

1.1 Reasons for the *Leading with Care* Policy

The *Leading with Care* policy is not about us as individuals. It is about us as a body of Christ — a denomination — trying to ensure the highest quality of ministry by offering our best to Christ and working to make sure that the worst does not happen. It is a time for entering the age of lost innocence, whether real or imagined.

All would agree that we should care for children/youth/vulnerable adults and follow the ways of Jesus. So, why is this policy necessary? Because children, youth and vulnerable adults are precious to us and we want to ensure that their teachers and leaders are equipped and trained in the best ways to nurture their faith journey. We also want to assure them, their parents and guardians that there is safety in our programs.

While we believe that religious institutions are supposed to be safe places, public media reminds us that it has not always been so. Despite careful procedures, abuse and unsafe practices have occurred in congregations where no one would expect it by people no one would question. To say “It can’t happen here” is not supported by what some people have heard, seen or experienced.

We also know that when vulnerable people are taken advantage of, it dishonours the name of Christ and the church. It dishonours the good work that many faithful servants have contributed over many years. Fifty years of faithful ministry could be seriously undermined by the act of one person. Therefore, our task is to uphold the name of Christ and to protect the work that has been achieved in our congregations. One way to protect is to make sure we have policies and procedures in place that, as best we can, provide a safe environment.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada is committed to providing safe environments for all persons, including children, youth, vulnerable adults, and those who minister to and with them. The church’s ministry includes times of worship, service, study and play in all milieus (e.g. church courts, congregations, camps) that fall under the jurisdiction of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. All staff, both volunteer and paid, must support this policy.

The following action statements describe both the reasons for this policy and The Presbyterian Church in Canada’s active commitment to it:

- We will **prevent** abuse of children/youth/vulnerable adults. Prevention includes having good processes in place in order to prevent opportunities for abuse, neglect and harm from arising.
- We will **protect** the vulnerable in our midst. The Presbyterian Church in Canada affirms that the protection of all children, youth and vulnerable adults is a spiritual, ethical and legal imperative.
- We will **report** incidents of abuse, neglect and harm. Such incidents, wherever and whenever they are encountered, will be reported immediately to the minister, the police, and the appropriate agencies in accordance with civil law requirements and the policies of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.
- We will **train and support** our teachers and leaders. Many congregations already have in place a process for recruiting, training, supervising and supporting teachers and congregational leaders. One of the reasons for this policy is to provide ways for congregations to begin, continue and/or improve on this process so that teachers and leaders are well trained and equipped for their ministry tasks.

1.2 History of the Policy

The Presbyterian Church in Canada, through its *FLAMES* Initiative, focused on children, youth and young adults in 2000. In that year, national staff and the national advisory committee for children and youth (Covenant Community with Children and Youth) began to draft a policy for the protection and care of children and youth. This policy arose from an awareness of the biblical imperative to follow the example of Jesus in assuring that the young, weak and vulnerable in our midst are cared for, cherished and protected. It also arose from a variety of practical questions directed to church offices and the national committee over the years such as these: Does our church have a policy around youth being billeted in private homes? Do church programs have appropriate ratios of leaders to children? Does the church have national regulations about sleepovers in church facilities?

The process of developing a draft protection policy began in 2000 and continued to 2005. The committee and staff for children and youth talked with the Experimental Fund administrator, the congregation of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Lakeshore, which was drafting a comprehensive congregational policy and other congregations in Canada which had drafted their own congregational protection policies. In addition, they looked at protection policies of other denominations. In 2002, an insurance concern arose when the insurance broker (Marsh Canada), which covers approximately 200 of our congregations, required more extensive implementation than was anticipated. In 2002, a draft of a policy and implementation was prepared by Education for Discipleship staff at national office and circulated to 100 readers. Further revisions were made and another draft was circulated, by permission of the 129th General Assembly (2003), to all congregations and presbyteries. Throughout 2004 changes were made to the draft policy following legal consultation and after noting some inconsistencies. The latest draft was always available on the church's website (www.presbyterian.ca/documents) and was clearly labelled and dated. Comments were received at church offices by January 31, 2005. Over 100 congregations and presbyteries responded with many suggestions and comments, which caused the policy to move in the direction of its present form, a more pastoral response to the issue of ensuring safe environments.

1.3 Pastoral Heart of the Policy

This policy is titled *Leading with Care* because:

- our Lord modeled for us how to lead with care as he healed the sick and infirm, and welcomed the young, the weak, and the vulnerable
- it is our awareness that some people in our church need special protection
- it affirms our commitment to training and supporting teachers and leaders in our churches so that children/youth/vulnerable adults will grow in faith and the love of Christ in a climate of safety.

In *Leading with Care* there is a dual focus of safety and prevention, and training and support of teachers/leaders. In creating a safe environment, the church protects people, prevents abuse, and, if necessary, reports abuse. Through training, support and evaluation, ministry is enhanced, enriched and strengthened in The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

In addition to enriching ministry, the policy is also part of our church's outreach and evangelism. Having this policy in place will be very reassuring to newcomers. While everyone in the congregation may know each other, a new person entering may not know anyone. He or she will wisely ask, "Is this a safe environment for my child? What signs do I see that tell me that safety procedures are in place?" Creating a safe environment must be part of the outreach plan of a congregation.

Some smaller congregations may object to this policy because they say, "We know everyone in our congregation." That may be true. But should we know everyone in our congregation? We would not be able to do that if we were constantly reaching out to new people. As new people enter our congregational life and want to get involved, we should have a way of matching their skills and abilities to the ministries we provide. Without some policy in place, there is no way of knowing whether or not we are placing our children in a safe setting.

Those of us who are established and/or long-time leaders in the congregation must model for others our willingness to enter a screening process. We cannot expect new people to go through a screening process that we ourselves are not willing to go through.

Since the intent of this policy is pastoral, not punitive, governing bodies in The Presbyterian Church in Canada should be guided by the following procedures:

- Ministers and elders will set an example for the rest of the congregation by actively supporting the implementation of the policy.
- Ministers and elders will model to the rest of the congregation their commitment to safety and prevention by agreeing to a Police Records Check if their ministry involves one-on-one counselling or visiting.
- If confidential matters arise in putting the policy into place, the session should handle that information with the same careful respect its members have for all confidential congregational matters.

1.4 Biblical and Theological Foundations

Our concern for the protection and care of all children, youth and vulnerable adults is firmly grounded in scripture and in our Presbyterian/Reformed view of justice. God calls the church to seek and establish a climate of justice because it reflects the divine righteousness revealed in the Bible.

*Showers, O heavens, from above,
And let the skies rain down righteousness;
Let the earth open, that salvation may spring up,
And let it cause righteousness to sprout up also:
I the Lord have created it. (Isaiah 45:8)*

*By myself I have sworn,
From my mouth has gone forth in righteousness
A word that shall not return:
"To me every knee shall bow,
every tongue shall swear."
Only in the Lord, it shall be said of me,
Are righteousness and strength. (Isaiah 45:23-24a)*

Even as he lay dying, King David describes his role as leader as grounded in justice. "The spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land." (2 Samuel 23:2-4)

Our Church is called to deal fairly with each other, protect the rights of others and protest against things that destroy human dignity. Our church's sense of justice is about both rights and responsibilities.

In addition to our sense of biblical justice, the second main reason we have as Christians for a policy such as this is the desire to bear witness in our tradition to valuing people in a holistic way in our homes, churches and in the world. The Bible gives us examples of the importance and primacy of family life — the nuclear family and the extended family (Genesis 1:27; Luke 15:11-32; 2 Timothy 1:3-5). In our churches we strive to find a place of significance for all children, youth and vulnerable adults. Children and youth are not seen as "the church of the future," but are the "church of today". As adults we acknowledge the valuable gifts they contribute to the community of faith. Concerning this, Living Faith declares, "The church is the family of God. Here all should be valued for themselves. We are one body in Christ: together rejoicing when things go well, supporting one another in sorrow, celebrating the goodness of God and the wonder of our redemption." (*Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984, section 8.2.6)

Third, we are called to provide a protective environment and care for the young and vulnerable because we believe this is what Jesus would have us do. As Christians we imitate the example of Christ and aim to stay rooted in his love in all our relationships. The gospels contain many stories of times when Jesus met and healed children (Matthew 9:18-19, 23-25) and portrayed them as examples for others (Matthew 19:10-14; Mark 9:33-37). The gospels

have many stories, too, of Jesus' care for vulnerable adults. In Mark's gospel we read about Jesus healing a man possessed by evil spirits (Mark 1:21-26), a man with leprosy (Mark 1:40-42), a crippled man (Mark 2:1-12), a dying girl and a sick woman (Mark 5:22-43), sick people in Gennesaret (Mark 6:53-56), and a deaf man (Mark 7:31-35). We read about Jesus feeding the hungry (Mark 8:1-9), healing a blind man (Mark 8:22-26), and commending a poor woman's generosity (Mark 12:41-44). In his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-11), Jesus exhorts us to care for and love strangers, prisoners, and the naked, hungry, thirsty and sick of the world; these words of Christ himself constitute, as declared in *Living Faith*, "a call to help people in need and to permeate all of life with the compassion of God." (*Living Faith: A Statement of Christian Belief*, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984, section 9.1.3)

1.5 Definition of Terms in the Policy and Implementation

Child/youth: a person who is under 18 years of age. Some Canadian provinces/territories classify children/youth as 16 years of age and younger. However, for the purpose of this policy, child/youth means a person under eighteen anywhere in Canada or in a ministry under the purview of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Event: an occasional or one-time event run by a congregation. Examples: a yearly concert, tea or picnic.

Leading with Care committee: a group of persons responsible for ensuring that the policy is put into place. The *Leading with Care* committee may be the session, part of the session or governing board of a ministry, or the session/board may appoint a committee of respected people specifically for this task.

Ministry position: a leadership role in which there is expected to be direct interaction with children, youth or vulnerable adults. Examples include: the positions of Sunday school teacher, youth group leader, elder, pastoral care worker, camp counsellor.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada: for the purposes of this policy, this shall include The Presbyterian Church in Canada and all related courts — sessions, presbyteries, synod and General Assembly — and the programs/ministries they oversee and sponsor.

Program/ministry: a structured series of similar activities or events governed and run by The Presbyterian Church in Canada which spans a period of weeks or months and in which the level of risk is expected to remain constant. Examples: weekly Sunday school; the routine pastoral visitation of an elder in the home of a frail, elderly person; weekly youth meeting at the church; operation of the Sunday morning nursery; an out-of-the-cold program.

Risk assessment: the process by which programs/ministries are rated according to risk factors. High risk ministries require special attention.

Teacher/leader: a lay person of at least 18 years of age who devotes significant portions of his/her time and energy in faithful church service and who has gone through a time of orientation and training, in order to hold a ministry position. Examples of teachers/leader includes: Sunday school teacher, youth leader, pastoral care visitor, leader of a group for developmentally challenged adults. Paid staff, clergy and other professional church workers are

also considered teachers/leaders.

Note: It is common practice in many of our congregations to use volunteer helpers who are between the ages of 12 and 18. Youthful leadership is to be encouraged and supported. However, it should be noted that when leaders and teachers are mentioned in this policy, we are referring to people of at least 18 years of age. Nevertheless, leaders under the age of 18 are expected to follow the policy when acting as leaders or volunteer helpers.

Vulnerable adult: a person who, because of his/her age, a disability or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to him/her. (Definition used in Bill C-7, proclaimed by the Government of Canada, August 1, 2000.)

Volunteer helper: a lay person who is involved peripherally in ministry with children, youth or vulnerable adults but has not chosen to become a teacher or leader. Examples includes: someone who delivers cookies to a children's program, someone who collects and presents socks to homeless people at a shelter, or someone who collects and distributes food bank items to families.

1.6 Relationship of this Policy to the Church's Policy on Sexual Abuse and/or Harassment

In 1993 the General Assembly of The Presbyterian Church in Canada approved for use in the denomination a policy for dealing with sexual abuse and/or harassment. All presbyteries, sessions, the General Assembly offices, colleges and other institutions with The Presbyterian Church in Canada are required to follow the policy or an equivalent policy if they have different governing structures.

With its dual focus of safety and prevention, and teacher screening, orientation, training and support, ***Leading with Care* is primarily a prevention document.** If careful steps are taken in leading, teaching and supporting, incidents of harm can be prevented.

If, however, despite good prevention practices, an allegation of sexual abuse and/or harassment is made, the Policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for Dealing with Sexual Abuse and/or Harassment outlines procedures for both sessions and presbyteries. There is a different procedure for criminal or non-criminal allegations. The procedures include discovery, intervention, investigation, adjudication, communication, and aftercare.

Copies of the Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy may be obtained (\$6) from The Presbyterian Church in Canada national offices (1-800-619-7301). The policy may also be downloaded from The Presbyterian Church in Canada website (www.presbyterian.ca). See the menu on the left side of the home page. Under "Resources," click on "Church Documents." Under "PCC Papers," see "Sexual Abuse and Harassment Policy." Each presbytery and synod clerk also has a copy of the policy.