

## VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE (CHURCH)

### Policy Introduction

Metropolitan United Church believes in the prevention of violence and promotes a violence-free workplace in which all people respect one another and work together to achieve common goals. Any act of violence committed by or against any member of our church or member of the public is unacceptable conduct that will not be tolerated. This policy applies to all activities that occur on Metropolitan's premises or while individuals engage in Metropolitan's business, activities, or social events.

Acts of violence may take the form of physical contact. Acts of violence may occur as a single event or may involve a continuing series of incidents. Abuse in any form erodes the mutual trust and confidence that are essential to Metropolitan's operational effectiveness. Acts of violence destroy individual dignity, lower morale, engender fear, and break down work unit cohesiveness.

### Purpose

This policy ensures that:

1. individuals are aware of and understand that acts of violence in the workplace (considered a church for purposes of this policy) are considered a serious offence for which necessary action will be imposed;
2. those subjected to acts of violence in the church are encouraged to access any assistance they may require in order to pursue a complaint; and
3. individuals are advised of available recourse if they are subjected to, or become aware of, situations involving violence in the church.

### Church Commitment

Metropolitan United Church is committed to:

1. investigating reported incidents of violence in the church in an objective and timely manner;
2. taking whatever action is necessary to respond to those incidents; and
3. providing support for complainants.

## CONTENTS

1. Definitions:
  - a. Violence in the church
  - b. Organizational members
2. Prohibited conduct
3. Responsibilities of management
4. Responsibilities of Metropolitan's members
5. Our complaint procedures
6. Confidentiality
7. Non-retaliation
8. Investigation
9. Corrective action and discipline
10. Record keeping
11. False accusations
12. Complaint resolution alternatives
13. Assistance
14. Evaluation
15. Incident report form
16. Tips for preventing and managing incidents of violence in the church
  - a. Verbal communication
  - b. Non-verbal behavior and communication
  - c. Responding to a physical attack
  - d. How to prepare yourself
  - e. Working off site
  - f. When you are on unfamiliar premises
  - g. Terminating a potentially violent interaction

## **Definitions**

For the purposes of this policy, “organizational members” include:

1. all employees of our church
2. all members of our church
3. all visitors in our church
4. all contracted trades people in our church
5. all volunteers in our church, and
6. all those participating in or viewing activities at Metropolitan.

For the purposes of this policy “violence in the church” means the threatened, attempted, or actual conduct of a person that causes or is likely to cause physical injury, whether or not it is work related.

Examples of violence in the church include, but are not limited to:

1. threatening behaviour such as shaking fists, destroying property or throwing objects;
2. verbal or written threats that express an intent to inflict harm;
3. physical attacks; and
4. any other act that would arouse fear in a reasonable person in the circumstances.

## **Prohibited Conduct**

No organizational member shall subject any other person to violence in our church or allow or create conditions that support violence in our church.

An organizational member of Metropolitan who subjects another employee, congregant, or any other person associated with Metropolitan to violence in the church may be subject to disciplinary action commensurate to the incident, up to and including dismissal from the church.

## **Management Responsibilities**

For the purposes of this policy, a supervisor or manager is responsible for:

1. acting respectfully towards other individuals while at in the church and participating in any church-related activity;
2. developing arrangements for the church that minimize the risk of violence in the church;
3. promoting a non-violent place;
4. ensuring that this policy is explained to all organizational members under their supervision or management;
5. identifying training needs for organizational members;
6. ensuring that organizational members understand who to contact regarding concerns about the policy or when reporting an incident;
7. ensuring their own immediate physical safety if an incident of violence in the church occurs, then reporting criminal behaviour to the appropriate law enforcement agency; and
8. ensuring the security and safety of all parties involved during an investigation of in incident of violence in the church.

[Return to List of Contents](#)

## **Member Responsibilities**

For the purposes of this policy, a member is responsible for:

1. acting respectfully towards other individuals while in the church and participating in any church-related activity;
2. ensuring his/her own immediate physical safety in the event of violence in the church, then reporting the incident to a supervisor, manager, or the police, as the situation warrants; and
3. co-operating with any efforts to investigate and resolve matters arising under this policy.

## **Complaint Procedures**

1. Prior to filing a formal report of the incident (*see [Incident Report Form](#)*), a person (the Complainant) subjected to violence in the church should let their objections to the behaviour be known to the alleged offender (the Respondent) directly or with the assistance of a third party.
2. A Complainant may ask for support from church staff to communicate their objections to the incident and/or to prepare and submit a formal complaint if they so choose.
3. The Complainant should carefully record details of the incident including the date and time of the incident, the nature of the violence, and names of people who may have witnessed the incident. This document is the Complainant's personal record and property.
4. The Complainant may choose to file a formal complaint that documents their concerns to a member of the Ministry and Personnel Committee or the Board of Elders.

## **Confidentiality**

Strict confidentiality is required to properly investigate an incident and to offer appropriate support to all parties involved. Any individual who becomes aware of an incident of violence should not disclose the details of the incident to any third party without prior consultation with the Complainant. Gossiping about an incident seriously undermines the privacy of all parties involved and will not be tolerated. Those with questions or concerns about an incident should speak to a member of the Ministry and Personnel Committee.

## **Non-Retaliation**

All persons involved in the processing of a complaint ensure that the Complainant is neither penalized nor subjected to any prejudicial treatment as a result of making the complaint. Disciplinary action may be taken against any person who takes any reprisal against a person who reports violence in the church.

## **Investigation**

1. Upon receipt of a formal complaint of violence in the church, the Senior Minister in consultation with the Ministry & Personnel Committee, determines whether an investigation will be pursued, and will:
  - a. advise the Respondent in writing of the investigation and nature and specifics of the complaint;
  - b. advise the Complainant of the investigation; and
  - c. assign the investigation to an internal or external person to investigate.

[Return to List of Contents](#)

2. The investigator will:
  - a. advise all parties to the investigation that they may have representation;
  - b. conduct the investigation in accordance with the principles of natural justice;
  - c. explore all allegations by interviewing the Complainant, the Respondent, and others who may have knowledge of the incident(s) or circumstances that led to the complaint, or are responsible for the church.
3. The investigator may make a finding of:
  - a. sufficient evidence to support a finding of violation of this policy,
  - b. insufficient evidence to support a finding of violation of this policy, or
  - c. no violation of this policy.
4. The investigator prepares a written report of the investigation's finding, and forwards that report to the Ministry and Personnel Committee within thirty (30) working days from the date the Respondent was advised of the complaint.
5. The Ministry and Personnel Committee makes a decision whether to dismiss or act upon the report from the investigator within thirty (30) working days of receiving the report and advises the Complainant and Respondent in writing of the outcome.

### **Corrective Action and Discipline**

1. If the Ministry and Personnel Committee decides to act on the report from the investigator, the following conditions are considered when determining corrective action:
  - a. the impact of the incident on the Complainant,
  - b. the nature of the incident,
  - c. the degree of aggressiveness and physical contact,
  - d. the period of time and frequency of the incidents, and
  - e. the vulnerability of the Complainant (e.g. the relationship of the Complainant to the Respondent).
2. The following corrective actions may be considered depending on the particular incident and the factors stated in the previous paragraph:
  - a. apology
  - b. training
  - c. referral to an assistance program
  - d. reassignment or relocation
  - e. suspension
  - f. discharge, and/or
  - g. legal action.

## **Record Keeping**

The documents corresponding to the investigation are to be kept on file in a secured location, separate from the Complainant's and the Respondent's personnel files, for two years from the date of the incident to be readily available for inspection by anyone directly affected by the incident, or an Occupational Health and Safety Officer.

The investigation report should be kept in a secured location for longer than two years when it is reasonable to do so in the circumstances. Examples of reasonable circumstances include:

1. to wait for the expiration of a limitation period,
2. for the supervisor or manager to evaluate the "violence in the church" policy, and
3. to monitor persons of ongoing concern.

## **False Accusations**

A person who submits a complaint in good faith even when the complaint cannot be proven, has not violated the policy.

If an investigation results in a finding that the Complainant falsely accused the Respondent of violence knowingly or in a malicious manner, the Complainant may be subjected to appropriate sanctions, including the possibility of termination from the church. Such action is considered a violation of the policy, and the investigation results and any sanctions are recorded in the Metropolitan's personnel records relating to the Complainant.

## **Complaint Resolution Alternatives**

An individual affected by violence in the church has the right to pursue their concern through alternative forums such as mediation, or other forms of dispute resolution.

Nothing in this policy prevents an individual from pursuing other remedies to an incident of violence in the church such as a criminal or civil action or a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights and Citizenship Commission.

## **Assistance**

An organization member with questions, concerns or a complaint regarding violence in the church may contact a member of the Ministry and Personnel Committee for help and advice. This information will be kept confidential except in the case of an imminent physical threat in the church.

## **Evaluation**

This policy is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure that it conforms with any changes to the [Occupational Health and Safety Act, Code and Regulations](#) and that it continues to address the needs of Metropolitan United Church regarding workplace violence. The evaluation should therefore include a needs assessment, process evaluation, and outcome evaluation. Benchmark data should be compiled to monitor the success of the policy.

[Return to List of Contents](#)

## INCIDENT REPORT FORM

*The purpose of this form is to document your claim and assist in a thorough investigation of the complaint.*

### Complainant Information

\_\_\_\_\_  
Last Name                      First Name                      Phone Number

Date/Month/Year of Incident: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Day: \_\_\_\_\_

### Respondent Information

Name, if known: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship:  Co-worker     Supervisor     Member of the Public

Other (Please Specify): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Names of Witnesses and/or those providing assistance

Co-worker     Supervisor     Member of the Public

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Co-worker     Supervisor     Member of the Public

Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Description

Please give a thorough description of the incident (what happened, where it occurred, what led up to the incident, who else was present, what action was taken at the time, what impact the incident had on you).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Medical Attention Required:     Yes     No

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of person reporting incident                      Date of Report

***Upon completion, please forward Incident Report Form to the Senior Minister for follow-up action.***

[Return to List of Contents](#)

## TIPS FOR PREVENTING AND MANAGING INCIDENTS OF VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE (CHURCH)

Although no incident of violence in the church is deserved, there are steps that one can take to reduce such incidents in the church. The following practical suggestions are from a guide entitled [\*Violence in the Workplace\*](#) from the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) (1999).

### Dealing With A Potentially Violent Person

#### Tips for verbal communication:

1. Focus your attention on the other person to let them know you are interested in what they have to say.
2. Do not glare or stare which may be perceived as a challenge.
3. Remain calm and try to calm the other person. Do not allow the other person's anger to become your anger.
4. Remain conscious of how you are delivering your words.
5. Speak slowly, quietly and confidently.
6. Speak simply.
7. Avoid communicating a lot of technical and complicated information when emotions are high.
8. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt or offer unsolicited advice or criticism.
9. Encourage the person to talk. Do not tell the person to relax or calm down.
10. Remain open-minded and objective.
11. Use silence as a calming tool.
12. Acknowledge the person's feelings. Indicate that you can see he or she is upset.

#### Tips for non-verbal behavior and communication:

1. Use calm body language – relaxed posture with hands unclenched and attentive expression.
2. Arrange yourself so that your exit is not blocked.
3. Position yourself at a right angle rather than directly in front of the other person.
4. Give the person enough physical space. This varies by culture, but normally 1 –2 metres is considered an adequate distance.
5. Get on the other person's physical level. If they are seated, try kneeling or bending over rather than standing over them. Do not pose a challenging stance such as ...
  - a. Standing directly opposite someone
  - b. Putting your hands on your hips
  - c. Pointing your finger
  - d. Waving your arms
  - e. Crossing your arms.
6. Do not make sudden movements which can be seen as threatening.
7. Do not fight. Walk or run away. Get assistance from security or police.

### Responding to a Physical Attack

If you are attacked:

1. Make a scene, yell or scream as loudly as possible. Try shouting words like *STOP*, *FIRE*, or *HELP*.
2. If you are being pulled along or dragged, fall to the ground and roll.
3. Blow a whistle, activate your personal security alarm or push the security alarm.
4. Give bystanders specific instructions to help you. Single someone out and send them for help. For example, "You, in the yellow shirt, call the police."

[Return to List of Contents](#)



5. If someone grabs your purse, briefcase or other belongings, do not resist. Throw the item to the ground several feet away from the thief and run in the opposite direction, yelling “help” or “fire.”
6. Do not chase a thief.
7. Run to the nearest safe place, a safe office, or an open store.
8. Call security or the police immediately after the incident.
9. If the attack does not warrant calling the police, inform your supervisors or the authorities at your workplace (church).
10. File an incident report.

### **Be Prepared**

1. Take a self-defense course.
2. Try to imagine yourself responding successfully to different types of attacks.
3. Practice your responses.

### **Working Off Site**

If you work away from a traditional office setting you must exercise extra caution. In many cases you have less—or no—ability to control your work environment. You may require special training to avoid violence by using conflict resolution and mediation tactics.

Nevertheless, the following specific preventative tactics or procedures will minimize or prevent risks associated with working off-site:

1. Have access to a cellular telephone or similar means of communication.
2. Use an established check-in procedure that allows you to manage typical situations you may encounter off-site.
3. Prepare a daily work plan so that you and others know where and when you are expected somewhere.
4. Arrange to meet in a safe environment.
5. Be alert and make mental notes of your surroundings when you arrive at a new or different setting.
6. Use the “buddy system,” especially when you feel your personal safety may be threatened.
7. Determine under which circumstances unaccompanied visiting would involve unacceptable risk.
8. Exercise your right to refuse to work in clearly hazardous situations.
9. Disclose any feelings of discomfort or apprehension about an impending appointment to your supervisor.
10. Do not enter any situation or location where you feel threatened or unsafe.
11. Carry hand-held alarms, noise devices or other effective alarm devices.

### **When You Are On Unfamiliar Premises**

1. Check for escape routes and position yourself near an escape route.
2. Mentally rehearse what you will do if an individual becomes aggressive or hostile.
3. Decide what your best preventive tactic will be.
4. Take control of the seating arrangements. If possible, seat yourself near the door.
5. Maintain a “reactionary gap” between you and the person – out of reach of the average person’s kicking distance. Increase the gap by sitting at a table. Be aware of the person’s proximity at all times.
6. Be well prepared for an appointment. Review the available information about the individual(s) you are meeting.

[Return to List of Contents](#)

7. Terminate the appointment in a non-confrontational manner if the individual appears to be:
  - a. Intoxicated
  - b. Under the influence of drugs
  - c. Emotionally disturbed and threatening or out of control.
8. Do not allow yourself to be backed into a corner. Leave a clear path to the exit.
9. Do not venture too far into the premises e.g. remain near an exit.
10. Do not turn your back on the person or enter a room first.

**Terminating a Potentially Violent Interaction**

1. Interrupt the conversation firmly but politely.
2. Tell the person that you:
  - a. Do not like the tone of the conversation
  - b. Will not accept such treatment
  - c. Will end the conversation if necessary.
3. Tell the person that you will ask them to leave the building, or that you will leave (if working off-site).
4. If the behavior persists, end the conversation.
5. Ask the person to leave the building or leave yourself.
6. If the person does not agree to leave, remove yourself from the scene and inform your manager or supervisor immediately.
7. Do not return to the person if you believe they pose a physical threat.
8. Advise other staff and have them leave the immediate area.
9. Call security or your local police.
10. File an incident report.

<b>VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE (METROPOLITAN)</b>	
<b>Approval by Board of Elders:</b>	<b>September 2014</b>
<b>Approval by Senior Minister:</b>	<b>September 2014</b>
<b>Previous Version Date:</b>	<b>September 2014</b>
<b>Group/Committee Responsible:</b>	<b>Senior Minister and Board of Elders</b>

[Return to List of Contents](#)