

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE ARISE WITHIN YOUR DISTRICT

This document is not intended to be an iron-clad policy statement or protocol to follow. Each case of alleged abuse is different. Instead, this document is intended to help stimulate the Church's (local and Conference) thoughtful, pastoral, professional and intentional response to a very serious incident within the life of individuals involved and the entire congregation.

If the allegation is against a clergy, the protocol outlined in the Sexual Ethics Policy and the *Book of Discipline* must be followed.

The questions presented below apply to incidents involving clergy, staff, volunteers, or any others who are alleged to cause harm to a parishioner or participant in the life of the church.

District Superintendents are expected to contact the Conference Crisis Response Team immediately upon receiving word of an allegation of abuse within the church. This team consists of the Bishop, the Cabinet Dean, and Assistant to the Bishop for Connectional Ministries. As circumstances dictate, the Conference Chancellor, Conference Pastoral Counselor, Communications Director and others may be included in these conversations.

Here are some questions you can ask the Pastor and/or Lay Leadership of the church where the allegation arises:

–During the initial investigation phase:

–What is the exact nature (i.e., dates, times, place, parties involved, specific acts of abuse) of the allegation? When did the pastor receive the report of alleged abuse?

–Have you spoken directly to the individual making the allegation? Did you make notes and document the details of that conversation? Are there any written documents (letters, emails, etc.) that help explain the alleged offense? When can you send the District Superintendent a copy of these documents? (Be prepared to have information unfold over the course of time—but seek to get as much information as possible).

–Have you discussed the allegations with the person accused of abuse? Did you make notes and document the details of that conversation?

–Has the alleged perpetrator been removed from service while the allegation is investigated?

–Is there an employment/volunteer file including the criminal records check for the accused perpetrator?

–Are you cooperating with the legal authorities? What is the status of law enforcement's involvement in this case? (Note: We are not investigators—only reporters.)

“If the sexual contact could arguably be child molestation, my practice is to always notify the proper authorities regardless of whether the person who discovers it is a mandatory reporter. If you don't report it, you will only look worse when it hits the media. They will try to make it look like a cover-up.” (Warren Plowden)

–Are you documenting the information received and the steps being taken? We are not involved in the investigation of the allegation; however, we do want to maintain a written record of what steps are being taken to report the incident, cooperate with the investigation, and respond administratively and pastorally to all involved.

–What pastoral care has been offered to the complainant and their family? What care has been offered to the alleged perpetrator and their family?

Please consult with conference leadership on how to proceed. Much of what follows is customized to each situation.

–Have the appropriate church leaders been notified of the incident and the investigation? What measures are being taken to ensure the safety of all participants? If “Safe Sanctuaries” policies are in place, were procedures being followed? What additional measures need to be taken to protect participants?

–What are the plans for letting others in the congregation know about the allegation and the Church’s initial response? This statement will briefly announce that allegations have been made while protecting the identity of the victim and the accused.

–What resources need to be deployed to assist in managing the crisis and assisting with healing? The Crisis team will help think through the options based on the situation.

–What proactive steps need to be taken in preparation for response to the media inquiries and other general inquiries about this incident? The Director of Communications can be very helpful in this area of crisis communications. Early preparations are encouraged.

–If the allegation is substantiated:

–Be prepared to respond to the media inquires about this incident. The Director of Communications can be very helpful in this area of crisis communications. Early preparations are encouraged.

–What care is being provided to the other “victims” (i.e., peers, peer’s family, other co-workers or volunteers, the congregation, etc.)? Are there any additional “actual” victims of abuse, as in the case of a predator? If so, how are you dealing with those individuals?

–What plans are in place to notify the congregation of the investigation’s findings? Truth-telling is an important part of the healing process. This meeting needs to be thoughtfully and prayerfully planned. Sensitive and strong leadership is needed for this meeting. (See **Safe Sanctuaries** manuals for suggestions.)

–What continuing care and follow-up is needed to help with the healing process?

-What steps are being taken to prevent future incidences? Does the Church have a "Safe Sanctuaries" policy? Are they following the policy? If not, what steps will be taken to develop and implement policies and procedures to protect participants from abuse?

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