulnerable people (as defined in footnote 7, p. 9 above) or children at present day.

## D. Decision to Decline Active Response

The *leadership body* may consider the disclosure as not falling within the ambit of this policy. The *leadership body* should then consider whether there are other avenues to redress the concern raised, even if the *leadership body* determines that the disclosure does not require an active response pursuant to this policy. In such a case the *leadership body* will then communicate this decision to the *complainant* with their rationale. The *complainant* is then able to respond to this decision in any of the following variety of ways:

1. Accept the decision at which time no further action will be taken.
2. Request further conversation, adding more information, or restating why further action is needed.
3. Pursue an alternative form of response by contacting one of the agencies indicated in Part I or any other agency or organization the *complainant* feels is relevant.

Nothing in this policy impacts a complainant's rights under law e.g. human rights, occupational health and safety or the Criminal Code.

The *leadership body* will remain open to further information or understanding (and in so doing potentially revisiting their decision) and will continue to offer support for the *complainant* as well as attempt to work constructively with any other groups that may get involved.

If the *leadership body* upholds its position any written material will be kept on file for 50 years.

## E. False or Malicious Complaints

It is possible that a complaint will be found to be unproved or unfounded after investigation. An unproven or unfounded complaint may be due to the lack of evidence, the incomplete memories of witnesses, a misunderstanding of this policy or a mistake.

However, a false or malicious complaint of harassment or abuse is a serious matter. It constitutes defamation or libel at law and can have serious legal implications. If a complaint is found to be deliberately false or malicious, it should be treated as if it were a violation of this policy and the *leadership body* should consider what, if any, sanctions are appropriate regarding the *complainant*.

## F. Congregational Life After Harassment or Sexual Abuse

It is our hope that this policy helps guide all those involved in a disclosure of harassment or sexual abuse in as clear and caring a manner as possible. It is hoped that this policy will develop a spirit of justice and restoration that can be attentive to the uniqueness of each disclosure. With that said, it is difficult to determine what life will be like for anyone involved after a disclosure of harassment or sexual abuse. It is important that the *leadership body* not assume what the final outcome of each process should look like. Perhaps the *complainant* and *respondent* are both interested in and able to, reconcile. Perhaps the *complainant* and *respondent* can continue to worship in the same place but no longer have contact with each other. Perhaps the *complainant* and *respondent* can no longer be in the same place together or can never agree on what happened. The *leadership body* is there to be continually attentive and discerning at each step so that the appropriate level of care and action can be taken. This is the ongoing work of relationships and community. In this way this guide will likely only be effective in relation to the overall relative health of the congregation. It is our prayer that this guide, and those involved in using it, leads to greater attentiveness and accountability in matters of abuse response and prevention.

# Appendix 1: Resources

## A. Creating a Safe Church Network

This guide is best used within a congregational or denominational infrastructure tasked with responding to safe church needs. We strongly encourage denominations and larger non-denominational churches to create a *Safe Church Network (SCN) or Team*. *Safe Church Networks (SCN) or Teams* serve to resource, educate and support their communities in *Safe Church* matters and healthy congregational life. The network model allows for congregants to take ownership of *Safe Church* practices while receiving support and educational opportunities via the network.

### **How does a *Safe Church Network* operate?**

In the context of a denomination, each respective church would appoint a volunteer representative to be their *Safe Church Coordinator (SCC)*. A staff member from the denominational head would organize and lead this team of representatives (these representatives make up the network). The network would meet regularly to discuss matters around safe church practices, learn from experts and speakers, and strategize ways to enliven abuse response and prevention topics in the church. The denomination should offer the SCN opportunities for growth and development. For example, the Christian Reform Church of North America (CRCNA) organizes an annual conference for their SCN, creating a rich learning and connecting experience.

The *Safe Church Coordinator* is also a person that congregants can turn to for information and options if they have been violated or have concerns related to harassment or abuse. All *Safe Church Coordinators* need to be trained in how to respond to disclosures of abuse or harassment. See Section G of Appendix 1 for organizations that offer these types of trainings

Larger non-denominational churches should have a *Safe Church Team* comprised of volunteers from the congregation with a heart for abuse response and prevention work and preferably organized and led by a paid staff member. The team would fulfill similar functions as the denominational SCN.

## B. Resources Specific to Intimate Partner Abuse

To address harassment or abuse occurring within intimate relationships you may find the following resources helpful and informative:

**Please update this section and include resources specific to your province and/or area. E.g. if you live near Abbotsford, B.C. include MCC's When Love Hurts and Home Improvement groups and organizations in your neighbourhood that specifically work to support those impacted by domestic violence. e.g. Klinik Evolve Program**

**ShelterSafe.ca** – will help you find a women's shelter in your area and offers resources on safety planning

**Mennonite Central Committee's Abuse Response and Prevention Network.**

This site will help you better understand intimate partner violence and includes sections on various demographics. <https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/family-violence/intimate-partner-violence/>

You can contact them to discuss your situation and they will connect you with further resources and information. <https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/contact/>

**Provincial Crisis Lines:** [www.sheltersafe.ca/find-help/](http://www.sheltersafe.ca/find-help/)

**TheHotline.org** – excellent resources on intimate partner violence

**WhenLoveHurts.ca** – excellent articles and resources

## C. Further Resources on Sexual Harassment and Abuse

### **Abuse Response and Prevention**

Understanding Sexual Violence

<https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/sexual-violence/what-is-sexual-violence/>

How to Offer Support

<https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/sexual-violence/how-to-offer-support/>

### **Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN)**

<https://www.rainn.org/>

### **Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Crisis Centres**

<https://casac.ca/anti-violence-centres/>

### **Into Account: Support for survivors and allies seeking justice, accountability, and recovery**

<https://intoaccount.org/>

### **Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (G.R.A.C.E.)**

<https://www.netgrace.org/resources>

### **Creative Interventions Toolkit**

See section on “Support Survivors of Victims”

<https://www.creative-interventions.org/toolkit/>

### **You Have Options: Help After Sexual Assault - information on medical and legal options**

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/vs/sa/pubs/helpafter.pdf>

## D. Law Enforcement and Medical Assistance

Please ensure the information below reflects the resources and options in your province or territory. What follows is specific to Manitoba.

### 1. Law Enforcement

Any action that falls under the Criminal Code of Canada—sexual assault, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, intimate-partner violence, or stalking—can be reported to the police. As an adult, it is your choice whether to report your experience to the police.

You Have Options: Help After Sexual Assault: this resources explains in detail the process of reporting to the police, what to expect and alternative options.

<https://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/vs/sa/pubs/helpafter.pdf>

Information on Protection Orders for Stalking and Domestic Violence:

[www.gov.mb.ca/justice/vs/po/pubs/legaloptionspo.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/justice/vs/po/pubs/legaloptionspo.pdf)

## 2. Anonymous Reporting

**Find out if your province has third party reporting channels. If so, please include that information below. The following information is specific for Manitoba.**

The Sexual Assault Crisis Program (SACP) receives third party reports from survivors of sexual assault 16 years and older anywhere in Manitoba. Third party reporting is a process where a survivor anonymously passes on information about the sexual assault they experienced to the police without having to speak directly to the police or make a formal report. If police want to speak directly to the survivor, they contact SACP and SACP reaches out to the survivor on their behalf—at this time it remains the survivor’s decision whether they would like to speak directly with police.

<https://klinik.mb.ca/in-person-counselling/sexual-assault-crisis-counselling/reporting-a-sexual-assault/>

## 3. Medical Examination

It is strongly recommended that you seek medical attention if you were sexually assaulted and have concerns about your sexual health. Contact your local sexual assault crisis centre for information on where to seek medical attention for assault.

**List the number and website for your province below:**

## 4. Forensic Examination

The time frame for a forensic exam, if the victim chooses this route, must be completed within 120 hours of a sexual assault. The purpose is to collect DNA evidence for a criminal case. Choosing to have a forensic exam does not mean you have to report the crime to the police. The evidence can be gathered and held until you decide whether you want to report. If you plan to report your assault to the police or want to decide at a later date, a forensic exam is advisable.

## E. Counselling Options

Populate this section with counselling services in your area that specialize in abuse recovery. Below list is for Manitoba.

### **Aulneau Renewal Centre**

[www.aulneau.com](http://www.aulneau.com)

1-204-987-7090

\*sliding scale

### **Aurora Family Therapy**

[www.aurorafamilytherapy.com](http://www.aurorafamilytherapy.com)

1-204-786-9251

\*sliding scale

### **Conexus Counselling**

[www.conexuscounselling.ca](http://www.conexuscounselling.ca)

1-204-275-1045

### **Klinik Community Health**

[www.klinik.mb.ca](http://www.klinik.mb.ca)

1-204-784-4090

\*free \*post trauma, sexual assault,  
and family violence counselling

### **Recovery of Hope**

[www.edenhealthcare.ca/roh](http://www.edenhealthcare.ca/roh)

1-204-477-4673

\*sliding scale

### **Turning Point Counselling**

[www.turningpoint-yfc.com](http://www.turningpoint-yfc.com)

1-204-669-4290

\*sliding scale

### **The Laurel Centre**

[www.thelaurelcentre.com](http://www.thelaurelcentre.com)

1-204-783-5460

\*free

\*for women sexually abused as children

\*Sliding scale: indicates that the cost for sessions is based on household income.

## F. Supporting Those Who Act Harmfully

### **Support and Accountability**

Article

<https://abuseresponseandprevention.ca/for-those-who-abuse/support-and-accountability/>

### **Creative Interventions Toolkit**

See section on “Accountability” and “Working Together”

<https://www.creative-interventions.org/toolkit/>

### **Shame, Realisation, and Restitution: by Alan Jenkins**

Section 5, Pp. 95-105

<https://www.creative-interventions.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/CI-Toolkit-Final-Section-5-Other-Resources-Aug-2020.pdf>

### **Working With Men Who Have Been Abusive**

A webinar with Magi Cooper

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPrntCKx3Mo>

### **Walking Together**

To be released in 2021 – 2022. *A resource from MCC’s Abuse Response and Prevention Network and Mennonite Church Eastern Canada, written by Carol Penner. While this resource focuses on how to support victims and offenders in situations of clergy sexual misconduct, the information is translatable to a wide variety of situations.*

## G. Training and Education Recommendations

### PASTORS AND SAFE CHURCH COORDINATORS

All pastors and Safe Church Coordinators should be trained in how to respond to disclosures of harassment and abuse and be equipped to connect people with the appropriate resources and support. A thorough training should include:

- Understanding myths and misconceptions related to sexual harm and intimate partner violence.
- Examining personal biases and beliefs that impact one's response.
- Learning how to respond in ways that are healing-centred and trauma-sensitive in cases of both sexual harm or domestic violence.
- Overview of options for those impacted both within and outside the church.
- General “do’s” and “do not’s.”
- Confidentiality and mandatory reporting.

### CONGREGATIONAL EDUCATION

The use and benefit of this policy is dependent on wider cultural and conversational shifts in the church. We strongly encourage churches to provide learning opportunities to congregants on topics surrounding healthy relationships and abuse, and to do so in age appropriate ways for children, youth and adults.

Also, this guide should be made publicly available to all congregants if your church is formally using it. What follows are a list of suggestions for how your church can foster a culture of relational respect and care.

- Dedicate one Sunday a year to a topic related to abuse. November is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month if you want to connect the service to a national initiative.
- Invite a guest speaker to do an adult education series on a topic related to healthy relationships, trauma-care, healing from harm, etc.
- Create opportunities for men to explore the impact of toxic masculinity on their lives (book study, men's group).
- Engage children and youth in activities that help them reflect on healthy relationships, gender stereotypes, bullying, internet-safety. See the MCC *Abuse Response and Prevention* website section on [Children and Youth](#) for resources.

This [link](#) provides topics and resources for adult education.

Organizations that Train Faith Communities

[www.AbuseResponseandPrevention.ca](http://www.AbuseResponseandPrevention.ca)

[www.IntoAccount.org](http://www.IntoAccount.org)

[www.NetGrace.org](http://www.NetGrace.org)





## Appendix 3:

### NOTICE OF ACCUSATION OF HARASSMENT OR ABUSE; INITIATING A FORMAL INVESTIGATION PROCESS

Name of Accused: \_\_\_\_\_

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

With this notice we inform you that a complaint alleging \_\_\_\_\_

in the context of \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation has been made to

the leadership of \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation.

This complaint will be addressed according to \_\_\_\_\_  
Congregation's *A Guide for Responding to Congregational Sexual Harassment and Abuse*, a copy of which is enclosed.

**Do not communicate with the *complainant* through any form of communication, either directly or indirectly.**

The leadership body of \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation will appoint an investigation team to investigate the complaint and recommend whether a charge of harassment or abuse be confirmed.

We recognize this will be a difficult time for you. We have arranged for \_\_\_\_\_ to assist you through this process and help you select a personal supporter during this time. We have informed \_\_\_\_\_ (same as above) that we have received a complaint, but we have not informed them of the details of the complaint.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_

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

## Appendix 4:

### HARASSMENT REPORT FORM (RESPONDENT)

This form is to be used to respond to the accusations of abuse or harassment made by \_\_\_\_\_  
in the context of people associated with \_\_\_\_\_ Congregation.

Attach additional sheets, as needed.

Your name (*respondent*): \_\_\_\_\_

Your address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone numbers and email: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of *complainant*: \_\_\_\_\_ has accused of the following.

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Please offer your account of the above events. Where possible, identify any witnesses or persons who may be able to corroborate your description of the incident(s).

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Identify any written material or other physical evidence supporting your account.

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Provide any additional information that you believe is relevant.

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Signature of complainant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Printed name and signature of congregational representative: \_\_\_\_\_

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

