

Franconia Mennonite Conference
Church Together Statement
On Addressing Abuse in Our Midst

Purpose/Reason:

Following the affirmation of the Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse at the 2015 MCUSA Convention, and given the important nature of this topic, we believe this statement and proposal is very relevant to our conference. We believe it is important to educate leaders about the realities of sexualized abuse and equip leaders to respond appropriately when boundaries have been violated.

Furthermore, equipping leaders of sexual abuse support groups is a way to be the hands and feet of Jesus. To journey with people as they explore healing and restored hope is a way to offer God's love to people who are experiencing pain, feeling alone and afraid, and are seeking a safe place to work through the impact of abuse on their life. The statement describes a simple, cost effective way to raise awareness, create clear safe church policies, and offer support for victims and survivors of sexual abuse by requesting that Franconia Conference identify and support several (2 to 4) members to be trained by SNAP through the Anabaptist-Mennonite chapter of SNAP (www.snapnetwork.org) to lead confidential self-help support groups. The SNAP Survivor Support Group Ground Rules and Guidelines used at meetings offered at the MCUSA Kansas City Convention are attached.

Statement:

We are proposing a specific way to encourage the Franconia Conference to put into practice the MCUSA Statement on Sexual Abuse which says, "We lament that sexual abuse exists not only within our society, but within our homes, congregations, and institutions." The statement informs that within our congregations, roughly 25% of people, both men and women, have experienced sexual abuse or violation. "Abuse wounds the body of Christ." We believe the church should provide a safe place for those who are left to heal these wounds, too often in secrecy and shame. We believe Franconia Conference should provide a place to "stress God's concern for life, healing and wholeness especially for those being oppressed or victimized".

We propose that Franconia Conference and congregations:

- **Establish a task force to oversee the implementation of actions designated by the MC USA Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse within Franconia Conference.** Task force's initial responsibilities would include the following:
 - Develop and support SNAP support groups.
 - Identify and support several Franconia Conference members to become trained support group leaders through the Anabaptist-Mennonite Chapter of the *SNAP Network. . SNAP provides free support group leadership trainings, the next one to be held in February 2016 in Chicago, IL
 - Hold regular local support group meetings for persons who have been sexually abused. These meetings would serve those beyond our congregations and in this way provide an outreach to our local communities. Congregations to provide free space for meetings and assistance with publicity.
 - Work closely with the conference board, ministerial committee and staff to educate leaders and congregations about sexual harassment and abuse and promote and develop teaching and practices that promote healthy and wholesome sexuality. See appendix A of MCUSA Churchwide Statement on Sexual Abuse.
 - Make sure child protection policies are in place and followed.
 - Develop procedures for reporting allegations of sexual harassment and abuse that may occur between adults.

We believe that "We should surround those who have been abused with support and seek to make sure they and other potential victims are safe from any future abuse." By increasing awareness and knowledge about sexual harassment and abuse, developing clear policies, and establishing safe, confidential, self-help support groups led by trained survivors of abuse and/or their loved ones, Franconia Conference would take an effective step toward realizing the commitments articulated by the Church-wide statement of MCUSA.

*The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) is the world's oldest and largest support group for sexual abuse victims and their loved ones. SNAP was founded by victims of Catholic priests in 1988 and now has more than 20,000 members in over 60 countries. Even though "Priests" is in its title, SNAP is open to religious and nonreligious persons who were sexually violated by anyone inside or outside a faith community.



Protect the vulnerable. Heal the wounded. Expose the Truth

Ground Rules for SNAP Support Meetings (Feel free to take with you).

1. Everything said in the group is confidential.
2. Please do not share with anyone the names or stories you learn in this room.
3. We share feelings and experiences just as they are. There are no right or wrong statements.
4. Each person knows what is best for her or himself, and therefore carries the primary responsibility for her or his well-being during the meeting. If at any time persons need to leave or take a break, for any reason, they are free to do so.
5. Everyone's presence is appreciated and can be a source of healing for others. No one is required to speak during the meeting. Listening is a gift, too.
6. When speaking, use "I" statements, rather than "we," "you," or "they." Please focus on your feelings, not opinions.
7. Avoid individual problem solving. Individuals can learn from one another's experiences to solve their own problems.
8. When a person speaks, the others should listen actively, with the goal of relating the speaker's experiences to their own. Only one person should be speaking at any given time with no interruptions from others.
9. Giving or asking for advice is not allowed. It is empowering and healing for us to gather ideas that can benefit us. No one of us is an expert and no one knows what is best for another.
10. The sharing that takes place is a gift to everyone in the room. Please don't ask questions seeking more information. What each person chooses to share is appreciated and sufficient.
11. At times there may be silence during the meeting. This provides a moment to reflect on what has been shared. No one needs to feel anxious or responsible to break the silence.
12. The session is divided into two parts. During the first part, everyone is invited to share his or her experiences and feelings. No one should speak more than once during this time. The second part consists of open discussion where all are invited to talk about what they learned from the previous sharing.

Please let us know how we can further assist you:

Contact for Harrisonburg Support Group:
Barbra Graber, SNAP Leader and survivor
Email: Barbra.graber@yahoo.com Cell: 540-214-8874
www.snapnetwork.org
Toll Free SNAP Phone: 1-877-SNAP HEALS (1-877-

762-7432)
Toll Free National Suicide Hotline: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)
Contact for the Anabaptist-Mennonite Chapter of SNAP:
Email: Mennonite@SNAPnetwork.org

SNAP Menno LEADER NOTES: Survivor Support Group Meetings

I. Opening Statement (to be read aloud by leader)

"We welcome you to this Harrisonburg SNAP support group meeting! We hope you will find the comfort, help and friendship we have been privileged to enjoy.

SNAP, including our newly formed Mennonite Chapter, is a grassroots organization made up wholly of survivors and their support people. We were sexually abused, most of us as children, but also as adults, by persons from our families and faith communities. We have found that joining with other survivors brings the healing and empowerment we seek. The only requirement for membership is that you are a survivor or a support person. It matters not where or when or in what context you were abused, you are welcome here.

As a result of our sexual violation, some survivors have chosen to have no association with any Church. Some among us have become members of other faiths, while some have stayed active, to various degrees, within the church of our birth. There are church leaders and therapists among us who are survivors. But clergy members and those in the helping professions attend as survivors only, and not in their role of representatives of any church or under a professional title. In the SNAP meeting, we are all peers. SNAP members shed any and all professional roles and titles when they enter these rooms.

The SNAP network has a threefold purpose: 1) to provide self-help support to survivors; 2) to share resources and information among survivors; 3) to organize for political action that challenges the institutional Church to better deal with and prevent sexualized violence.

You may join for one, two or all three purposes. There are many opportunities within SNAP but there are no requirements. Sometimes healing comes simply from listening. It is up to you to decide how you wish to participate.

SNAP members share their experiences without judging another's. No survivor can tell another survivor what is best for him or her. SNAP meetings and attendance are confidential. Who you see here and what is said here must stay here, in strictest confidence. Only in this way can we feel safe to discuss what is on our hearts and minds."

II. Introductions Go around room, first name and identity as Survivor, Supporter, or Family Member.

III. Read through Ground Rules with each person taking turns reading, hard copies for all

IV. Open meeting: in first half each person shares only once, second half is open discussion about what we have learned from the sharing.

V. Closing Statement (to be read aloud by leader)

"In closing, remember that the opinions expressed here were strictly those of the person who gave them. Take what you want, and leave the rest. Talk to each other, reason things out with someone, but let there be no gossip or criticism of one another.

We realize that it took as much courage for you to come to this meeting as it did the person next to you. That strength and courage have not gone unnoticed. Whatever your problems, there are those among us who have had them too. We wish you well in this healing journey. And we hope you will stay in touch."