

PREVENTION AND ACCOUNTABILITY RESOURCE FROM MENNONITE CHURCH USA

A Brief Summary by Doug Luginbill, CDC Conference Minister

Overview: It is challenging to summarize an 86-page document. While the full *Prevention and Accountability Resource (PAR)* is available to anyone who would like to read it at mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Prevention-Accountability-Resource.pdf, I believe it is helpful to provide a short overview of the resource. The resource provides an introduction, a summary of our MC USA polity, two primary sections and three appendices.

Introduction: The introduction begins with, “*The purpose of this document is to provide resources for MC USA congregations and conferences as they seek to prevent abuse in the church and to respond effectively in the event abuse does occur.*” (page 2) The introduction also explains the relationship between the PAR and *A Shared Understanding of Ministerial Leadership*. *A Shared Understanding* explains the way MC USA understands pastoral leadership, credentialing, and pastoral ethics.

A Word about MC USA Polity: The term “polity” simply means the way an organization is structured and the relationships between various levels of an organization. The PAR states, “*MC USA observes a congregational polity. That means that the power and authority rests at the congregational level – as opposed to the national level. Congregations have autonomy when determining membership criteria in the local congregation, programming, personnel, property, and so on. Congregation members are accountable to their local congregations as defined by the membership covenant of that congregation (which varies from congregation to congregation).*” (page 4)

Congregations are part of conferences. Central District Conference (CDC) is one of fifteen conferences of MC USA. Central District Conference has membership criteria that all congregations agree to when they become part of CDC. Central District also appoints a ministerial committee of six people to oversee credentialing of pastors and provide resources to credentialed leaders. Credentialed leaders have an accountability relationship with our CDC ministerial committee.

The PAR also clarifies the relationship MC USA has with conferences and credentialed leaders. It states, “*When a person serves in the role of pastor in a congregation and/or that person is credentialed by the conference, it creates an accountability relationship between that person and the area conference. In those cases, the area conference is responsible for abuse prevention – including education and accompaniment – and response, if a pastor or credentialed leader is accused of misconduct. The area conference partners with the Safe Church ministry of MC USA to ensure that abuse prevention and accountability processes are thorough and consistent with the goals and values of MC USA.*” (page 5)

Part I: Abuse Prevention: Part I is divided into several sections that include:

Code of conduct for credentialed and non-credentialed leaders in congregations as well as identifying healthy boundaries relating to both children and adults that help protect against misconduct.

Ethical Practices related to the task of clergy including power, authority, conflict, confidentiality, preaching, teaching, pastoral care, financial ethics, and community relationships.

Best Practices for Congregations in Support of Abuse Prevention and Harm. This includes such things as congregational behavioral covenants, conflict resolutions

processes, grievance processes, church safety policies, financial practices, Pastor Congregation Relation Committees, pastoral evaluations, clergy health, and continuing education.

Suggested Policies in support of abuse prevention. This section identifies several policies congregations are encouraged to create to protect pastors and congregants from potential abuse and misuse of power.

Part II: Accountability: Part II describes the detailed process of reporting, investigating, and discerning accusations of abuse against clergy and lay leaders. A significant change from the previous Ministerial Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedure is that investigations of reported abuse are going to be led at the denominational level rather than at the conference level. The rationale for this includes:

Investigations require a significant amount of time and emotional energy by volunteers who may be unfamiliar with the process or who may have not had a refresher on the process for a long time.

Investigations require a significant amount of time and emotional energy by conference staff, thus delaying other important conference ministry tasks.

Conference ministers are placed in the difficult position of administering an investigation against credentialed individuals for whom the conference minister is typically a primary support person. This creates a potential conflict of interest or dual role with competing responsibilities.

Different conferences interpreted policies differently and/or include different procedures and communication techniques. Having the denomination overseeing investigations provides more continuity and consistency across conferences.

Another significant change from previous guidance includes the creation of a “Denominational Minister of Church Safety.” Currently Nancy Kauffmann serves this position in an interim role. Also, each conference is to identify a “**Church Safety Liaison.**” The Church Safety Liaison will:

Be trained at the denominational level

Facilitate abuse prevention and response training with new and existing clergy in their area conference

Facilitate abuse prevention and response training for congregations

Ensure compliance with clergy abuse policy at the area conference level

Maintain a deep working knowledge of the clergy abuse policy

Participate, as needed, in investigations when clergy or lay leader abuse is reported.

Complete a total of 10 hours of outside abuse prevention and response training on an annual basis

Appendices: The *PAR* includes the following appendices.

Appendix 1: Glossary of Definitions

Appendix 2: Forms

Appendix 3: Additional Resources

While no process or procedure can eliminate abuse, the *PAR* is a valuable resource for conferences and congregations and helps us provide safety, responsibility, and accountability to all who are part of our faith communities.