



# EQUIPPING FOR... **ELDERSHIP**

## Leading with Care

David Phillips

**D**avid Phillips is a retired educator who has served his home church as an elder and church school teacher for many years.

For the past 13 years, David has been the national office's "go-to-guy" for the Leading With Care policy. When the policy was initially adopted it was met with some skepticism and confusion. David played a key role in helping the denomination understand the policy and how to apply it. He has visited 44 of our 45 presbyteries to make presentations and field questions.

David was asked, "Drawing upon your experience, if you had ten minutes to speak to a session about Leading with Care, what would you say?" Here is his answer.

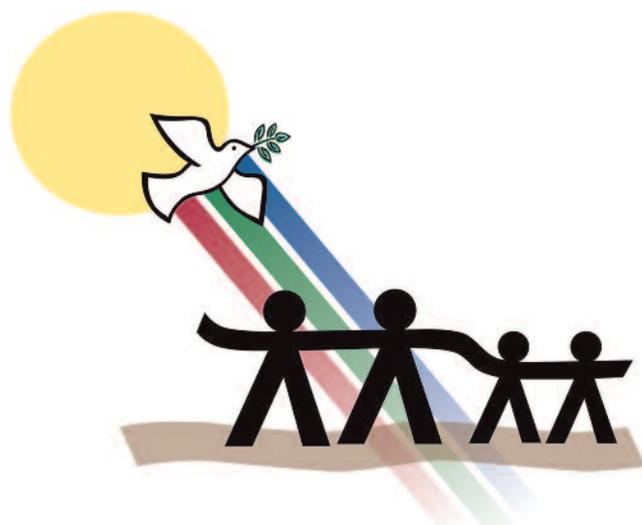


As elders, we are responsible for many areas of church life both in respect to people and properties. Leading with Care is a policy that provides for safety within our buildings, programs and outreach in the community.

There are many important elements of the Leading with Care policy passed in 2005, but highlighted below are five areas that will help the elders in administering this policy.

### 1. Care Is For Everyone

It is very important that elders know the Leading with Care policy. The Policy Statement (2.1) states: "It is the policy of The Presbyterian Church in Canada that **all** persons, and in particular children, youth and



vulnerable adults, who participate in the denomination's programs/ministries and/or use the denomination's facilities will be cared for with Christian compassion and will be safe".

In other words this policy is for everyone in our churches and in the community we serve. There is no doubt we should especially recognize the vulnerable, the children and youth but we need to be conscious of the need for everyone to feel welcome and safe in our churches.

### 2. Emergency Evacuation

An area that is very important and is sometimes overlooked is found in section 4.3 and that is the "Facilities Checklist".

There are many areas of the policy that need cooperation between the session and the board of managers or maintenance committee. One area that is often overlooked is the area of fire safety. Unfortunately, we have had church fires. In some instances there has been little damage. In other instances sections of the church have been destroyed and even whole buildings lost.

It is important to have smoke detectors installed, working fire extinguishers in appropriate locations and escape maps posted, but nothing is more important than regular fire or other disaster type drills (so that everyone knows how to exit the church building safely.) The drill should be planned well in advance. The first couple of drills should involve a walkthrough with explanations so the congregation understands what is expected. Then an announced drill will be held to ensure the procedures work.

This may sound very elementary but experience has shown that poor preparation has led to trouble when an actual evacuation was needed. This is true for fire, earthquakes or any other disaster. Of course, each drill is unique and must be drawn up according to the layout of the building, the surrounding church property, the mobility of the people and the nature of the emergency.

If the building must be evacuated during a Sunday service, whether as a practice or as a result of an emergency, it is important the children and youth meet in one area outside of the building and the adults in another. This is so that a final check can be made to determine if all of the children are out and safe. When that is confirmed, and only then, the adults and children may come together.

### **3. Police Record Checks ... or ... Vulnerable Sector Checks**

Police record checks need to be used as needed. Depending on the nature of the person's work in the church, not everyone will need a check. Still, these checks are probably required of most church leaders and are to be renewed every five years.

Be sure of two things in relation to police checks. The police check is a generic term for many types of background examinations (often called a vulnerable sector check.) Different terms are used across the country. Whatever the term, it should fit the work of the volunteer. Does the individual meet in isolation with others or are they always in public settings, for example? Secondly, the police check is part of the process of determining the suitability of the teacher/leader. It is also important to see that the person fits the job description.

### **4. Being Vulnerable**

In the policy, the term "vulnerable" is used and a definition is given. Vulnerable is "a person who, because of his/her age, a disability or other circumstances, whether temporary or permanent, is in a position of dependence on others or is otherwise at a greater risk than the general population of being harmed by persons in positions of authority or trust relative to him/her."

Keep in mind the section of the definition "or other circumstances." Most of the abuse cases that occur fall under the category "other" and generally are the result of an emotional or psychological dependence. One person becomes dependent on a "person in a position of authority" and that person steps over their bounds and abuse occurs.

### **5. Leading With Care Committee**

A Leading with Care Committee should be formed to facilitate the implementation of the policy and then to carry out a twice-yearly report to the session. The committee can be established as a subcommittee of the session or as a committee of the congregation.

A committee of five, representing other areas of the congregation, seems to work well in most cases. There could, for example, be one representative from each of the session, Christian Education Committee, Pastoral Care Committee, Board of Managers and congregation.

When these groups meet, they should include Leading with Care on their agenda from time to time in order to talk about building safety and other aspects of the policy. When their representatives meet together as the Leading With Care Committee, it can review the concerns expressed by the groups and discuss how they might be addressed. For example, the session may feel that more windows are needed in the offices and would pass that to the board of managers who could follow up. Those using this format have found it works well and their churches have been safer.

### **Finally**

As elders, we can play a positive roll in helping the congregation embrace this policy for the safety and wellbeing of all who enter our faith communities.

# Being a General Assembly Commissioner

## Session Starter

*Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office*

### Prayer:

We give thanks, O Lord, for your word. It is a lamp that pierces darkness and a light that leads to faith, hope, peace and love. May we be open to the illumination of the Spirit speaking in the scriptures so we might obey your word and do your will. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

### Introduction: Book of Forms section 258

It is the right and duty of every presbytery to elect ... ministers and members of the Order of Diaconal Ministries, together with an equal number of elders as its commissioners to the General Assembly.

### Scripture: Micah 6:8 NRSV

God has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?

### A Brief Commentary:

Micah speaks out boldly against injustice and corruption in all its guises. Then he describes another way a life can be shaped. He says it is God's will to treat each other with justice and kindness as we walk in a spirit of humility with our God.

### Reflection:

Each year, presbyteries appoint ministers and elders to attend the General Assembly, the highest court of our denomination. Ministers are usually appointed on a rotational basis. Selected sessions, according to the number of elders required, are asked to name an elder to be commissioned by the presbytery. Any elder on the constituent roll of a session is eligible to be chosen. See the subsections of 258 for more detail.

Being commissioned to the General Assembly is a privilege and a responsibility. It is hoped it will be a



worshipful and enriching experience. The primary expectation of commissioners is to help discern the mind of Christ for The Presbyterian Church in Canada. How can they achieve such a lofty goal? One way might be for commissioners, while they pray, contemplate and discuss reports and recommendations, to listen to Micah and ask themselves, "What decision is just, demonstrates kindness and expresses a humble walk with God?"

Before the Assembly, commissioners receive reports from the church's agencies. It is important to read them in order to make informed decisions. Your presbytery may give commissioners suggestions about how best to prepare. First-time commissioners receive information from the General Assembly Office and are invited to an on-site Q&A meal meeting at the Assembly.

During the Assembly, commissioners will meet with hundreds of Presbyterians from across Canada. They will visit, sing, pray, speak, listen, think and decide. Orientation regarding meeting procedures will be provided by the Principal Clerk.

After the Assembly, information and referrals are sent to sessions and other bodies. Commissioners are usually asked to report on the experience to their presbytery.

This is an opportunity to grow in knowledge and faith within the body of Christ. Maybe someone from this session will say yes when next invited to be a commissioner.

### Follow up:

1. How many from this session have attended a General Assembly? What was it like?
2. How do we discern God's will in the church?
3. Let's pray that God's will is done at this Assembly.

## What's on your mind?

### What does the Committee on Church Architecture do?

*Don Muir, Associate Secretary, General Assembly Office*

You are thinking about installing an elevator to improve accessibility. You've decided to build an addition to create more meeting space. You are dealing with an older building that requires repairs and need help prioritizing the work or finding the right people to help guide the process. Your congregation realizes your existing church is too large and wonders what opportunities and options the church could consider. You've outgrown your current building and are dreaming of another location and erecting a new building.

The Committee on Church Architecture can help congregations that are pondering possibilities like these.

Naturally there are several groups that need to be involved in such projects. Some of them are needed to grant approvals along the way. Depending on the scope, nature and cost of the project, discussions and decisions might involve the session, the board of managers, the congregation and presbytery.

It is important to remember that the Committee on Church Architecture is also there to help.

The committee, which is accountable to the Assembly Council, is made up of architects and church members experienced in various aspects of building projects. The committee is assisted by the General Manager of the Presbyterian Church Building Corporation, the Associate Secretary for Canadian Ministries and the Deputy Clerk of the General Assembly. Together they generously donate

their expertise and knowledge to support congregations that are undertaking exciting and challenging construction endeavors.



This committee's primary function is to review architectural plans drawn up for new buildings, additions and major renovations. Comments are sent to the congregation and its presbytery. They may note alternative construction ideas or simply confirm that the drawings look fine in terms of design, public safety and cost effectiveness.

In short, the committee provides an independent and impartial "second set of eyes." This can be a helpful service to congregations that sometimes results in helpful drawing revisions and long-term significant cost savings.

And it's free!

For more information you are encouraged to visit the committee's website at [presbyterian.ca/gao/assembly-council/coca](http://presbyterian.ca/gao/assembly-council/coca).

When you scroll down a bit on that page, under the heading of Approvals COCA you will see a link called **Notice of Project** that provides an initial contact between congregation and committee. After you have completed the schematic design with your Architect/Design Team, you should submit the **Application Form**, which also has a link on the same page.

The committee wishes you God's blessing and stands ready to walk with you along this journey.