

1                                   **Policy for the Care of Survivors of Sexual Abuse**  
2                                   **First Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas**

3                                   *Adopted by the Caregiving and Membership Commission December 12, 2017*

4                                   *Approved by the FMC Church Board January 18, 2018*

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6                                   **Some Realities and Hopes for the Congregation**

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8                                   1. First Mennonite Church will commit to providing a safe setting in which the love of Christ is  
9                                   taught and modeled for all to receive, from the most vulnerable to the most powerful. When  
10                                   sexual abuse with its load of suffering happens, the church of Jesus Christ can also be a place of  
11                                   truth-telling, intentional process, healing and restoration in the love of Christ.

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13                                   2. Within any congregation it is likely that survivors and abusers coexist under a cover of  
14                                   secrecy. Secrecy often feels safer than disclosure, but that’s rarely safer. Secrecy brings its own  
15                                   difficulties.

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17                                   3. Sexual abuse destroys trust on many levels. Building trust again may be a long complicated  
18                                   process.

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20                                   4. Forgiveness, if it happens, cannot be forced, demanded or rushed. “If the victim forgives too  
21                                   quickly forgiveness can seem to make things right before there is a chance to understand the  
22                                   serious harm done and what repentance and restoration really entail. . . . For all, including the  
23                                   whole community affected by the abuse, forgiveness can mean naming both the grievous sin  
24                                   with its impact on others and the unmerited grace that cannot be earned but only received.”  
25                                   (MCUSA Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse under #3.) Granting forgiveness does not  
26                                   mean granting trust or that trust is restored. Nor does forgiveness erase the trauma and the  
27                                   ongoing consequences caused by sexual abuse or the need for ongoing accountability for the  
28                                   abuser.

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30                                   5. The congregation will attempt, with God’s help, to create an atmosphere of respect for  
31                                   survivors of sexual abuse, sexual abusers, and for families of both while prioritizing the safety of  
32                                   the vulnerable. As possible, confidentiality will be maintained unless that poses risk for others.  
33                                   Before the congregation will consider welcoming a sexual abuser to their fellowship a  
34                                   professional assessment will be done to determine the level of risk he or she brings as well as  
35                                   the person’s movement toward repentance.

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37                                   6. Society sees openness and protection as competing values. As followers of Jesus Christ  
38                                   churches are called to hold openness and protection in dynamic and creative tension that may  
39                                   lead us to more fully embody Christ’s grace, joy and peace while providing for the safety of  
40                                   children and survivors of abuse.

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42                                   7. Restoration of *shalom*: reconciliation. While we hope for right relationships within the  
43                                   congregation, in situations of sexual violence, reestablishing personal relationships between

44 victims and their abusers may not be possible or wise. The congregation will commit to praying  
45 that God will bring healing and hope for survivors of sexual abuse and for sexual abusers,  
46 known and unknown. The larger responsibilities of the congregation are to promote learning  
47 for all about pertinent issues around sexual abuse, protect and support those in the  
48 congregation who are vulnerable, and provide accountability and support for those who have  
49 abused others.

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51 8. Primarily through the Nurture Commission's efforts children, youth and adults will be  
52 educated about healthy sexuality, appropriate boundaries, and the prevention of sexual abuse.

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54 9. The congregation will commit to follow willingly the church's policies for the protection of  
55 children, youth and adults as a means to lessen the risk of abuse (Safe Sanctuaries Policy),  
56 respond to abuse (Safe Sanctuaries Policy), and demonstrate care and respect for survivors and  
57 abusers (Policy for the Care of Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Policy for the Care and  
58 Accountability of Sexual Abusers). Each informed church member becomes an additional  
59 barrier to prevent abuse and provides an additional opportunity for support to survivors.

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## DEFINITIONS

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63 + Sexual abuse is an evil act, and sometimes a criminal act, against both God and persons.  
64 Sexual abuse is any sexual contact or interaction between two persons of unequal power in  
65 which the one with more power victimizes the person with less power. The power imbalance  
66 may result from the abuser's greater age, size, position, experience or authority.

67 Direct sexual contact may include: fondling; oral, genital and anal penetration;  
68 intercourse; forcible rape.

69 Indirect sexual interaction may include: verbal comments; pornographic videos or  
70 pictures; obscene phone calls; exhibitionism; allowing children to witness sexual activity;  
71 sexting and any other misuses of electronic media. Sexual abuse is never the fault of the victim.

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73 + A sexual abuser is a person who has violated another person's sexual boundaries through  
74 direct or indirect contact. The sexual abuser bears sole responsibility for the act. A sexual  
75 abuser may be an adult, adolescent or older child. An adult may abuse another adult or a  
76 minor. A minor may abuse another minor.

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78 + A victim of sexual abuse is a person of any age, male or female, who has experienced a  
79 violation of appropriate sexual boundaries by a person of greater power through direct or  
80 indirect sexual contact.

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82 + A survivor of sexual abuse is a person who continues to learn how to cope with the abuse and  
83 understands that s/he was not at fault. A survivor continues to move from the powerlessness of  
84 being a victim to places of greater healing and strength. This may not be a smooth or straight-  
85 forward journey. Each survivor's healing process is unique; what helps one may not help every  
86 other.

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- 88 + Secondary victims may include family members, close friends, other congregants, or any  
89 person who is indirectly affected by a situation of sexual abuse. Secondary victims may be  
90 connected to the victim, the abuser, or both.
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- 92 + An enabler is a person who either willfully or through manipulation by the abuser protects the  
93 identity of the sexual abuser. An enabler allows sexual abuse to take place by keeping secrets  
94 and preventing community awareness of sexual abuse. An enabler deflects blame from the  
95 abuser.
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- 97 + A vulnerable adult is a person who is or may be for any reason unable to take care of him or  
98 herself, or unable to protect him or herself against significant harm or exploitation.
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- 100 + A Limited Access Agreement is a written document with guidelines to protect  
101 victims/survivors and the congregation while the abuser participates in the life of the church.  
102 The abuser is also protected if the Agreement is followed; it will lessen the risk of false  
103 accusations against him/her. The plan will be signed by the abuser, (and parents, if a minor), a  
104 pastor, member of the Caregiving and Membership Commission, member of Safe Sanctuaries  
105 Committee/Nurture Commission and Church Board chair.

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## 109 Introduction—Survivor of Sexual Abuse

110 God created human beings in God’s image and declared this very good. Our sexuality is part of  
111 this good order, created to enable us to enjoy companionship and intimacy and to form families  
112 and build community. Our spirituality and our sexuality are not disconnected or competing  
113 aspects of our lives, but express our longing for intimacy with God and with others. (1)

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115 When people violate others sexually, the church is called to be a place of healing and justice-  
116 making Our MCUSA Vision: Healing and Hope is “God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ  
117 and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that  
118 God’s healing and hope flow through us to the world.” First Mennonite Church’s 2017 vision is  
119 “Together in Christ: rooted deeply, reaching widely, loving well.”

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121 First Mennonite Church is committed to being a place of healing and hope for those who have  
122 been subjected to any kind of abuse. This policy, however, speaks particularly to the needs of  
123 those who have been sexually abused and their families. By following the guidelines in this  
124 policy we, as a congregation, hope to lessen the risk of sexual abuse, provide care for survivors  
125 of sexual abuse, and increase awareness about the dynamics of sexual abuse. We understand  
126 these efforts to be expressions of “loving well,” so that “God’s healing and hope flow through  
127 us to the world.”

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## Care for Survivors

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### Realities

The Body of Christ is called to be a center of healing and hope for sexual abuse victims/survivors.

“Most people who have experienced sexual abuse have serious, long-term consequences, including overwhelming feelings of fear, guilt, and anger. Many survivors also experience depression, anxiety, and physical difficulties such as sleeplessness, eating disorders, and fatigue. Some experience post-traumatic stress disorder or recurring memories, such as flashbacks, nightmares, or intrusive thoughts. Many have difficulty developing positive relationships with others, such as friends, spouses, and family members. Some turn to drugs or alcohol to lessen the pain or may show suicidal or self-destructive tendencies.

If the abuse happened in the context of the church, there are also significant spiritual effects. Survivors may find it hard to trust church leaders and may even feel betrayed by God and the church. They may also feel sinful and question God’s love for them.”  
*(Protection and Inclusion, Dove’s Nest).*

With support from others, survivors can be strong, courageous individuals and most go on to live good and productive lives, despite the crimes committed against them. Through God’s love experienced in community, survivors can find the path to healing for themselves and others.

A person who has been sexually abused may wish to share his/her experiences with someone who can listen with compassion and offer prayerful support in an atmosphere of confidentiality. Making available a supportive person or group for the survivor may be helpful, with the understanding that each survivor is unique, guides his/her own journey of healing, and must be included in decisions about a support person or group. Survivors need different kinds of support which may include support groups within or outside the church, one-on-one counseling, medical treatment, or other kinds of healthy support. An important way of supporting survivors and helping them feel safe is by holding abusers accountable. The church will endeavor to find ways to aid the healing process through providing appropriate personnel, funding, or other community resources. An array of secondary victims may benefit from supportive care in addition to the primary victim.

### Actions

The following process will be used for responding to and caring for survivors among us.

1. When a victim shares her/his story with a pastor or congregational member, if safety is an immediate concern, that person will take appropriate action to protect the victim and report the complaint as outlined in our Safe Sanctuaries Policy, Action Plan for Handling Complaints.

172 2. If an adult survivor requests the help of a support person or group, the pastoral team and/or  
173 the Caregiving and Membership Commission will form this group in consultation with the  
174 survivor. The support person or group will:

- 175 • Listen and encourage with compassion;
- 176 • Pray with and for the survivor;
- 177 • Guard confidentiality;
- 178 • Help determine whether assistance outside the church is necessary or helpful;
- 179 • Empower the survivor to use resources to support his/her journey toward  
180 healing;
- 181 • Listen to the survivor's (or their advocate's) perspective and needs regarding  
182 reintegration of a sexual abuser into congregational life; and
- 183 • Respect the survivor's autonomy to direct his/her healing process.
- 184 • Accompany and advocate as needed.
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186 3. Survivors may choose forgiveness as a gift to themselves, so they can move on and live their  
187 lives with joy and peace. Pressuring the survivor to forgive is rarely helpful. Ultimately  
188 forgiveness is a process of letting go and moving forward in healthy ways.

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190 4. The Caregiving and Membership Commission may provide financial assistance from the  
191 Caring Fund to help a survivor utilize professional and community services to aid his/her  
192 healing.

### 193 194 Care for Families of Survivors

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196 The pastors and/or Caregiving and Membership Commission will oversee support for  
197 the secondary victims associated with the survivor. One or more congregational members may  
198 be asked to serve as their advocate. Financial assistance from the Caring Fund may be used to  
199 assist families and other secondary victims in the aftermath of the trauma of sexual abuse.

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Resources Which Have Informed This Policy

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214 “Information on Child Sexual Abuse, Pedophilia and Sex Offenders,” pp. 29-40, *A Time to Heal: Protecting Children and Ministering to Sex Offenders*, Debra W. Haffner, 2005.  
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217 “Balancing Acts—keeping children safe in congregation,” Debra W. Haffner, retrievable from  
218 [www.uua.org/documents/haffnerdebra/balancingact.htm](http://www.uua.org/documents/haffnerdebra/balancingact.htm).  
219  
220 “Child and Youth Protection Policy,” First Mennonite Church, Halstead, Kansas, undated.  
221  
222 “Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse,” MCUSA 2015.  
223  
224 “COVENANT TO CARE FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL ABUSE AND SEXUAL OFFENDERS,”  
225 Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kansas, 2009.  
226  
227 “Policy and Procedures for the Protection of Children and Youth,” Shalom Mennonite Church,  
228 Newton, Kansas, 2016.  
229  
230 “Policy Regarding the Prevention of Sexual and Other Abuse, with Protection and Inclusion  
231 Addendum: A guide for Portland Mennonite Church on safely including persons who have  
232 committed sexual offenses,” Portland Mennonite Church, Portland, Oregon, 2016.  
233  
234 “Protection and Inclusion: Guide for Churches on Safely Including Persons Who Have  
235 Committed Sexual Offenses,” Dove’s Nest, 2016, retrievable from [www.DovesNest.net](http://www.DovesNest.net).  
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238 ***Note: This document may be used as a resource for congregations working on the issue of***  
239 ***sexual abuse. It may not be used as a template for others, because every church must go***  
240 ***through its own process and claim the outcome. Questions may be directed to the First***  
241 ***Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas, 316-283-0273, or emailed to [firstmennonitenewton.org](mailto:firstmennonitenewton.org).***