

February 2014

To: Pastoral Charges within Hamilton Conference
Related ministries within Hamilton Conference

Cc: Presbytery Pastoral Oversight Committees and Pastoral Relations Committees

In 2010 the Ontario Government passed into law Bill 168 (an amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act) which requires employers to adopt policies with regard to violence and harassment in the workplace. The legislation was the tragic result of escalating harassments that resulted in deaths.

The United Church of Canada is committed to zero tolerance of violence and harassment in any form whether directed toward its employees or any other individual affiliated with the United Church or perpetrated by them. The United Church of Canada has chosen to respond to this legislation by including but not limited to congregants, volunteers, visitors, consultants, service providers, other third parties, as well as employees of all congregations regardless of the number of employees.

Bill 168 means that each congregation and/or ministry in Hamilton Conference must approve and post policies and know what steps to take if you receive a complaint.

To help you become compliant with Bill 168, Hamilton Conference has provided each congregation with two resource books ("HEART" Program: Harassment Education Advisory Response Team), template policies, and DVD and CDs. Hamilton Conference website www.hamconf.org also contains online material that has been updated since the original material was produced in 2011.

The following steps need to be taken:

1. All staff and governing body members become familiar with the resource material on the Hamilton Conference website under the tab *Bill 168 Resources: Resources for churches regarding Bill 168 (Violence and Harassment in the Workplace)*, the material in the HEART handbook, and the HEART webinar DVD.
2. At a meeting of your governing body,
 - a. View the HEART webinar (provided on a separate DVD if the HEART DVD does not play properly),
 - b. Discuss the definitions of "violence" and "harassment" as defined by the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code, and
 - c. Discuss the questions in the resource: *Bill 168: Questions to Encourage Dialogue*.
3. Using the Conference website template or CD template for all three policies (each with similar content but specifically addressing the Occupational Health and Safety Act and the Ontario Human Rights Code), fill in your church's/ministry's name and adopt the policies at a meeting of your governing body. (**Do not** use the outdated template provided in the HEART resource DVD.)

N.B. Congregations and/or ministries **do not** need to form their own HEART to handle complaints. Your HEART – Harassment Education and Response Team, is the Hamilton Conference Executive, through the Conference Executive Secretary.

4. Send a copy of the approved policies to the Conference office along with a copy of the governing body meeting minutes showing when the policies were adopted. Send a copy of the approved policies to your Presbytery office,
5. Educate your current leaders and staff and regularly educate new leaders and staff about the policies and complaint process. Post the policies in a public place. Review the policies annually.
6. As an additional preventative measure, conduct a regular workplace risk assessment and actively address risk areas.

As a Christian denomination, we have a history of developing policies and practices for complaints, dispute resolution, sexual abuse and prevention, racism, accessibility, etc. to make our spaces safe and welcoming for all people. Bill 168 gives us a new opportunity for discussion and action so that those who are employed, volunteer, and visit our churches and ministries are freed from the fear and threat of violence and harassment.

May our conversations and actions as faith communities strive to provide spaces of safety and respect for all as we follow in the way of Jesus Christ.

Sincerely,

Kim Uyede-Kai
Hamilton Conference Minister for Congregational Support