

Safety Covenant Assembly Mennonite Church

With Mennonite Church USA, Central District Conference and consistent with our commitments in the Privileges of the Child, Assembly Mennonite Church covenants to be a safe place for all of God's people. Given the preciousness of our children and youth and their potential vulnerability to abuse, we covenant for their safety and full participation in our community. Out of our commitment to love and care for all of God's creation we make this covenant to our children, youth, adults, families and community

Commonly Accepted Principles of Healthy Boundaries and Safe Church

- Adults have more power than Children and Youth.
- Clergy have more power than people with whom they have a pastoral relationship.

We covenant to:

- 1) Provide a six-month period in which we commit to getting to know new members and attendees before asking them to teach Sunday school, supervise childcare, or participate on the elder care team.
- 2) Provide a one-year period in which we commit to getting to know new members and attendees before asking them to be a mentor, junior youth leader or youth coordinator. As adults with high responsibility and the opportunity to be one on one with children we will require a criminal background check every three years which will be kept in locked in the office.
- 3) Abide by the two-adult rule: two approved adults will be present during any church activity involving minors. Preferably these adults would not be related. Mentors with completed background checks do not need to follow this rule.
- 4) Ensure that any person under 18 who works with children and/or youth is supervised by or paired with someone older than 21.
- 5) Provide a safe space by requiring that all Sunday School classrooms and offices have windows in the doors.
- 6) Cultivate an "open door" culture in which parents are encouraged at any time to drop-in and observe or participate in activities.
- 7) Use a Church Nursery sign in procedure to clearly identify who is responsible for the child and who the child is being released to.
- 8) Provide a public setting when possible for one-to-one interactions or pastoral contacts, especially with youth. When an office or private meeting is most appropriate, the door will remain open, the meeting will take place in a room where the individuals are visible through a window in the door, or others will be informed in advance of the meeting.
- 9) Use appropriate discipline and expressions of affection.
 1. Use of appropriate hugs and touches that are reassuring or comforting.
 2. Use warm, caring verbal comments, not demeaning or blaming comments, verbal put downs or corporal punishment.
- 10) Provide an annual training for all adults in the congregation regarding this policy. Provide an annual information and education for children that is age appropriate and helps them to understand boundaries and respectful relationships.
- 11) Report incidents of abuse to the state authorities such as police and/or children's services. See Appendix 1 for information.
- 12) Follow the recommendations of the Digital Communications policy.
- 13) Ensure that all those working with children sign a Memo of Understanding Annually.
- 14) Monitor our implementation of this Covenant. The Christian Education Committee will provide oversight for implementation of this Covenant, assessing compliance and reporting to the Leadership Group yearly.

**Memo of Understanding
For Child and Youth Workers
Assembly Mennonite Church
(Volunteer and Staff)**

Assembly Mennonite Church is committed to providing a safe, secure and healthy environment for all children and youth who participate in its ministries and activities.

The Safety Covenant reflects our congregation's commitment to preserving this church as a holy place of safety and protection for all who would enter and as a place in which all people can experience God's love, healing and hope through relationships with others.

As a volunteer/staff member in this congregation:

- 15) Do you agree to observe and abide by the Safety Covenant, Digital communications policy and the guidelines regarding working with children and youth? _____yes _____no
- 16) If you are under the age of 18, do you agree to work under adult supervision at all times? _____yes
_____no _____ I am over the age of 18.
- 17) Do you agree to promptly report to a member of the pastoral team and/or the Christian Education Committee (Tara Swartzendruber Landis, Maria Wenger, Patricia Ebersole Zwier, Kyle Schlabach) any incident of abuse, neglect, or ongoing bullying/intimidation?
_____yes _____no
- 4) Have you ever been charged with a crime involving abuse, neglect, or violence?
_____ yes _____ no

If yes, please describe: _____

I have read the Safety Covenant, the digital communications policy and this memo of understanding, and I agree to observe and abide by the policies set forth therein.

Signature Date

Print Full Name

Volunteer Position

Please return this form to Naomi Roots' mailbox.

Appendix 1

How to Report Suspect Abuse

Who should report child abuse?

According to Indiana Code, Juvenile and family Law:

Any individual who has reason to believe that a child is a victim of child abuse or neglect must make a report to Child Protective Services or the local law enforcement agency.

How do I make a report?

1. Report your suspicions or observations to the pastor with whom you work most closely. the pastor will help you to call Child Protective services and to fill out a report form,
2. If a child verbally reports abuse to an adult or if an adult observes/suspects suspicious behavior between another adult or older youth and a child.
 - a. Secure the child's safety: If the child is in imminent danger, seems fearful to return home after a disclosure of abuse, or needs immediate medical attention, call 911.
3. Report the information: Child Protective Services (CPS) at 1-800-800-5566. This is a 24-hour, 7-day a week CPS hotline.
 - a. What information do I give? Exact name, address and telephone number of the parent, guardian or custodian. Exact description of what you saw or what the child said to you The more specific your information and the details you provide, the easier it is for DHS/CPS to assess the situation quickly.
 - b. Generally, do not discuss the incident with anyone else, unless requested by the pastor or other authorities.
 - c. Tips to remember while acting on suspicions or report of abuse:
 - i. Stay calm and listen carefully to the child.
 - ii. Take the child's word seriously and keep any physical evidence.
 - iii. Do not ask leading questions or probe for more details. It is better to wait for a trained professional to thoroughly investigate the situation and interview the child. It is appropriate to say, "Tell me more," or ask other open-ended questions.
 - iv. Give emotional support, reminding the child that he/she is not at fault and that he/she was courageous and right to tell you about the problem.
 - v. Express your own sincere emotions. Tell the child how sad you feel that this has happened. Tell him/her how sad God feels when a child is hurt.
 - vi. Assure the child that you will do everything you can to make the abuse stop. Explain that in order to help, you must tell some other people.
 - d. When child abuse allegations have been made, pastoral care will be offered to all involved, by the pastor and/or appropriate referrals will be made.

Appendix 1 (continued)

Reporting Abuse of a Vulnerable Adult

Who is an endangered adult?

A person who believes or has reason to believe an endangered adult is the victim of battery, neglect or exploitation is required to report the facts to Adult Protective Services or a law enforcement agency having jurisdiction over the endangered adult. A report to Adult Protective Services may be made by calling the state hotline number or by contacting the appropriate APS Investigative Unit directly. Any emergency report should be made directly to law enforcement. A person who makes a report in good faith is immune from any civil or criminal liability. IC 35-46-1-13 & IC 35-46-1-14.

An "endangered adult," for purposes of reporting, is an individual who is:

1. at least eighteen (18) years of age; and
2. incapable by reason of mental illness, mental retardation, dementia, or other physical or mental incapacity of managing or directing the management of the individual's property or providing or directing the provision of self-care.

How to report:

1. Report your suspicions or observations to the pastor with whom you work most closely. the pastor will help you to call Child Protective services and to fill out a report form,
2. Call the Indiana State Hotline: **1-800-992-6978**

Assembly Mennonite Church- Safe Church Digital Communications

Assembly Mennonite Church covenants to be a safe place for all of God's people. Social networking sites, on-the-spot communication devices and email are an integral part of our society and culture now. In our faith community, they can enhance communication, faith sharing and deepen relationships. In efforts to apply healthy boundaries and our commitments to safe church to the world of digital communications, we commit to the following practices.

General Information about Digital Communications

- All communication sent digitally (e.g. email, social networking sites, notes or posts, texting) is NOT CONFIDENTIAL and may be shared or reposted to others beyond our control.
- Interactions in the virtual world need to be transparent, as a window in a door provides transparency in the physical world.
- In the virtual world, healthy boundaries and safe church practices must be adhered to as they are in the physical world.
- Laws regarding mandated reporting of suspected abuse/neglect/exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.

Social Networking Sites Relationships

Adults working with children and youth are strongly encouraged to set very stringent privacy settings on any social networking profile. Bear in mind that the content posted to a public profile can be viewed by anyone without your consent.

- Adults should not initiate social media contact with children or youth. Youth may not be able to decline such requests due to the disparity of power between youth and adults.
- Youth may initiate social media contact and adults should discern the level of contact they want to maintain with youth prior to responding to these requests.
- Any material on any site that raises suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should be immediately reported to the Department of Child and family services or the police (see Appendix I) If the material is on an Assembly affiliated site, that material should be documented for Assembly's records and then removed from the site after consultation with the department of child and family services and/or police.
- Inappropriate material that does not raise suspicion that a child has been or will be abused/neglected/exploited should immediately be removed from the site.
- Social networking groups for MYF/JYF should be open to parents/guardians of current members.
- Unsupervised internet access by children is not permitted during Assembly sponsored events.
- When the need for a digital communication platform is identified, a group of people should be tasked with leading it. They should create a behavioural covenant to govern what content is appropriate and inappropriate for any social media group created on behalf of Assembly.
 - *Recommendations for Behavioural Covenants*
 - Covenants should acknowledge that materials posted on Assembly affiliated sites (and/or group pages) are NOT CONFIDENTIAL.
 - Covenants should acknowledge that content deemed inappropriate will be removed from the site or group page.
 - Covenants for Assembly-related social media groups should address the following:

- Appropriate language
- Eligibility of membership to join a social networking group.
- Whether you have to be part of the congregation and whether there are age requirements/restrictions for participation.
- Loss of eligibility of membership and removal from the social networking group. (Consider how and when members will be removed from the group due to moving away, leaving the faith community, becoming too old for youth group, pastors leaving to minister elsewhere)
- Who, how and when members may be identified by name in text or in photos.
- Appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of members (bullying, pictures that depict abuse, violence, sexual acts, etc.) and the consequence for inappropriate behaviour.
- Compliance with mandated reporting laws regarding suspected abuse.

Recommendations for Video Chats, Blogs or Video Blogs

- Adults should refrain from initiating social text or video chats with youth
- Participants in a video chat or blog should consider what will be shown in the video such as their surroundings, their clothing/state of dress, etc.
- All public posts and communication with youth should be saved when possible.
- All Pastors and other adults engaged in ministry with Youth should consider the content and nature of any post that will be read by or visible to Youth. Your voice is often considered the voice of the church, even when youth are not your intended audience.

Recommendations for Publishing/Posting Content

- Photos published on Assembly sponsored sites/publications, should not include name or contact information for children or youth.

Recommendations for Use of Email/text/Instant Messaging

- Emails to Junior or Senior Youth should be copied to a Parent/Guardian and/or an Assembly leader. Content should be brief and pertain to the logistical details of connecting.
- Prior written permission for youth to connect digitally (signed paper, or email reply by Parent/Guardian) is required.
- Assembly employees and volunteers may use text messaging to communicate with Junior or Senior Youth, if and only if, they have the formal written consent or parents/guardians. Content should be brief and pertain to the logistical details of connecting (e.g. about attending an event or requiring transportation).
- Pastoral care or counselling should be carefully done through text messaging.