

::12.16 COMMON PROTOCOL FOR CHURCHES WORKING WITH INDEPENDENT ORGANISATIONS

(The Church of Ireland, The Presbyterian Church in Ireland, The Methodist Church in Ireland)

A Common Protocol for Churches relating to Independent Organisations working with children and young people.

INTRODUCTION

The Context

The Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland (hereafter referred to as the Churches) each have their own Child Protection Guidelines. It is considered helpful if these Guidelines substantially agree with each other in respect of minimum standards of good practice in dealing with children and young people. As each set of Church Guidelines is based upon either Getting it Right and Our Duty to Care (N. Ireland) or Children First and Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector (Rep. of Ireland), we believe that they do substantially agree in their policy and procedures while allowing for flexibility of practice depending on the individual Church's structure of government and administration.

It is recognised that it would also be helpful if the Churches agreed a common protocol for dealing with external organisations which regularly use church premises. This document seeks to clarify the expectations and responsibilities of both the churches and the independent organisations, especially in the areas of child protection policy, appointment of leaders, information sharing and reporting of concerns that may arise within an organisation.

Definitions

An independent organisation is a group that while not operated by the church, nonetheless uses church premises. Such organisations may be specifically youth organisations, or may be organisations which occasionally work with children e.g. St John Ambulance.

The organisation may have an outside headquarters and a separate method for the appointment of leaders e.g. Scouts, Crusaders, Guides. Although some of the leaders may attend the local host church they are not appointed by the church and are not directly responsible to the church.

There are also youth organisations which are operated by local churches, but which also have outside headquarters, such as BB and GB. The leaders are appointed or approved by the church but with a measure of involvement and training by the outside headquarters. The principles and the criteria below are also relevant to this type of organisation, and normally will be met by the organisation. However if this is not the case the requirements stated below will apply.

1 General Guiding Principles

- 1.1** In all our practice the Churches and organisations agree that the welfare and safety of children is the paramount consideration.
- 1.2** It is recognised that churches and organisations are interdependent and it is therefore vital that constructive working relationships are developed and maintained.
- 1.3** If an organisation using church premises is operated independently of the local church, while the church will not be responsible for the appointment of leaders or general running of the organisation, it is recognised that the Church still has some interest in the organisation being run to an acceptable standard. The Church has a responsibility for what happens on Church property and the Church will give formal permission for the organisation / unit to use the premises. It is recognised that even if an organisation is independent of the church, the public's perception may be that it is still a church organisation.
- 1.4** If a church has concerns that certain practices breach child protection guidelines, such concerns should be raised with the organisation leader and/or the headquarters of the organisation. If the concerns are not satisfactorily dealt with the host church may withdraw permission for use of the premises by that organisation.
- 1.5** While the church is not to be responsible for the appointment of leaders to an independent organisation it is good practice for the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council to be informed annually (September) of the names of the leaders in writing.
- 1.6** This protocol should be reviewed on an annual basis at a meeting of the Inter-Church Child Protection Group and representatives of independent organisations, in the light of any revision of church or organisation policies.

2 Agreed Criteria

The churches suggest that the following criteria be agreed with independent organisations using church premises, e.g. Scouts, Guides, Crusaders, Christian Endeavour and other groups.

It is the duty of the organisation to ensure that the premises are suitable and appropriate for planned activities. The organisation shall also seek to ensure that activities shall be carried out safely. Any safety concerns regarding the premises shall be notified by the organisation leader to the appropriate person within the church as soon as possible.

- 2.1** The organisation shall confirm to the local church that it has adopted and consistently implements a child protection policy which accords with the standard of Getting it Right and Our Duty to Care (NI) or Children First and Child Protection for the Youth Work Sector (RoI). A copy of the organisation's policy shall be supplied to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council or written verification that the policy is accepted by the church at central level.
- 2.2** The local church shall supply to the organisation leader the names and contact details of the church officials responsible for the premises. The organisation shall supply to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council the names and contact details of all the leaders immediately following appointment. The organisation shall confirm that new appointees have been (NI) subject to a Access(NI) check or (RoI) have been vetted where possible; that no information was received which debarred their appointment and they have been found suitable to work with children and young people.
- 2.3** The organisation shall ensure that leaders and helpers in the organisation receive appropriate child protection training and are aware of the organisation's reporting procedures.
- 2.4** If a report has been made by the organisation of a child protection concern, suspicion or allegation through its procedures, the person(s) responsible for child protection in the local church should be informed in confidence that a report has been made.
- 2.5** The organisation shall supply written confirmation from the insurer that adequate insurance cover is in place for the organisation's activities or written verification that the insurance policy of the organisation is accepted by the Church at central level.
- 2.6** A Form of Approval (sample below) shall be signed by the leader of the organisation / unit and a church representative confirming that the conditions have been met. It is appropriate for this to be completed annually or at least every three years depending upon church requirements.

3 Boys' Brigade (NI) And Girls' Brigade (NI)

These are organisations which are operated by the local church but also have a separate external headquarters. Thus, there is a measure of independent input to these organisations and the following is suggested as good practice to avoid unnecessary duplication and communication breakdown.

- 3.1** Leaders are nominated and approved by the local church and appointed by the Boys' Brigade. Leaders are jointly accountable to the local church and to the Boys' Brigade.
- 3.2** For BB it is necessary to complete both the BB Appointment Form and the church's Application Form.
- 3.3** For GB the church's Application Form only is completed.
- 3.4** The BB/GB should use the church's procedure for reporting concerns.
- 3.5** The BB/GB should submit a list of its officers/helpers and contact details to the Kirk Session / Parish Panel / Church Council each September.
- 3.6** The church shall confirm in writing to the BB/GB that the appointment procedure (including AccessNI check) has been completed, before any new appointee is approved for BB/GB registration and training.
- 3.7** The church shall provide appropriate child protection training for new appointees.
- 3.8** All leaders must sign a declaration that they shall uphold the church's Child Protection policy.