

**Final Report to the
2009 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference on the
2007 Annual Conference Query: Child Abuse Prevention**

Background Review

For more than two decades, the Church of the Brethren has been concerned with the ongoing issue of child abuse and neglect. In 1983 a query was presented to Annual Conference on the topic and was answered in 1986 with the "Church of the Brethren Annual Conference Statement and Recommendations for Positive Action on Conditions of Childhood in the United States." The Conditions of Childhood Task Force, appointed by the 1986 Annual Conference and the Association of Brethren Caregivers, created the *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook: A Manual for the Church of the Brethren* in 1991. Subsequently, the "Code of Ethics for Ordained and Licensed Ministers and Lay Speakers" (1996) and the "Ethical Guidelines for Congregations of the Church of the Brethren" (1996) were developed, which, among other significant contributions, reiterate and restate these concerns and recommendations.

In November 2005, members of the Skyridge (Kalamazoo, Mich.) Church of the Brethren adopted a query requesting a thorough examination of how the recommendations made in Conditions of Childhood, the *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, and the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations are being utilized and implemented in Church of the Brethren congregations; schools; camps; district, Annual Conference, and General Board programs; and other related institutions and events. That query was approved by the Michigan District Board in April 2006 and passed on to the Michigan District Conference, meeting in August 2006, where the query was approved for consideration by the Annual Conference meeting in 2007 at Cleveland, Ohio. The 2007 Annual Conference accepted the query, Child Abuse Prevention, and referred its concerns to the Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC), currently known as the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren.

In order to determine how the recommendations made in Conditions of Childhood, the *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, the Code of Ethics for Ministers, and the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations are being utilized and implemented throughout the Church of the Brethren, ABC conducted a survey in 2008 of congregations; camps; district offices; and agencies, ministry areas, and programs. The results of that survey were used to make recommendations related to child abuse prevention and child protection policies.

The interim report, presented to the 2008 Annual Conference, is an account of the initial work done by the Association of Brethren Caregivers in response to the query.

Highlights of the 2008 interim report include:

- A description of the survey process and an in-depth analysis of the survey results.

Highlights, continued:

- A summary of activity by the Association of Brethren Caregivers related to child abuse awareness and prevention.
- Recommendations to congregations; camps; district offices; and agencies, ministry areas, and programs based on a careful review of the Conditions of Childhood statement, the *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, the Code of Ethics for Ministers, and the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations, as well as the results of the 2008 survey.

A copy of the full 2008 report can be obtained by contacting the Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren and at www.brethren.org/abuseprevention08.

Summary of Activity since August 2008

Family Life Ministry

The interim report included recommendations to be implemented by the Caring Ministries. In response, the director of family life ministry met with members of the family life ministry group in October 2008 to develop a plan to implement those recommendations. The following actions have been taken:

Recommendation: Raise awareness of the need for child protection/child abuse prevention policies and assist with the development of policies.

- Placed an ad in the April 2009 Messenger lifting up April as child abuse awareness month and encouraging congregations to adopt child protection policies, identifying Caring Ministries as a source for information about child abuse prevention and protection policies, and inviting people to attend the 2009 Annual Conference insight session about keeping children safe.
- Publicized child abuse awareness month in Newsline, through district communications, and on the brethren.org homepage.
- Provided information and resources to individuals, congregations, and district offices to assist with the development and implementation of policies.

Recommendation: Identify existing resources and develop additional ones to assist various Church of the Brethren entities to implement the previous recommendations found in the Conditions of Childhood statement, the Child Abuse Prevention Handbook, the Code of Ethics for Ministers, and the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations.

- Donated to each district office a copy of the book, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in the Church for Children and Youth*, to make available as a resource to congregations for developing child protection policies. Copies of the book in Spanish were donated to three districts identified as having the largest number of Spanish-speaking congregants. Publicized availability of the books in Newsline and April 2009 *Messenger*.
- Lent *Reducing the Risk* training materials (DVD, training guide, samples of forms) to several congregations.
- Updated the child protection web page and added to its resources.

Recommendation, continued:

- Created a webpage for child abuse awareness month with congregational resources, information about strengthening families and relationships, and links to parenting and abuse prevention materials.
- Invited several pastors to contribute worship resources related to conditions of childhood, strengthening relationships, and child protection issues.
- At the 2009 Annual Conference, an insight session about child abuse and child protection policies and a session for grandparents raising their grandchildren will be presented.

Recommendation: Serve as a resource for congregations in their ministry to individuals, families, congregations, and communities that have been impacted by child abuse.

- Identified several mental health specialists as potential resource persons to provide guidance to people ministering to those impacted by child abuse.
- In response to an expressed request for information, training for deacons and others who are providing support to those impacted by child abuse will be developed in the future.

Additional Surveys

A significant number of district offices, camps, agencies, ministry areas, and programs did not complete the survey in 2008. In order to obtain a more accurate picture, a second survey request was issued in early 2009 to those district offices, camps, agencies, ministry areas, and programs that did not return the original survey in 2008. In addition, eighty-six percent (86%) of the congregations did not complete the survey in 2008. Due to the expense involved in resending survey requests to these 912 congregations, they were not included in the 2009 re-surveying process.

The information obtained from the surveys returned in 2009 gives a more complete picture of the number of groups with child protection policies and that provide resources and training related to child abuse prevention.

Number of Surveys Received in 2009:

Group Type	Number that did not return survey in 2008 and received second request in 2009	Number of surveys returned in 2009	Number of surveys returned in 2008 or 2009
District Offices	9	4	18 of 23 sent
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	6	5	22 of 20 sent +
Camps	10	6	25 of 30 sent

+ Some agencies/ministries/programs completed several surveys because of their multiple ministry areas; therefore, the total surveys returned exceeds the number of invitations sent.

Number that have a Child Protection Policy:

Group Type	Of those returning survey in 2009, number that have a child protection policy ❖	Total number reporting they have a child protection policy (2008 and 2009 responses)	Of those without a policy, number that plan to develop and implement a child protection policy (2008 and 2009 responses)
District Offices	3	9 of 23 sent	2
Agencies/Ministries/Programs *	3	10 of 20 sent	0
Camps	6	24 of 30 sent	1

- ❖ Elements of a policy may include screening, background checks, training about the policy and/or child abuse and abuse prevention, procedures for responding to allegations of abuse and/or reporting suspected or known incidents of abuse, and other.
- * Agencies/ministries/programs were asked to complete this question only if they interact with children/youth.

Resource and Training Availability:

Group Type	Of those returning survey in 2009, number that provide resources to congregations related to developing policies ★	Total number reporting they have resources for congregations related to developing policies (2008 and 2009 responses)
District Offices	4	17 of 23 sent

- ★ Resources such as information about child abuse and prevention, guidelines for developing policies, sample policies, workshops to assist with developing policies, materials such as *Reducing the Risk*, resources from insurance companies, resources in Spanish, and other.

Group Type	Of those returning survey in 2009, number that provide other resources to congregations related to child abuse prevention ♦	Total number reporting they have resources for congregations related to child abuse prevention (2008 and 2009 responses)
District Offices	1	10 of 23 sent

- ♦ Resources such as worship experiences and trainings related to the conditions of childhood, trainings to strengthen relationships and marriages, trainings to promote healthy parenting practices, non-violence teaching for children/youth/adults, parenting support groups, respite for parents/caregivers, shelters, advocacy, community services related to child abuse prevention, training to increase competency in dealing with victims and perpetrators of abuse, and other.

Group Type	Provide training to children (through age 10) about:					
	What abuse is		How to prevent abuse		How to report abuse	
	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	0	0	0	0	0	0
Camps	0	2	0	2	0	1

Group Type	Provide training to youth (age 11-18) about:					
	What abuse is		How to prevent abuse		How to report abuse	
	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	0	1	0	1	0	1
Camps	1	3	1	3	1	3

Group Type	Provide training to adults about:					
	What abuse is		How to prevent abuse		How to report abuse	
	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09	2009	'08 + '09
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	2	12	1	10	2	12
Camps	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Additional Information Obtained

The Church of the Brethren Annual Conference shared the following update related to child abuse prevention and child protection:

- 1) With the Annual Conference strategic plan, the child protection policy that was already in place was expanded.
- 2) Training for age-group coordinators and other significant volunteers that has been in place for quite some time was expanded and is provided for those individuals the day before Conference starts.
- 3) Background checks will be instituted for all age-group coordinators responsible for working with all ages of children attending Annual Conference, starting with the 2010 conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- 4) Additional enhancements to their policy are anticipated for the future.

Bethany Theological Seminary reported the following information:

- 1) Students have criminal background checks.
- 2) Students are screened before admission to Ministry Formation.
- 3) All students are required to attend the "Healthy Boundaries" seminar, a day-long training from the Church of the Brethren Office of Ministry, prior to placement.

In addition, Bethany reports it has procedures in place for reporting suspected or known abuse.

Observations

Over the course of the last two years, the Association of Brethren Caregivers/Caring Ministries has experienced increased interaction with individuals, congregations, districts, camps, agencies, ministry areas, and programs related to child abuse prevention and child protection policies. Many of those interactions were to request information about child abuse prevention and child protection policies, to seek suggestions on how to help reluctant congregations recognize the need to adopt a policy, or to report that child protection policies have been implemented.

A significant number of contacts, however, expressed denial of the need for a child protection policy. Comments such as "We know these people" and "We are a church" are disconcerting in light of the fact that over eighty percent (80%) of child abuse is perpetrated by a person known to the child, and we know that abuse has occurred in church settings. Indeed, the trusting nature of churches, lack of screening of staff and volunteers, and opportunities for close personal relationships

with children and youth can contribute to making churches an ideal setting for perpetrators of child abuse.

We also know that Brethren are not immune to experiencing child abuse. *Portrait of a People: The Church of the Brethren at 300*, by Carl Desportes Bowman, reports that nine percent (9%) of respondents to the 2006 Brethren Member Profile state they experienced sexual abuse or violation as a child, while four percent (4%) report sexual abuse or violation as a teenager. We do not know the percentage of sexual abuse or violation that occurred in or under the auspices of the Church, nor do we have information about the number of Brethren who have experienced child abuse or other domestic violence issues.

Recommendations

"Child abuse prevention is good for the church as well as the children."

From the 1991 *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*

As a faith community, the church can play a vital role in the prevention of child abuse by helping to strengthen families and ensure that parents and caregivers have the knowledge, skill, support, and resources they need to care for their children. The church also has a moral obligation to assure that our children are safe, and that the adults supervising them at church activities are properly screened and trained for working with children and youth. This includes screening and training to help prevent child abuse, including child sexual abuse.

Based on a careful review of the Conditions of Childhood statement, the *Child Abuse Prevention Handbook*, the Code of Ethics for Ministers, and the Ethical Guidelines for Congregations, along with the results of the 2008 and 2009 surveys, this final report puts forth these recommendations:

- 1) Every Church of the Brethren congregation, district, agency, ministry area, program, and camp adopt and implement a child protection/child abuse prevention policy appropriate for its ministry setting.
- 2) The Church of the Brethren maintain resources to assist congregations, districts, agencies, ministry areas, programs, and camps in developing child protection/child abuse prevention policies.
- 3) The Church of the Brethren continue to help strengthen families and ensure that parents and caregivers have the knowledge, skill, support, and resources to care for their children.

Submitted by: Caring Ministries of the Church of the Brethren
1451 Dundee Avenue
Elgin, IL 60120
(800) 323-8039
www.brethren.org