



## Association of Brethren Caregivers

# Interim Report to the 2008 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference on the 2007 Annual Conference Query: Child Abuse Prevention

## Introduction

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.

This interim report is the account of the initial work done by the Association of Brethren Caregivers (ABC) in response to the query. A final report will be given at the 2009 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren.

## The Survey Process

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, the Association of Brethren Caregivers conducted a survey.

ABC identified and categorized the recommendations found in the above resources, which address three main areas: 1) child protection/child abuse prevention

policies; 2) education and training about child abuse and child abuse prevention; and 3) programming and resources to promote and support healthy interaction and relationships. These areas of recommendations were then quantified and reworked into survey questions to determine if and how they have been implemented at various levels of denominational programming to date.

Four organizational categories were identified as recipients of the surveys: congregations, districts, agencies/ministries/programs, and camps. The surveys were designed with as much commonality as possible to determine the degree of implementation across all organizations; however, since each group fulfills a different role within the denomination, additional and/or modified questions were created for each group as appropriate.

Letters were created describing the purpose of the survey and inviting the recipients to complete the survey in one of two ways: online (using a free service called Survey Monkey) or on paper. Potential responders were encouraged to use the online version if at all possible so that results could be automatically tallied. Those needing to use a paper copy were asked to call ABC to request that the survey be sent to them. The surveys are available for review at [www.brethren-caregivers.org](http://www.brethren-caregivers.org).

Following are the details of survey distribution:

#### CONGREGATIONS:

A total of 1,055 letters (paper copies sent via US mail) were sent to the church board chairpersons, in care of the churches, asking them to complete the survey. The letter and survey were translated into Spanish, and the letter, paper survey, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope were sent to 18 congregations identified by the Congregational Life Ministry office as being primarily Spanish speaking (this number is included in the total of 1,055).

#### DISTRICTS:

Letters were sent (via e-mail attachment) to each District Executive (a total of 23) at the district office e-mail address, asking that the survey be completed.

#### AGENCIES, MINISTRIES, and PROGRAMS:

A total of 20 letters were sent (via e-mail attachment) to Church of the Brethren agencies, ministries, and programs of the General Board, and to two social service agencies with ties to the Church of the Brethren. The e-mails contained a personalized introduction explaining how the survey fit their particular agency/ministry/program and invited them to have others in their agency/ministry/program area complete the survey if that was appropriate.

#### CAMPS:

Letters were sent to the directors of 30 Church of the Brethren camps (via e-mail insofar as possible; for those for whom e-mail was not available, paper letters and surveys were mailed) asking them to complete the survey.

The letters to congregations were mailed on January 14, 2008. E-mails, with the letter attached, were sent to district, agency/ministry/program, and camp director offices between January 16 and 23, 2008. In all instances, the recipient of the letter or e-mail was asked to designate someone else to complete the survey if he or she was not the appropriate person.

The survey process was also publicized on the ABC website, through the "feature bar" of the Church of the Brethren website, and through Newsline (January 2008).

Completion of the survey was requested by February 15, 2008. ABC kept the online survey active through mid-April to accommodate late responders.

Unique surveys were created for each survey category, but all were asked 1) whether or not a specific child protection/child abuse prevention policy exists for the organization, and 2) if such a policy exists, what elements are included and for whom. Congregations and districts were also asked what resources and programming related to child protection and child abuse prevention they have available. Surveys for agencies/ministries/programs and camps included questions specific to training offered for different age groups (children, youth, and adults) about what abuse is, how it can be prevented, and how it is to be reported.

Again, the surveys for each group can be found at [www.brethren-caregivers.org](http://www.brethren-caregivers.org).

## Survey Results

From the total 1128 invitations to participate in the survey, 193 surveys were received from the following groups:

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Invitations to Participate</b>	<b>Surveys Received</b>	<b>Percentage Responding</b>
Congregations	1055	143	14%
Districts	23	14	61%
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	20	17	85% +
Camps	30	19	63% *
<b>Totals</b>	<b>1128</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>17%</b>

+ Some agencies/ministries/programs completed several surveys because of their varied ministry areas, while six invited ministry areas did not submit any completed surveys.

\* It should be noted that one camp completed the online survey twice. The numbers have been adjusted to reflect this. Another camp completed the agency survey online instead of the survey specific to camps. That survey has not been counted in the results.

## Existence/Development of Policies

The primary question asked of all groups was if a child protection/child abuse prevention policy currently exists. Following are those results from the surveys received:

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Policy Exists</b>	<b>Policy Does Not Exist</b>	<b>Don't Know or Skipped Question</b>	<b>Percentage of Positive Responses</b>
Congregations	50	88	5	35%
Districts	6	5	3	43%
Agencies/Ministries/Programs ★	7	0	0	100%
Camps	18	1	0	95%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>44%</b>

★ Agencies/Ministries/Programs were asked to complete this question only if they interact with children/youth. Seven report they do have interactions with children/youth and all seven (7) have policies.

Organizations reporting they do not have a policy were asked if plans exist to develop such a policy:

<b>Group Type</b>	<b>Number of Respondents Without a Policy</b>	<b>Plan to Develop Policy</b>	<b>Percentage Planning to Develop Policy</b>
Congregations	88	18	20%
Districts	5	1	20%
Agencies/Ministries/Programs	0	0	--
Camps	1	1	100%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21%</b>

### Elements of Policies

All groups were asked to indicate the elements found in their policies, both for all employees and for volunteers who work with children and/or youth. A list of possible elements was included on the surveys for responders to select from, along with an "Other" category where additional information could be entered.

In all groups, screening as a part of the employee hiring process and granting permission for volunteers to work with children and youth process ranked in the top four elements of policies for both employees and volunteers. Procedures for responding to allegations of abuse and procedures for reporting suspected or known instances of child abuse also appeared in the top four elements of all policies. Policies for camps and agencies/ministries/programs consistently included training about all aspects of the policy, with specific training about child abuse and prevention.

Congregations were asked for elements included in policies at the congregational level as well. The most common elements were 1) procedures for responding to allegations of abuse; 2) procedures for reporting suspected or known incidents of abuse; and 3) training of the congregation about all aspects of the policy.

Camps and agencies/ministries/programs were also asked to comment on the existence of training for children and youth concerning 1) what abuse is; 2) how to prevent abuse; and 3) how to report abuse. Training for adults was included as a separate category for agencies/ministries/programs. For the 19 camps that responded to these questions for children and youth, 90% of the responses indicated that no training on any of these issues is currently being provided. None of the agencies/ministries/programs responding include any training for children; one provides training for youth, and about half provide training for adults. While the provision of training at a variety of levels is indicated in the policies of 100% of the reporting camps and nearly 86% of the reporting agencies/ministries/programs, the number of actual training programs appears to be small, especially for children and youth.

### **Resources and Programming**

Finally, congregations and districts were asked to indicate the types of resources and programming offered. Nearly half of the responding congregations include non-violence teaching/training/learning experiences for children and youth, as well as programming and training to strengthen relationships and marriages. The third most common resource available at the congregational level is the existence of worship services that lift up issues related to the conditions of childhood.

Ninety-two percent (92%) of the responding districts indicated that they provide resources to congregations in their respective districts to assist them in developing policies. The most common resources reported are:

- Sample policies
- Resources from insurance companies
- Other resources such as *Reducing the Risk of Sexual Abuse in Your Church* and *Reducing the Risk II*, and *Making Your Church Safe from Child Sexual Abuse*
- Guidelines for developing policies
- Information about child abuse and child abuse prevention

### **Survey Summary**

The mandate to ABC from Annual Conference was primarily to 'take the temperature' of the survey categories identified in this report. In summary, the results are disappointing and concerning, especially at the congregational level. In fact, the lack of response from congregations (143 of 1,055 congregations) makes it virtually impossible to determine what is actually happening in our congregations. While the response was significantly better from other groups polled, on average only slightly more than half of the groups responding have policies in place, with camps reporting the best rate by far. It is equally concerning that of those responding that policies do not currently exist, an average of only 21% have plans to create one.

Most notable regarding elements of existing policies is that, other than an initial screening of employees (including clergy) and volunteers, the emphasis in policies is significantly skewed toward responding to allegations of abuse and reporting suspected or known instances of child abuse rather than on preventative measures. In other words, policies seem to be much more re-active than pro-active oriented when it comes to issues of child abuse.

The two groups asked about the provision of resources – congregations and districts – reported relatively positive activity, especially at the district level.

### **Activity by the Association of Brethren Caregivers**

In addition to conducting the survey, during the past year the Association of Brethren Caregivers initiated a number of activities and developed resources related to the topic of child abuse awareness and prevention. These include:

- Facilitated Insight Sessions at the 2007 Annual Conference about child protection/child abuse prevention and how to raise resilient children.
- Sponsored the Caring Ministries Assembly in September 2007 with the theme “Being Family: Reality and Renewal” to enhance the ministry of deacons, pastors, chaplains and other caregivers with individuals and families.
- Assisted with a child protection policy training at a congregation in September 2007.
- Invited congregations (Newsline October 2007) to send examples of their policies and procedures to be posted online. A number were received, and five have been posted to date.
- Increased the resources and links on the ABC child protection webpage to include:
  - A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) section regarding child abuse and child abuse prevention
  - Links to websites of organizations dedicated to child abuse prevention
  - Links to organizations providing information to assist with creating policies and procedures
  - Links to resources and guidelines for camps
  - Links to Church of the Brethren statements, guidelines, and queries, including:
    - “Annual Conference Statement and Recommendations for Positive Action on Conditions of Childhood in the United States” (1986)
    - “Code of Ethics for Ordained and Licensed Ministers and Lay Speakers” (1996)
    - “Ethical Guidelines for Congregations of the Church of the Brethren” (1996)
    - 2007 Annual Conference query, “Child Abuse Prevention”
- Purchased the *Reducing the Risk II* training manual and DVD to lend to congregations and others interested in developing child protection/child abuse prevention policies and procedures.

- Expanded our library with other resources related to this topic.
- Created the "Keeping our Children Safe" logo to use to identify all elements of the child protection/child abuse prevention ministry, resources, webpage, survey, and other items that may be developed in the future.
- Developed the following vision statement for the newly-formed Family Ministry Group to guide its work related to issues impacting the family, including child protection and child abuse prevention: *Family Life Ministry seeks to embody the healing love of Christ by affirming, equipping and supporting families of birth and families of choice to live in healthy, resilient relationship.*

## Recommendations

Based on the results of the 2008 survey and 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, this 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.
- 2) The Association of Brethren Caregivers continue to raise awareness across the denomination of the need for child protection/child abuse prevention policies at all levels and assist with the development and implementation of those policies.
- 3) The Family Ministry Group of ABC 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.

These resources will include: training materials about child abuse, child abuse prevention, and establishing safe environments for children and youth; materials to assist in developing and implementing child protection policies; resources that promote healthy interaction and relationships; and worship resources that lift up the conditions of childhood and extend a call for congregational response.

- 4) The Family Ministry Group serve as a resource for congregations in their ministry to individuals, families, congregations, and communities that have been impacted by child abuse.

## **Follow Up for 2009 Annual Conference**

A final report about activity by the Association of Brethren Caregivers related to the Child Abuse Prevention query and any additional recommendations will be presented at the 2009 Annual Conference of the Church of the Brethren in San Diego, California.

Submitted by:

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