
WEAVERTOWN MENNONITE CHURCH CHILD SAFETY POLICY

INTRODUCTION

In response to the Jerry Sandusky trial of 2011 and other abuses of the Catholic church, the state of Pennsylvania (PA) has enacted multiple pieces of legislation which take effect in 2014-2016. The new laws include requiring the clearance of any adult volunteer or employee (≥ 18 years of age) who has direct supervision of minors (≤ 17 years of age). The laws also mandate that anyone with direct supervision of children report suspected abuse (mandated reporters).

We realize we are not invulnerable to social failures and choose to take seriously Jesus' warning to not offend a "little one" (Matthew 18:6). We affirm our commitment to love and rehabilitate victims as well as offenders. We believe it is primarily the church's responsibility to evaluate the eligibility of those working with children; state laws cannot adequately screen the condition of the heart. Practicing the Matthew 18 concept of church accountability while problems are small will minimize the need for the involvement of the state. We also believe it is the Christian's responsibility to obey civil law when not contradicting Scripture: *"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."* (1 Peter 2:13).

Therefore, Weavertown Mennonite Church has established the following Child Safety Team and Policy.

THE CHILD SAFETY TEAM

The Child Safety Team (CST) shall include 3 "core" members appointed by the pastoral team. Additionally, the current Sunday school superintendents and one or more pastoral delegates shall be on the team. The CST is responsible for maintaining the child safety policy; maintaining the approved volunteers list and records; providing regular opportunities for obtaining certifications and training; and liaisons for the church.

APPROVED VOLUNTEERS LIST

The Weavertown Mennonite Church Child Safety Team shall create and maintain a list of volunteers approved for direct supervision of minors. For approval, a volunteer must be a member in good standing at Weavertown Mennonite Church (or a church accepted by the CST), meet approval of the CST, and have documentation of current PA required certifications on file with the CST. Any volunteer failing to meet requirements of PA § 6344 (c) shall not be eligible for approval. Records shall be maintained for at least 50 years. Volunteers shall be responsible for submitting documentation of certifications to the CST to maintain approval. New certifications are required every 60 months. The CST will provide formal opportunities for training and renewal of certifications at regular intervals.

Pennsylvania considers pastors and anyone who has regular contact with children (paid or unpaid) to be a Mandated Reporter (required by law to report suspected abuse). Therefore, pastors, Sunday school teachers and superintendents, vacation Bible school teachers and superintendents, kid's clubs volunteers, ushers and anyone supervising minors for a function of Weavertown Mennonite Church must be approved prior to be considered for these roles. Obtaining approval is strongly recommended for the majority of adult members, or anyone who would be otherwise eligible for any of the above mentioned roles. Minors shall not have formal primary responsibility for other minors (e.g. teaching Sunday school class without an adult also present). Minors are not required to obtain clearances.

OBTAINING CLEARANCES

All prospective volunteers must obtain the following certifications:

- Report of criminal history from the Pennsylvania State Police
- Child Abuse History certification from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
- FBI criminal history—but only if the volunteer has lived outside the state of Pennsylvania in the last 10 years.

Please see application and instructions at <http://j.mp/CSTPolicy> for further details.

MANDATED REPORTER TRAINING

Volunteers are legally required to report suspected child abuse to the PA child welfare authorities (CWIS). Volunteers at Weavertown Mennonite Church are strongly recommended to engage in regular training to properly recognize and report abuse (i.e. Mandated Reporter Training). The CST will provide regular formal opportunities for this training. Alternatively, the volunteer may complete online training from the list provided at <http://j.mp/CSTPolicy>. Submit documentation of any training completed to the CST.

REPORTING ABUSE

In the event of reasonable cause to suspect child abuse, the individual is encouraged to discuss the concern with his direct supervisor or a CST member, including the pastors, who may advise the volunteer. However, the volunteer shall also absolutely report the suspected abuse to CWIS and may not be discouraged from doing so. If a report is submitted to the state, the state also requires the individual to immediately report this action to the CST or a pastor.

Prior to making a report to the state, the volunteer is encouraged to review the FAQ provided by the CWIS at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/CWIS/Public/FAQ> and/or review the definitions of abuse document provided by the CST at <http://j.mp/CSTPolicy>.

Suspected abuse is reported to the CWIS at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>. Note: Telephone submissions are not preferred but accepted at 800-932-0313 (Childline) and require submission of the full written report within 2 days.

PRESENCE OF SEXUAL OFFENDERS IN THE CONGREGATION

If a known sexual offender wishes to visit Weavertown Mennonite Church, he or she should be accompanied by an approved member while on the premises.

SOURCES:

Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Child Welfare Portal.

<https://www.compass.state.pa.us/cwis/public/home>

KeepKidsSafe.PA.gov. Clearances. <http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/clearances/index.htm>

KeepKidsSafe.PA.gov. Volunteer FAQ.

http://keepkidssafe.pa.gov/cs/groups/webcontent/documents/document/C_135249.pdf

Pennsylvania General Assembly. Chapter 63.

<http://www.legis.state.pa.us/CFDOCS/LEGIS/LI/consCheck.cfm?txtType=HTM&ttl=23&div=00.&chpt=063.&CFID=224154444&CFTOKEN=11851291>