



An Introduction to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada's Policy for Protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable People (PPCYOVP)

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Feedback to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)'s National Office is that some leaders within our church have found working with the *PPCYOVP* to be a very involved process. To assist with congregations that are currently working on compliance with the ELCIC's *PPCYOVP*, our National Church Council (NCC) requested that an introduction to the policy be prepared.

The *PPCYOVP* is an official policy of the ELCIC, as approved by NCC in March, 2004. It has eight sections:

1. Understanding the Need
2. Understanding Abuse
3. The Church's Legal Vulnerability
4. Protection Procedures
5. Recruitment of Volunteers
6. Incident Reporting Procedures
7. Response to Allegations of Abuse
8. Implementation and Accountability

As well, the ELCIC provides 10 model documents to assist congregations with the implementation of this policy. These documents are labeled A to J and are referred to in the *PPCYOVP*.

At the heart of the *PPCYOVP* is the **Ten Commitments**. These commitments can be found on page 6 of the policy; to reduce risk in the ELCIC, all congregations and organization of our church are being asked to make these commitments. A copy of these commitments is attached to this document.

Sections 1, 2, and 3 provide background as to why a commitment to protection is *necessary*. This background is useful when explaining to boards, leaders, staff and volunteers the need for this policy. Understanding the nature of abuse and why a policy is needed should be part of the training for staff and volunteers.

Sections 4 and 5 describe procedures for congregations and organizations to follow in order to reduce the risk of abuse. It is a thorough description of how to live out a commitment to protection. These *PPCYOVP* call us to change our habits and conduct. While change can sometimes be difficult, it is important to recognize that each procedure described aids our church in addressing vulnerable situations. The main topics covered by these procedures are:

Section 4: Protection Procedures

- Procedures for young children going to the washroom.
- Procedures for appropriate touch.
- Provide adequate supervision at all events. In particular, this means at least two unrelated adults are always present; and that leaders have been screened and trained.
- Procedures for day trips and overnight trips, including parental permission. Overnight trips increase risk immensely, and therefore they require additional diligence.

Section 5: Recruitment of Volunteers

- Screen volunteers. *PPCYOVP*, page 11, summarizes important liability reasons for all volunteers to submit an application form. The importance of checking references is stressed throughout the document.
- Train volunteers; in particular make them aware of this protection policy and procedure.

- Documenting the screening of volunteers ensures that the organization can demonstrate compliance with the policy if legal, liability or insurance issues occur.

Sections 6 and 7 describe how a congregation or organization should respond if an incident or accusation occurs. When a bad situation arises, these sections describe what leaders need to do in order to prevent a bad situation from getting worse. As part of training, volunteers and staff are briefed on these sections because it emphasizes that there are consequences to inappropriate behaviour and it promises a fair process when dealing with incidents.

- Commitment to respond with diligence to all allegations of abuse. These procedures are spelled out in sections 6 and 7.
- Commitment to appropriate documentation. This gives evidence of diligence if a legal matter arises.

Section 8 calls on leaders to recognize the importance to this document. It describes the ongoing need to be diligent to understanding, implementing and reviewing protection policy.

The Following Forms are model documents for implementing *PPCYOVP*.

- Volunteer Ministry Covenant (Document A)
- Volunteer Application Form (Document B)
- Volunteer Interview Form (Document C)
- Volunteer References Verification Form (Document D)
- Volunteer Reference Verification Script (Document E)
- Volunteer Approval Form (Document F)
- Activity Permission Form (Document G)
- Medical Permission Form (Document H)
- Suspected Abuse Report Form (Document I)
- Suspected Abuse Follow-Up Report Form (Document J)
- Mentor–Youth Boundaries Form (Document K)

The *PPCYOVP* is available on the ELCIC website. The current link is

<http://www.elcic.ca/docs/PolicyToProtectVulnerablePeople.pdf>

OR go to www.elcic.ca, click on *Documents* and then scroll down to *Protection of Children, Youth and Other Vulnerable People*.

The *PPCYOVP* drew heavily on the *Safe Steps program* of the Eastern Synod. This program is available on the web at http://www.easternsynod.org/constitutional_policies.php, scroll down and click on the *Model Template for Congregational Screening and Model Congregational Screening*.

In recent months, the ELCIC has again become aware of the increasing value that insurance companies place on protection policies and procedures. The ELCIC is asking all congregations carry adequate liability insurance and to have a policy for protecting vulnerable people. Congregations are not obligated to use this exact policy; congregations are obligated to have an adequate policy. Congregations choosing to modify the *PPCYOV*, or to use a different policy, are advised to consult legal council and your insurance carrier to ensure the adequacy of your policy.

Additional information is available by contacting Rev. Paul Gehrs, Assistant to the Bishop for Synodical Relations, email: pgehrs@elcic.ca, phone: 204-984-9156.