

# CLASSIS ALBERTA NORTH

## SAFE CHURCH ABUSE PREVENTION FAQ

### 1. SAFE CHURCH TEAM FORMATION /MANDATE

#### **What is the purpose of an abuse prevention safe church team?**

- A team needs to prevent abuse by establishing abuse prevention policy and procedures that include abuse reporting guidelines.
- Provide abuse awareness training for volunteers and staff.
- Ensure screening of volunteers and staff as per insurance requirements.
- Provide abuse awareness education to all members, utilizing specific curriculum for children and youth. (example Circle of Grace)
- Have strategies in place for responding to reported abuse by a church leader and protocols for dealing with church leader misconduct. (Advisory Panel Process)
- Provide a safe environment where abuse can be freely discussed and support received.

#### **Who is on a safe church committee?**

- Due to the large volume of work to start up a safe church policy and protocol as well as screen all volunteers and staff, a larger team would be advisable with the ability to decrease numbers as workload dictates.
- It would be beneficial to assign a safe church administrator who is not the pastor due to the ongoing work as well as the possibility of having to deal with misconduct by a church leader.

#### **Where can I find help?**

- Please contact the Classis Alberta North Safe Church team members for any assistance (see Classis Alberta North Safe Church webpage).

### 2. POLICY FORMATION

#### **Why do we need a policy?**

- Every organization in Alberta, spiritual or secular, needs to have an abuse prevention policy and procedures in place.
- The fact of not having a policy does not mean you are unaware of the requirement but shows lack of responsibility and integrity of your church.

#### **Where to start?**

- Policy formation.
- Classis Alberta North has purchased rights to a very basic abuse prevention policy template from 'Plan to Protect' with wording specific to our Christian Reformed Churches and is copyright protected for our use.

#### **What needs to be included in an abuse prevention policy?**

- A policy will reflect your insurance requirements (see insurance requirements) and the protocols within your churches ministries.
- A policy will contain needed registration permission and application forms.

#### **Is there an abuse prevention policy template for use by Classis Alberta North churches?**

- Please contact Classis Alberta safe church team for access to the template document.

### 3. **INSURANCE**

#### **What does insurance require in an abuse prevention plan/policy protecting minors and vulnerable adults ?**

- A written policy should contain the churches commitment to protecting members from abuse or false allegations and show a zero tolerance for abuse
- Contain definitions of abuse
- Describe mandatory screening requirements for staff and volunteers
- describes premises and controls intended to prevent or discourage abuse incidents
- Contain operational procedures
- Describe premise modifications
- Abuse Prevention Training for all volunteers and staff
- Written protocol for reporting and response to abuse.
- Check out Thrive (CRCNA) – The Denominational Safe Church Ministry is now part of Thrive - <https://network.crcna.org/>
- Robertson Hall posted an excellent Newsletter on abuse prevention (See **Resource button** on Webpage)
- Ecclesiastical Insurance (ecclesiastical.ca) posted an excellent article on “Guidelines for developing a safety and protection policy for children, youth, and vulnerable adults” (See **Resource button** on Webpage)

#### **Who can I ask about insurance coverage for staff and volunteers?**

- Please contact your insurance provider.
- Classis Alberta North's current insurance specialist is Murray Nunweiler ([murray@reliance-insurance.ca](mailto:murray@reliance-insurance.ca)).

### 4. **VOLUNTEER SCREENING**

#### **What is required for screening adult volunteers and staff who work with vulnerable adults and minors?**

- Signed Application including ministry agreement and release for references and criminal record checks.
- Interview
- Minimum 2 Reference checks
- 6 month waiting period for new member
- Criminal record check including vulnerable sector check
- Approval by church council

### 5. **POLICE CHECKS**

#### **What is involved in a criminal vulnerable sector check?**

- Vulnerable Sector Check includes a check of local police records to determine if a pattern of behaviour that would present a direct threat to the safety of vulnerable persons exists.

#### **How often does a criminal record check need to be done?**

- Churches every 3-5 years.

#### **Where do I go to get the criminal record check completed?**

- Local RCMP detachment.

- Edmonton Police Service Edmonton, Beaumont, Sherwood Park, St. Albert, Morinville, Fort Saskatchewan, Leduc, Stony Plain, Spruce Grove

## 6. **DOCUMENTATION**

### **What paper work do I need to collect?**

- All the screening paperwork for staff and volunteers: application/police check/references /training
- All attendance sign-in sheets for ministry groups and nursery.
- Children and youth Registration forms
- All completed permission forms

### **What do I do with all the paperwork?**

- There is no statute of limitations so all paperwork must be kept forever due to the fact allegations can occur years after an incident. You may consider converting the paper copies to electronic copies.

## 7. **TRAINING**

### **What kind of training do volunteers need?**

- All volunteers and staff need to be trained in abuse prevention awareness, reporting and procedures specific to the church policy.

### **Where can my volunteers be trained?**

- The Classis Alberta North Safe Church Committee has orientation material available on their webpage. All volunteers working with our vulnerable must attend an annual orientation of safe church practices.

## 8. **USER COMPLIANCE**

### **I have difficulty recruiting volunteers as the screening is a hindrance?**

- Please encourage them to attend and point out that abuse prevention is definitely about protecting the vulnerable but also about protecting our volunteers. It shows our membership and the community that we value everyone and have gone to extended efforts to ensure the safety of all persons, our programs and our volunteers.

### **What do I tell volunteers who refuse to do police checks?**

- Most volunteers do not understand what information is being collected and what information is being disclosed to the church. Please reassure them that you are only privy to paperwork that states the individual has been cleared or not cleared and all other correspondence should there be an issue is sent directly to the individual for follow up.

### **How do I entice volunteers to do the training?**

- Please continue to offer different avenues for training.

## 9. **COUNCIL SUPPORT**

### **How to get your council to support abuse prevention policy and procedure?**

- Please take the time to ensure that your pastor and council has a clear understanding on what abuse prevention entails for your church. With their backing there will hopefully be less resistance.

### **How to get your council to support screening?**

- Ask for permission to attend a council meeting and do a short presentation about abuse prevention and be available for questions.

## **10. CONGREGATION EDUCATION**

### **How to get congregations to understand and support policy and procedures?**

- It is important to educate your volunteers and staff but also provide education for your members.

### **What should congregations know about abuse prevention?**

- That yes abuse happens ...and yes even in our CRC churches.
- Reminded on a regular basis to remain alert to possible places and times when abuse may occur.
- Give them the rationale behind new protocols so they understand the protection provided by these new requirements.

### **How do we make churches safe places where victims of abuse can find support and be able to talk about their experiences?**

- Having posters or brochures posted will show that abuse prevention is important in your church. Showing that your church values these individuals and is ready to offer support is the beginning of providing a safe environment for discussions.
- Perhaps offering small group opportunities to learn about and talk about different forms of abuse.
- Having pastors speak about issues of abuse in prayers or sermons.

### **Where can I find information or view the Circle of Grace curriculum for children and youth ages preschool -grade 12?**

- Classics has a copy for preview or use.

### **Where can we access support for victims of abuse?**

- Cornerstone Counselling services in Edmonton offer counselling at a rate relative to person's income.
- At this point in time there is no specific fund to draw from to assist with the cost of counselling services.

### **What if there is an allegation against the church leader/ pastor?**

- If there are any issues with church leader misconduct please contact Classis with a request to use the **Classis Abuse Response Team (CART)**
- **CART** offers an Advisory Panel Process to councils in Classis Alberta North when allegations of abuse are brought by an adult against a church leader. The process is ecclesiastical in nature and does not prevent the claimant from taking criminal or civil action if deemed necessary.
- Those serving on **CART** have specific training.