

Open Table Sexual Abuse Response and Prevention Policy

As a small fellowship, we are “a community of shared faith and trust that requires tangible accountability to protect the vulnerable, to prevent abuse, to build trust and to live into the mutuality to which Christ calls us.” (*Prevention and Response*, p 16-17)

Every regular participant is in some sense a leader. The MC USA pamphlet *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-credentialed Leadership* applies to all of us and is the basis for the following policy. In addition, MC USA *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure* applies to those holding leadership credentials. Refer to these documents [at mennoniteusa.org/resource/sexual-misconduct/] for details that expand on the outline below and to stay current with possible revisions.

Providing a safe space for all participants, especially children

1. Abide by our Safe Space Agreement and by MC USA recommendations for prevention of sexual misconduct.
2. Monitor our implementation of this with an annual review prior to our November membership signing, including verifying that hyperlinks are current, and work to strengthen these policies in our setting, .
3. Hold an annual workshop, training or worship series addressing some aspect of healthy sexuality and equipping us to recognize and respond to sexual violence.
4. Support each other in learning about and maintaining healthy boundaries. Expect credentialed leaders to complete the FaithTrust Institute Healthy Boundaries training offered by MC USA, Central District Conference or other organization.

Responding to Sexual Abuse within the Congregation

1. Is the complainant a child?
 - a. Contact Child Protective Services (1-800-800-5556) and file a report
 - b. Contact the Central District Conference Minister (confmin@mcusacdc.org), or the Central District Conference (office@mcusacdc.org, 800-662-2264 or 574-534-1485)
 - c. Follow our Safe Space Agreement

Note: When children are involved, only a suspicion of abuse is required. When you suspect a child has been abused, report to protective services immediately.

2. Is the complainant an adult?
 - a. Encourage complainant to seek support from local sexual assault crisis center, trauma-informed therapist, civil attorney, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP), or some other group/ person who will help them think through their options and serve as an advocate. Keep in mind, this step may take time.

- b. If the complainant wishes to report to law enforcement, contact law enforcement and support complainant in making report, then follow steps given in d) below.
- c. If the accused individual is a credentialed leader, follow MC USA *Ministerial Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedure*. Current contact information for reporting misconduct can be found at mcusacdc.org/misconduct/.
- d. In other cases, follow the steps below, from MC USA *Prevention and Response: Sexual Abuse and Non-credentialed Leadership*.
 - i. At least 2 members from leadership team contact conference minister together. [Current contact information for reporting misconduct can be found at mcusacdc.org/misconduct/].
 - ii. Provide support to complainant: find therapy, advocacy, etc. (This is an ongoing step and needs to be revisited periodically. Offer to walk with complainant, and support their decisions. Be aware of your desire to make decisions for them, or to take on responsibilities outside of your role. Consult with your local sexual assault crisis center early on for guidance.)
 - iii. Immediately suspend accused individual of congregational responsibilities
 - iv. Inform the congregation of the suspension, open call for other complainants to come forward. This message comes from church leadership (pastor and leadership body). Point congregants to leaders they can go to with concerns. Ask congregation to pray for those involved.
 - v. Contact investigative team/person from a pool of trained investigators for misconduct in the denomination to complete the investigation.
 - vi. Establish timeline for investigation and keep complainant informed of investigation progress. For safety and support of the complainant ask the accused individual to please stop attending your congregation. Ask where they will attend. Inform new congregation of the situation. Do this in writing, indicating the nature of the misconduct (without unnecessary details). This communication *should not* identify the complainant(s) unless they request so.
 - vii. At the end of the investigation inform the complainant and the accused individual of the results in writing, by phone, and in person. Inform every member of the congregation of the outcome. Do this in writing, indicating the nature of the misconduct (without unnecessary details). This communication *should not* identify the complainant(s) unless they request so.
 - viii. Follow all recommendations arising from the investigative team. Make pastoral care available to all, prioritizing the needs of the complainant over those of the accused individual.

- ix. Pay attention to the need for healing/processing by the faith community itself — informational meetings, circle processes, task force to problem-solve or prevent future problems.

Throughout the process:

- *Always privilege the complainant's voice.*
- *The complainant's wishes/needs may change over time. Be sure to check back in with them frequently.*
- *While the complainant will not control the process, the complainant must be kept in the communication loop.*
- *While false reports do happen, research finds they only occur in 2-10 percent of cases. In contrast, it is estimated that over 60 percent of sexual assaults are never reported.*

Responding to members who are credibly accused of sexual abuse elsewhere

(While MCUSA's *Prevention and Response* pamphlet does not give a detailed process for this situation, it informs the following section.)

The term credibly accused is not a legal term, but an advocacy term, used to refer to someone who is documented to be federally charged, civilly sued, named for the offense in a media article from an established news outlet (not blogs), or dismissed from a post for sexual misconduct. (from P and R, p. 11; originally from Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests)

Recognize the humanity of the offender, but do not urge forgiveness or reconciliation. Before forgiveness or reconciliation can be considered, the offender must take full responsibility, be held publicly accountable and offer an apology. (P and R, p 9)

1. Immediately suspend offender of congregational responsibilities.
2. Inform the congregation, open call for other complainants to come forward.
3. If there are additional complainants in the congregation, proceed as outlined above in *Responding to Sexual Abuse within the Congregation, 2d*.
4. If there are not additional complainants, establish clear and appropriate boundaries to be observed if member is to participate in congregational activities. Consult lawyer if appropriate. [see <http://www.churchlawandtax.com/blog/2012/october/when-sex-offender-wants-to-attend-church.html>]
5. In the case of confidential investigations such as a campus Title IX investigation, follow the same steps as outlined above in *Responding to Sexual Abuse within the Congregation, 2d*, to the extent possible with the information available. An additional investigation might be called for if there are additional complainants within the congregation.