



Safe Church Covenant

Faith Statement

As an Anabaptist Mennonite congregation, we believe that Jesus Christ is our example for everyday living and behavior. Mennonites are known for their emphasis on peacemaking, reconciliation, nonviolence, a simple lifestyle, servanthood, and a strong sense of community and service to others, caring for each other and those in need.

We at North Suburban Mennonite church are committed to creating a safe and caring environment for all God's people, including members, attenders, children, youth and community. We will use this covenant as our guide to prevent any incidents of abuse or neglect and to address abuse or neglect should it occur in our church or elsewhere.

Facility Safety

All Childcare or Sunday school will take place in a public area or a room with a window. If the room does not have a window, the door will remain open. An open-door policy will be in place for all classrooms.

If a child needs to use the restroom, a parent will be called to accompany them.

Abuse Prevention

This information is from the [Mennonite Church USA Prevention & Accountability Resource](#)

The language is very specific for clarity of communication.

1. North Suburban Mennonite Church prohibits the following: • Sexually or physically abusive touch • Any touch that is unwanted by a child • Touching a child's/minor's thighs, stomach or back • Corporal punishment • Shaming or shouting at children/minors • Lap-sitting • Tickling, piggyback rides, or other games involving high levels of touch with children/minors • Playing with hair • Massages • Full frontal hugs This list is non-exhaustive, and any other forms or derivations of such touch are also prohibited.
2. North Suburban Mennonite Church desires to show children/minors appropriate displays of affection that are welcome and observable by another adult such as high-fives, pats on the shoulder, and brief hugs.
3. North Suburban Mennonite Church acknowledges that sexual language is a serious boundary violation. As such, it prohibits these types of language and behaviors with children/minors: • Sexually suggestive language, racy jokes, sexual innuendo, descriptions of sexual experiences/habits. • Uploading, downloading, sharing, or viewing of pornography or any sexualized images. • Sharing with minors music, video games, and movies with sexual themes.

This list is non-exhaustive and any other forms or derivations of such language or behaviors are also prohibited.

4. **Healthy Boundaries** with Adults: It is always the responsibility of the person in the position of greater power to maintain appropriate boundaries with others (e.g., a pastor or other church leader with any congregant, any adult with a child, an older teen with a younger child, etc.). It is never justifiable for a pastor or other church leader to cross boundaries with a child or another adult who is in a position of spiritual and emotional dependence.

Touch that causes concern from a pastor, leader, or other adult in a position of authority or trust would include: • Physical touch with a congregant that is not welcomed, done in private (especially initiated by the person in greater power), or is kept secret from others. • Any caressing, sensual, or intimate touch (touching face, hair, or giving a massage). • Notice any progressive touch (e.g., holding hands longer, hugging longer, back/shoulder touch to lower on the back or rubbing the back, progressively more intimate touch). • Any romantic or sexual touch. This list is non-exhaustive, and any other forms or derivations of such touch are also prohibited.

Guidelines for Pastors/Volunteers/Teachers

1. We will provide a six-month period in which we commit to getting to know new member and attendees before asking them to teach Sunday school.
2. We will ensure that any person under 18 who works with children and/or youth is paired with someone older than 21.
3. We will provide youth with Sunday school teachers that are at least five years older than the youth.
4. We will provide a public setting as often as possible for pastoral counseling, especially with youth. When an office meeting is most appropriate, the door will remain open, or the individuals will be easily visible through a window in the door.
5. Screening: All volunteers/teachers and paid staff will undergo a background check and receive training on abuse awareness and prevention before being allowed to volunteer/teach. **The lead pastor will be the only one with access to the police reports.**
6. We will monitor our implementation of this Covenant. The Church Board will provide oversight for implementation of this Covenant, assessing compliance and reporting to the congregation yearly at a congregational meeting.

Safe Use of Electronic Communication

No Electronic communication with a child/youth will occur without permission of a parent or guardian.

Parent or guardian will be copied on any emails and will be kept informed of any texts or phone calls.

Photos of children/youth will not be shared on any social media or website without prior written consent of parent or guardian. Names, addresses, phone numbers or any other identifying information of the child/youth will never be posted on any social media or website.

Guidelines for Registering Staff and Volunteers

To provide a safe and nurturing environment for the children and youth who participate in our congregational programs the following guidelines have been established for those who want to work with our children and youth. The [governing church committee] and a designated individual will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the Safety Covenant with all church employees and/or volunteers.

- 1) All individuals who seek to volunteer with the children and/or youth will sign a memo of understanding.
- 2) All paid staff will agree to a police background check. Only the lead/senior pastor will read the police background check and only the Chair of the congregation will read the lead pastor's background check.
- 3) Volunteers will have attended North Suburban Mennonite Church regularly for at least six months prior to volunteering for activities involving the supervision of groups of children.
- 4) Volunteers will have attended North Suburban Mennonite Church regularly for at least two years prior to volunteering for activities involving regular off-grounds supervision of groups of youth (youth sponsors) or individuals (youth mentors). A police background check will also be required.
- 5) Any person convicted of physical and/or sexual abuse will not be approved as a child/youth worker.

Process for reporting abuse or handling a complaint of abuse

Anyone who suspects or witnesses abuse or a child/youth reports abuse, will report to the Safe Protection Policy Committee. The SPPC will then submit a report to DCFS (Illinois Department of Children & Family Services). If the abuse is of a vulnerable adult, Adult protective Services will be contacted.

An Incident Report Form will be filled out by a member of the church board.

The accused person will be suspended from duties and will have no direct contact with children/youth.

The victim's physical, mental and emotional needs will be attended to by the pastoral team. This may include making sure the victim is seen by a medical professional and providing mental/emotional health referrals.

The Church Board will:

Keep up to date on Mennonite Church USA safe church guidelines: [MCUSA guidelines](#)

Oversee background checks and training of all volunteers/teachers.

Be the NSMC's mandated reporters of any abuse complaints.

Keep up to date on any state laws regarding abuse.

Regularly review the Safe Church Policy and amend as needed.

Make sure the Safe Church Policy is always readily available to congregants.

Community Resources: Reporting abuse

Libertyville Police:

847-362-8310

200 E Cook Avenue, Libertyville, IL 60048

DCFS:

1-800-25ABUSE (252-2873)

CHILDABUSE.ILLINOIS.GOV

Adult Protective Services:

1-866-800-1409

Jolene Miller, Illinois Mennonite Conference Safety Liaison

Contact through <https://www.illinoismennonite.org/contact>

Documents:

Background Check Form: [Background Check form.docx](#)

Incident Report Form: [Incident Report form.docx](#)

Volunteer Agreement Form: [Memo of Understanding.docx](#)

Illinois State Law

(325 ILCS 5/2) Sec 2. (a) The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services shall, upon receiving reports made under this Act, protect the health, safety, and best interests of the child in all situations in which the child is vulnerable to child abuse or neglect, offer protective services in order to prevent any further harm to the child and to other children in the same environment or family, stabilize the home environment, and preserve family life whenever possible. Recognizing that children also can be abused and neglected while living in public or private residential agencies or institutions meant to serve them, while attending day care centers, schools, or religious activities, or when in contact with adults who are responsible for the welfare of the child at that time, this Act also provides for the reporting and investigation of child abuse and neglect in such instances. In performing any of these duties, the Department may utilize such protective services of voluntary agencies as are available.

Illinois State Definition of Terms

"Child" means any person under the age of 18 years, unless legally emancipated by reason of marriage or entry into a branch of the United States armed services.

"Youth" generally refers to individuals aged 13 to 17 years, particularly in contexts involving juvenile justice and services. The Illinois Juvenile Court Act (705 ILCS 405/) provides guidance on youth-related definitions and protections.

"Vulnerable Adult" is defined as an individual aged 18 or older who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits their ability to provide for their own care or protection.

"Abused child" means a child whose parent or immediate family member, or any person responsible for the child's welfare, or any individual residing in the same home as the child, or a paramour of the child's parent:

- (a) inflicts, causes to be inflicted, or allows to be inflicted upon such child physical injury, by other than accidental means, which causes death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function;
- (b) creates a substantial risk of physical injury to such child by other than accidental means which would be likely to cause death, disfigurement, impairment of physical or emotional health, or loss or impairment of any bodily function;
- (c) commits or allows to be committed any sex offense against such child, as such sex offenses are defined in the Criminal Code of 2012 or in the Wrongs to Children Act, and extending those definitions of sex offenses to include children under 18 years of age;
- (d) commits or allows to be committed an act or acts of torture upon such child;
- (e) inflicts excessive corporal punishment or, in the case of a person working for an agency who is prohibited from using corporal punishment, inflicts corporal punishment upon a child or adult resident with whom the person is working in the person's professional capacity;
- (f) commits or allows to be committed the offense of female genital mutilation, as defined in Section 12-34 of the Criminal Code of 2012, against the child;
- (g) causes to be sold, transferred, distributed, or given to such child under 18 years of age, a controlled substance as defined in Section 102 of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act in violation of Article IV of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act or in violation of the Methamphetamine Control and Community Protection Act, except for controlled substances that are prescribed in accordance with Article III of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act and are dispensed to such child in a manner that substantially complies with the prescription;
- (h) commits or allows to be committed the offense of involuntary servitude, involuntary sexual servitude of a minor, or trafficking in persons as defined in Section 10-9 of the Criminal Code of 2012 against the child; or
- (i) commits the offense of grooming, as defined in Section 11-25 of the Criminal Code of 2012, against the child.

"Neglected child" means any child who is not receiving the proper or necessary nourishment or medically indicated treatment including food or care not provided solely on the basis of the present or anticipated mental or physical impairment as determined by a physician acting alone or in consultation with other physicians or otherwise is not receiving the proper or necessary support or medical or other remedial care recognized under State law as necessary for a child's well-being, or other care necessary for the child's well-being, including adequate food, clothing and shelter; or who is subjected to an environment which is injurious insofar as (i) the child's environment creates a likelihood of harm to the child's health, physical well-being, or welfare and (ii) the likely harm to the

child is the result of a blatant disregard of parent, caretaker, person responsible for the child's welfare, or agency responsibilities; or who is abandoned by the child's parents or other person responsible for the child's welfare without a proper plan of care; or who has been provided with interim crisis intervention services under Section 3-5 of the Juvenile Court Act of 1987 and whose parent, guardian, or custodian refuses to permit the child to return home and no other living arrangement agreeable to the parent, guardian, or custodian can be made, and the parent, guardian, or custodian has not made any other appropriate living arrangement for the child; or who is a newborn infant whose blood, urine, or meconium contains any amount of a controlled substance as defined in subsection (f) of Section 102 of the Illinois Controlled Substances Act or a metabolite thereof, with the exception of a controlled substance or metabolite thereof whose presence in the newborn infant is the result of medical treatment administered to the person who gave birth or the newborn infant. A child shall not be considered neglected for the sole reason that the child's parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare has left the child in the care of an adult relative for any period of time. A child shall not be considered neglected for the sole reason that the child has been relinquished in accordance with the Abandoned Newborn Infant Protection Act. A child shall not be considered neglected or abused for the sole reason that such child's parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare depends upon spiritual means through prayer alone for the treatment or cure of disease or remedial care as provided under Section 4 of this Act. A child shall not be considered neglected or abused solely because the child is not attending school in accordance with the requirements of Article 26 of The School Code, as amended.

Person responsible for the child's welfare" means the child's parent; guardian; foster parent; relative caregiver; any person responsible for the child's welfare in a public or private residential agency or institution; any person responsible for the child's welfare within a public or private profit or not for profit child care facility; or any other person responsible for the child's welfare at the time of the alleged abuse or neglect, including any person who commits or allows to be committed, against the child, the offense of involuntary servitude, involuntary sexual servitude of a minor, or trafficking in persons for forced labor or services, as provided in Section 10-9 of the Criminal Code of 2012, including, but not limited to, the custodian of the minor, or any person who came to know the child through an official capacity or position of trust, including, but not limited to, health care professionals, educational personnel, recreational supervisors, members of the clergy, and volunteers or support personnel in any setting where children may be subject to abuse or neglect.

In Illinois, a **mandated reporter** is defined as an individual who is legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect. This obligation is outlined in the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (ANCRA).

Who is a Mandated Reporter? Professionals in specific fields, including: Teachers, Healthcare providers, Social workers, Law enforcement officers and Childcare workers

Reporting Requirements: Mandated reporters must report any reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect. Reports should be made to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) or local law enforcement.

Consequences of Non-Reporting: Failure to report can result in legal penalties, including fines or criminal charges.

Training and Resources: Illinois provides training resources for mandated reporters to help them understand their responsibilities and the reporting process.

For more detailed information, refer to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services website or the specific text of the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act.

Vulnerable Adult

"Abuse" means causing any physical, mental or sexual injury to an eligible adult, including exploitation of such adult's financial resources.

"Neglect" means another individual's failure to provide an eligible adult with or willful withholding from an eligible adult the necessities of life including, but not limited to, food, clothing, shelter or health care.

"Financial exploitation" means the use of an eligible adult's resources by another to the disadvantage of that adult or the profit or advantage of a person other than that adult.

Any person who suspects the abuse, neglect, financial exploitation, or self-neglect of an eligible adult may report this suspicion to an agency designated to receive such reports under this Act or to the Department.