



# CHILD ABUSE AND THE CHURCH

Creating Prevention Guidelines, Ministering to Survivors,  
Responding to Perpetrators

**CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION STUDY COMMITTEE**

*Bible Fellowship Church 2021 Conference*

## Guidelines for Writing a Church Child Protection Policy

~ by Pastor Mark A. Bickel, Grace BFC Wallingford, PA

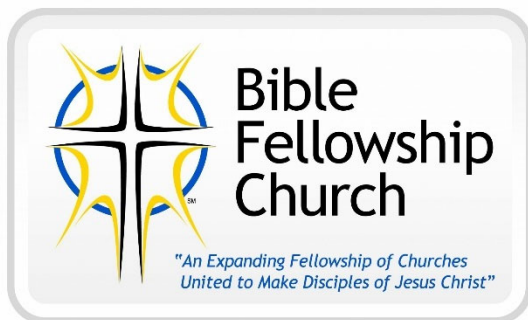
## Sample Guidelines

### Ministering to Children and Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

~ by Lisa Radcliff, author and speaker

### Examining the Process of Rebuilding Relational *Shalom* in the Case of Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse through the Nexus of Forgiveness, Justice, and Reconciliation

~ By Pastor Philip E. Morrison, Child Safety Assistant, Africa Inland Mission



Booklet prepared by the  
Bible Fellowship Church Study Committee on Child Abuse in  
2019.

Find out more on [BFC.org](http://BFC.org) and [BFCHistory.org](http://BFCHistory.org)

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# Guidelines for Writing a Church Child Protection Policy

*By Mark A. Bickel*

**The Need for a Policy:** In seeking to protect the children and youth in our churches, as well as providing appropriate guidance to our volunteers and staff, it is vitally important that all BFC churches have in place a robust Child Protection Policy. While policies will differ in some respects due to national, state, and local laws, as well as the size of the church involved, there are some key questions that should be asked in forming any policy. Below are recommended sections / question to be addressed in writing a policy.

**Sample Policy:** The BFC website also contains a sample child protection policy, which is compiled from policies provided by several BFC churches. The sample policy should NOT be used as is - it should be updated to include your church name and should be modified to include definitions, clearances, and reporting procedures for your specific locale. You should also revise as necessary to fit your particular church. Red print in the sample policy are things we would anticipate you will need to update for your church / comments to help guide your work. One word of caution: be absolutely sure that whatever policy you put in place is something your church can and will enforce. If there is ever an incident or accusation, it will be very important that everyone knows and has followed your policy.

## Key Sections to Include / Key Questions to Answer

**Purpose and Scope** - A brief statement of why this policy exists and what it covers; it should cover a minimum of all church-sponsored activities on and off property that involve children or youth under the age of 18. Some churches have also opted to include a biblical statement on God's care for children, either in summary form in their policy or as a separate document or appendix.

**Definitions** - Define key terms, including Child, Youth, Children's Ministry Worker, Teen Helper, Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse, Mandated Reporter, etc. Where applicable try to use the wording of your State laws (see Sample Policy for possible definitions).

## Employee/Volunteer Applications and Clearances

- **Application to work with Children** - How does someone go about applying to work with children and youth? What are the qualifications / forms to fill out? Be sure to have a written application that includes things like contact information, relationship with Christ, and reason they desire to work with children or youth. As part of the

application process, have them list references, and be sure to follow up by contacting references. Also, be sure to get signed permission for any clearances the church will run, a signed statement that the applicant knows of no legal or moral reasons they should not serve, and a signed statement of agreement with your child protection policy. You may have a separate application procedure for teens under 18 who wish to help with children's ministry; if so, be sure to state what the minimum age is to serve and that you get a parent or guardian who signs both to give permission and to state they know of no legal or moral issues that would prevent their child from serving.

- **Securing Clearances** - Clearly define what clearances are needed for an employee or a volunteer, as well as whether clearances are needed for elders, deacons, or other leaders. Be sure all state or other government mandated clearances are included. Also, clarify who procures and pays for them (church or individual) and if they are allowed to bring outside clearances with them (for example, a teacher bringing her school clearances). Note that some states offer different clearances for different positions and define which can be used where (in PA, an employment clearance can be used for volunteer work, but a volunteer clearance cannot be used for employment). If you allow people to bring a clearance, what will you allow and how recent does it need to be?

- **Waiting Period** - Best practice suggests requiring a person to be involved in your church for a period of time before being allowed to work with children; many use six months as the waiting period. Your policy should define both the duration as well as how you count that (six months since first attending the church, since first joining a group in the church, since becoming a member, etc.). It should also define any common exceptions (transfer from a BFC church with at least six months at that church, etc.). The goal of the waiting period is to assure you know each person working with children, as well as to discourage any potential perpetrator looking for easy access to children.

- **Application / Clearance Administration** - Who is authorized to review applications and process / review clearances? Who makes the final decision on whether a person is allowed to serve or not? How is that communicated to leaders? In most cases, it is best for two or three people to be defined as handling all decisions; they should be the only ones allowed to view the files to maintain confidentiality (in all cases, more than one person should be responsible for processing clearances). They may produce a more widely-viewable list of those fully cleared, but only a stated few should have access to the clearance documents or to any record of those denied clearance.

- **Renewing Clearances** - Define a time-frame when a person will need to renew all their clearances. Five years would seem to be the maximal time period for renewal; some states require renewal more frequently. Also, note that if you change your child protection policies or training, you should require all employees and volunteers to read the new policy, take the new training, and sign to having completed and agreeing with the policy in order to maintain their position.

**Child Protection Training** - What training will you require? At a minimum, training should include:

- General best practices for child protection.
- Your specific church's practices and policies, including appropriate methods of discipline.
- Definition of, and how to spot, child abuse.
- Reporting procedures for child abuse.
- Any state-mandated training (note that some state requires different training for employees than volunteers; some states that may not require training may still offer online courses that may be of benefit to your people and save you time in preparing new material. There are some insurance companies and Christian ministries that also offer online video and/or interactive training - see "Resources" on last page.
- We would suggest having a form that people sign at the end of training, stating they have completed all training and that they have read and will abide by all church policies, and then keep that signed form on file.
- We would also suggest age-appropriate training for parents and for children so they know at least the general outline of the policy, where to find the full policy, and what to do if they ever suspect abuse or believe they may be a victim of abuse.

### **Classroom / Ministry Procedures**

- **Minimum Staffing** - How many people need to be in a classroom with children and youth? We recommend two adults as a minimum. If you use teen workers, specify how they count as staff (we suggest that they not count toward your minimum). Are there staff-to-child ratios to maintain for different age groups? Do spouses count as one or two? Do you need both male and female leaders in a mixed classroom? Is there a required hall monitor or other positions? How would you handle it if the minimum number of staff is not available? Note: some churches allow one adult and one teen if a door remains open and a minimum of three children are present; other churches try to recruit parents to help provided they are fully cleared; some would instead close that room and

either add the children to another class or tell parents that ministry is not able to be offered today.

- **One-on-One Situations** - Is one-on-one counseling allowed? If so, do you need parent approval? Would you require same-gender counseling? Should someone else be in the building while one-on-one counseling takes place? Also, address what happens if someone finds himself or herself in a one-on-one situation because a parent arrives early or late with a child while only one adult is present, or when there is a need for a brief one-on-one conversation (some churches suggest leaving a door open or having one-on-one interaction in a public hall while also informing a parent or supervisor that such a conversation is taking place). Especially where youth/teens are involved, there are times when adult-to-child mentoring takes place; what guidelines do you have for such meetings, whether they take place at a restaurant or other public place or in a private home? We recommend that at minimum, a parent should give approval ahead of time and should know exactly where and when all such meetings will take place. In such instances, adult-child meetings should be held in a public place or, if in a home or at church, someone else should be in the building.
- **Bathrooms / Diapers** - How will you handle children using the rest rooms in a manner that assures that they are not alone or are one-on-one in a closed bathroom with an adult? What measures will be taken to make sure, in such instances, that classrooms are not left unattended? Some churches use a hall monitor, open outside doors to the rest room, utilize teen helpers, or limit bathroom visits to same-gender assistance, etc. You may also define different procedures for different ages. Either here or in the discipline section, you need to also specify the prohibition of not touching genital areas while listing other general safeguards.
- **Code of Conduct** - Include child safety issues in your classroom procedures and a code of conduct for volunteers. This may include things like no inappropriate rough play with children who are not your own; guidelines for appropriate and inappropriate hugs or other touching; not allowing sexual joking or innuendo; use of loud voices, criticism, or praise that is consistently directed at specific children, etc.
- **Discipline** - What are appropriate and inappropriate methods of discipline? When are parents to be called in? When might a child be asked not to participate? Also, define any types of disciplinary issues that need to be reported to a supervisor or member of the church staff, or any instances when a staff member should be asked to step in.
- **Adult Guests** - How will you handle guests in the classroom or ministry? For example: missionaries or other speakers who do not have your church

clearances, or a parent who wants to sit with their special needs child but is not cleared. One option is to state that they do not count towards minimum staffing, and they are not allowed to be one-on-one with any of the children without cleared staff also being present.

- **Transportation** - Transportation provided by the church as part of attending a church function should require that no adult or child is one-on-one in any vehicle: there should be at least two adults or at least two children/youth in all vehicles. You may also wish to establish a minimum age for drivers for church events (your insurance carrier may require this). For transportation of individual children or youth from their homes to church or a church event, the driver should have received permission from the parent or guardian, and the parent should be aware of each time a child is transported. Where possible, having multiple children or adults present is preferred. Children and teens should never accept a ride from someone their parents have not approved.

### **Identifying Suspected Abuse**

- How can volunteers and staff identify evidence of abuse, either on-site or off-site? We recommend using the wording of state law or a respected expert on the topic.
- You may also add an appendix with a list of signs of abuse, guidelines for talking with a child you suspect had been abused, etc. (See also “Reference” section).

### **Reporting Suspected Abuse**

- How would someone report suspected abuse? This should include both who to inform in the church as well as when and how to inform local authorities.
- Be sure to list in the policy, and/or as a separate page, the phone numbers of the key people in the church and key legal reporting authorities to contact.
- If your state has mandated reporter laws, be sure it is very clear in your policy who is required to report, what they are required to report, to whom they are to report, and any required order to the reporting. We suggest taking the wording for your church’s policy directly from the state law, and providing any explanations necessary to make the policy understandable for everyone.
- Be sure all volunteers, and especially all staff, are aware of any required order for reporting suspected abuse. For example, PA state law requires that ChildLine must be called first, even before consulting a supervisor; the person suspecting abuse must personally make the call to ChildLine.
- Specify any forms that must be filled out and other steps that must be taken after initial reporting suspected abuse. Each church should have a form that is

used to record all details immediately following each incident and can be consulted for follow-up and kept in its confidential permanent record.

- Each church should identify a person or committee to whom all suspected abuse instances are reported and who is authorized to respond on behalf of the church. We strongly recommend that at least one pastor who is a paid employee of the church be included.

### **The Church's Response to Reported Abuse**

- State that you take accusations of abuse seriously and that you will respond promptly to all reports of abuse.
- State that you will fully cooperate with all legal authorities, and that all staff and volunteers are required to cooperate with both external investigations and internal inquiries.
- State that you will immediately inform legal parents or guardians, keep them informed, and care for them throughout the investigation (except in instances where the parent is the one accused of abusing the child; then legal counsel will be sought to determine appropriate interaction with the parents).
- Define who will be in charge of the internal response (Children's Director, Senior Pastor, Chairman of the Elders, etc.).
- Define who they will report to. This will most likely be the church's Board of Elders.
- Specify reporting requirements for insurance, the BFC denomination, legal counsel, etc.
- Determine who will serve as spokesmen to the congregation and/or the media?
- Define an alternate process if one of the above is the one accused. For instance, if the Senior Pastor normally oversees the church's response but is the accused, the Chairman of the Board of Elders or another appropriate person immediately steps in.
- Specify what happens to an employee or volunteer during the investigation (example: they will have no contact with children) and what happens if they are convicted (they will be removed from ministry and their employment will be terminated as per employment law). You will need to balance both "believing and taking seriously any accusation" and "innocent until proven guilty," which for paid employees may mean removal from interaction with children or participation in other public ministry during the investigation while still retaining employment until a verdict is reached.

### **Church Care for the Abused and The Family of the Abused**

- State your commitment to walking with and caring for the child and his/her family.



- Legal parents or guardians should be immediately informed about the incident and kept in the loop as any legal or church investigation proceeds; they should be clearly informed concerning any final findings or actions taken.
- If the abuse happened while the victim was involved in a church activity, you may also choose to cover costs of medical exam and treatment of victim, pastoral or professional counseling for the victim and family, and legal costs for the victim.
- You may also wish to address the dual needs to maintain confidentiality as much as possible for the victim's sake while also maintaining a level of transparency to the congregation so it is aware of the incident and any charges or changes that come about as a result.

### **Administration of Policy**

- **Key People and Contact Information** - Note who created this policy (elders, pastor, etc.), who oversees its implementation (children's director, Sunday School supervisor), who does clearances (church secretary), who violations to policy are reported to (head teacher in class, supervisor), who injuries or suspected abuse get reported to (we suggest this be a staff member or elder, not a volunteer). For the above, we suggest having a one-page appendix to the policy that lists the current person in each position and appropriate contact info, along with any local or state agencies that a person may need to contact in relation to child protection or mandated reporting.
- **Record Keeping / Confidentiality** - Records of applications, clearances, and accusations should all be kept in clearly-marked confidential files with limited access. Your policy should define who has access and how long the records will be kept. You should also keep active records of parental contact information that class and ministry leaders can access at all times. You should keep a live record of attendance so at any time a supervisor can know exactly who is in attendance. You should then keep those records on file so if there is ever a legal need in the future, you can verify whether a particular child was or was not present and whether or not a particular volunteer or staff member was on duty.
- **Who, if anyone, can make exceptions to the church's policy?** While most of a church's policy should not allow exceptions, occasionally an issue may come up that was not fully anticipated. An example: you hire a new pastor who is fully cleared but has not been in the church for the six months your policy requires. Is there a way to allow him to serve with children now, and then work to update the policy to cover

such instances in the future? We suggest that only the Board of Elders as a whole be allowed to make exceptions. Exceptions should be rare and documented in writing.

- **Who can make modifications to the church's policy?** Who is authorized to make changes to this policy? Can the children's supervisor or senior pastor, or only the elders? We recommend all policy revisions be officially approved by the elders (Some churches state, in their church by-laws, that the maintaining of a comprehensive Child Protection Policy is a responsibility of the elders).

**Other Possible Considerations** - A church may want to keep the Child Protection Policy entirely separate from other Children's Ministry policies or else it may wish to put as much information as possible in one place. If the latter is your goal, you may consider adding some of the following:

- **Sickness and Injury**

- You should have general health guidelines so contagious children and/or workers are not allowed to be in the classroom.
- There should be a way to report any injuries that occur on-site: if serious, they may warrant immediate staff intervention; but even if minor, some record should be kept in case a parent or medical or legal professional later calls into question what happened or how it was handled.
- It is good policy to have signed permission from parents that allows church leaders to be able to get emergency medical treatment for their children with allergies; emergency contact numbers should be included on the form (this is especially vital in instances where events occur off church property or at times and places where parents are not in the same building as their children).

- **Additional Qualifications for Volunteers / Teachers**

- They should be a Christian who has a testimony to God's saving work in their lives.
- They should possess a current walk with the Lord (that is defined as ...).
- They should be a member of the church or regular attender of the church or ministry.
- They should be under the care / oversight of an elder, small group, etc.
- They should possess gifts of teaching or should have received church training as a teacher, etc.
- There should be a probationary period: a set period serving under an existing leader or volunteer. During this probationary period, a

prospective worker or volunteer should not be counted towards the minimum number of required adults and should not be allowed one-on-one interaction with children.

## Resources

### Books and Booklets

- *Safe: A Church Worker's Basic Guide to Promoting Child Safety in African Churches*, Seminar Version, by Phil Morrison (2019, unpublished). Written for an African context, but providing a very good biblical theology of child protection as well as an extended outline for creating of a Child Protection Policy for your church. Note: most of Morrison's outline appears in the above guidelines
- *The Child Safeguarding Policy Guide for Churches and Ministries*, by Basyle Tchividjian and Shira M. Berkovits (2017, New Growth Press). Provides in-depth discussion of best practices for child safety, worksheets for developing policy, and helpful lists of things like signs of abuse and what to say and not to say to a child who is disclosing abuse, as well as practical advice for handling violations of policy, accusations of abuse and care for victims.
- The authors of the above book also have written four booklets that can be purchased separately or as a package with the book: *The Spiritual Impact of Sexual Abuse*, *Caring for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, *What the Bible Says to Abuse Survivors and Those Who Hurt Them*, and *Protecting Children from Abuse in the Church*.

### Ministries and Websites

- **Brotherhood Mutual Resources** - [brotherhoodmutual.com](http://brotherhoodmutual.com). Provides articles, sample policies, and sample forms for a variety of child safety and other church safety issues (Child Safety and others can be found in the "Resources" menu).
- **GRACE** (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment) - [netgrace.org](http://netgrace.org). Provides several articles as well as a list of helpful books and other resources. Also offers certification of Child Safety as well as providing legal services.
- **Ministry Safe** - [ministrysafes.com](http://ministrysafes.com). This is a contracted service that provides clearances, training, support, and legal services.
- **Summit Church Counseling Resources** - [bradhambrick.com/my-favorite-posts-on-sexualabuse](http://bradhambrick.com/my-favorite-posts-on-sexualabuse). This site includes articles on counseling those who have been sexually abused as well as links to several other Christian resource sites.
- **Rise and Shine Movement** - [riseandshinemovement.org](http://riseandshinemovement.org). Resources for parents to talk with their kids about sexual abuse.

- **Child Welfare Information Gateway** - [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov). A government website with lots of information on child welfare in general as well as links to each state's laws and websites.
- **National Sex offender Registry** - [nsopw.gov](http://nsopw.gov). This site provides the ability to search its national database of registered sex offenders.
- **iLook Out For Child Abuse** - [ilookoutforchildabuse.com](http://ilookoutforchildabuse.com). This site provides a free 90-minute online interactive course in identifying child abuse as well as covering PA Mandates Reporter laws.
- **Christ-Centered Counseling Ministries** - [c-ccm.org](http://c-ccm.org). This site provides counseling to those in the church, especially focused on helping those within the Bible Fellowship Church.

*Guidelines Last Updated: January 28, 2020*

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# SAMPLE Child and Youth Protection Policy

**Sample Note:** Sample is made for a middle-sized church that has some part time staff overseeing Children and Youth. Items in **RED ITALICS** will need to be modified for your church. Since Pennsylvania has some of the strictest Child Clearance and Mandated Reporter laws it has been used in this sample, so be sure to update for your state. This sample was created in September 2019 as a compilation of best practices from a number of BFC protection policies. To receive a copy of the sample policy as a Word document, email [Communications@bfc.org](mailto:Communications@bfc.org).

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## ***Sample Bible Fellowship Church***

### **CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

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## ADDITIONAL CHILD PROTECTION DOCUMENTS

*LIST of additional DOCUMENTS and FORMS ... At a minimum you will want a child worker application, an injury reporting form, and a suspected abuse reporting form. You may also want to incorporate more detailed policies for specific ministries.*

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy, adopted by the Board of Elders of *Sample Bible Fellowship Church, Some Town, PA*, is to provide a safe and secure environment for all children and youth entrusted to our care and to comply with *Pennsylvania State Law*.

We want to encourage our children, youth and their families to grow in their relationship with God and one another. A safe and secure environment includes a formal, written policy to help prevent the occurrence of child abuse. The following policy and procedures are for the protection of our children, youth, employees, volunteers and our entire church family.

### SCOPE

This policy will apply to all current and future workers, compensated and/or volunteer, who have responsibility for the welfare of children and youth when they are under our supervision.

### DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this policy the following definitions will apply:

**Child, Youth, and Minor** - will be defined as any individual under the age of eighteen or comparable mental capacity.

**Adult** - will be defined as any individual at least eighteen years of age.

**Worker** - will be defined as any adult who serves as a volunteer and/or paid person given the responsibility of working with or caring for minors.

**Junior Worker** - will be defined as any worker under the age of eighteen enlisted to assist with the care of minors.

**Child Abuse** - will be defined as sexual abuse or exploitation of a child. Abuse includes any recent act or failure to act which causes non-accidental serious physical or mental injury to a child. (see “Child Abuse Reporting Procedure” for extended definition)

**Child Sexual Abuse** - will be defined as any sexual activity with a child regardless of the location. The abuser may be an adult, an adolescent, or another child. Child sexual abuse is criminal behavior that involves children in sexual behaviors for which they are not personally, socially, and developmentally ready. Child sexual abuse includes behaviors that involve touching and non-touching aspects. All child sexual abuse is an exploitation of a child’s vulnerability and powerlessness in which the abuser is fully responsible for the action. Child sexual abuse may be violent or non-violent.

**Child Protection Designated Representatives** (Designated Reps) - will be defined as the persons appointed by the Elders to oversee and administer all Child Protection policies and procedures for the church. *There must be at least two appointed representatives at all times, one of which must be a paid employee of the church.*

**Child Clearance Administrator** - will be defined as the person responsible for running background checks and other administrative work related to child protection. The Child Clearance Administrator can be one of the Designated Representatives or can be a separate person appointed by the Elders and reporting directly to one of the Designated Representatives.

**Clearances** - will be defined as all clearances required by the *state of Pennsylvania* for any adult with responsibility over minors. These may include, but are not limited to, *PA child abuse clearances, PA State Police criminal background checks, and fingerprint based federal criminal history checks.*

**Church Event** - will be defined as any event that is sponsored and managed by *Sample Bible Fellowship Church.*

**Guest Speaker** - will be defined as any person who is not a worker but intends on administering a presentation to a group of children or youth for a special event or class.

## ADULT WORKER ENLISTMENT

Any employee of *Sample Bible Fellowship Church* who is responsible for the welfare of a child or has direct contact with children, must have the following clearances: *State Criminal Background Check, Child Abuse Clearance, FBI Criminal History and any other clearances legally required.*

Any volunteer worker responsible for the welfare of a child or having direct contact with children must have all legally required clearances on file with *Sample Bible Fellowship Church*; These currently include: *State Criminal Background Check and Child Abuse Clearance. In addition, a worker must also get an FBI Criminal History completed if they have lived outside Pennsylvania within the last 10 years or they cannot swear in writing that they are not disqualified from serving pursuant to the conditions listed in the WHO SHOULD BE DENIED section of the law and has not been convicted of any of the enumerated offenses, or equivalents from another jurisdiction.*

All clearance checks must be conducted by an appropriate agency recognized by the *State of PA* and verifiable copies must be provided to the church to keep on file. We require that initial clearance checks must have been run within the past 2 years to be accepted. Both employees and workers are required to renew their clearance checks in accordance with *Pennsylvania state law. Note that PA State Law allows us to accept clearances run for employment elsewhere as part of our volunteer worker clearances but does not allow us to use clearances run for volunteer work elsewhere for any paid employee of the church.*

Only the designated representatives and the child clearance administrator will have access to the criminal background check report. Recommendations will be given by these individual(s) to the appropriate ministry leader as to the qualification of the applicant.

To be cleared as a regular worker in children or youth ministries, an applicant must be under the care of *Sample Bible Fellowship Church* for a period of no less than six months. A written transfer of membership from another church, with references, may be adequate reason to waive the waiting period. Exceptions to the required waiting time may be granted only by the Board of Elders. To be considered, the worker must have all appropriate background checks completed and references checked prior to being granted an exception.

All worker applications and clearances must be submitted to the church, all required training must be completed, and all forms must be reviewed by at least one of the Designated Representatives before final approval is given to work with minors. Any prospective worker



who has prior incidents of sexual misconduct or child abuse will not be allowed to be a worker in our children or youth ministries.

## JUNIOR WORKER ENLISTMENT

All perspective junior workers must have submitted written permission from a legal guardian giving them permission to serve in our Children's Ministry and stating that there is no legal or other known reason that would prevent the junior worker from being allowed to work with minors. Junior workers will be approved by one of the designated representatives and complete training before serving.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH WORKER APPLICATION FORM

All workers will be required to complete our Child and Youth Worker Application Form providing personal and confidential information necessary for us to clear them for ministry. All personal information voluntarily disclosed, the results of all security background and reference checks, or the refusal of any person to participate in these will be maintained in the strictest of confidence.

Whether disclosed voluntarily, or as a result of the security background check, the following items, although not an exhaustive list, may disqualify a worker from participating in the leadership, sponsorship, or supervision of any activities or programs with minors:

### *WHO SHOULD BE DENIED. (NOTE: This list is directly from PA law)*

- *Anyone who is named in the statewide child abuse database as a perpetrator of a founded report committed within the last five years.*
- *Anyone whose PA State Police Criminal Background check OR FBI check reveals a conviction for any of the following at any time in the past:*
  - *Criminal homicide; aggravated assault; stalking; kidnapping; unlawful restraint; rape; statutory sexual assault; involuntary deviate sexual intercourse; sexual assault; aggravated indecent assault; indecent assault; indecent exposure; incest; concealing death of child; endangering welfare of children; dealing in infant children; prostitution and related offenses; obscene and other sexual materials and performances; corruption of minors; sexual abuse of children; OR the attempt, solicitation or conspiracy to commit any of the above offenses;*

- *Anyone who's PA State Police Criminal Background check OR FBI check reveals a conviction for a drug or drug-related felony in the past five year.*

All charges for these crimes, as well as any charges or convictions for other crimes not listed above, will be reviewed by the Designated Representative. The Designated Representative may also deem it wise to deny clearance to someone for items not listed above. In all cases of denial of worker status the reasons for denial should be documented in the applicants file, and the applicant informed of the reasons.

If questions arise from, or exceptions are proposed to, the above, they must be brought to the attention of the Board of Elders. All decisions of the Designated Representative can be appealed to the Board of Elders. The Board of Elders' decision is final.

## WORKER AND JUNIOR WORKER TRAINING

Each new worker and junior worker will be required to read through the child protection policy, child abuse reporting procedure, the Discipline Involving Children and Youth policy, and the Volunteer Code of Ethics and Rules, and certify in writing that he or she has read the documents and is willing to follow the procedures outlined. They must also complete child protection training as prescribed by a designated representative. This training will include a review of the child protection policy and requirements for mandated reporters.

## WORKER SUPERVISION

Church staff and volunteer directors will supervise workers on an ongoing basis and make unannounced visits into classes or other program sites from time to time.

All doors to rooms where children are participating in learning or play activities will remain open, be removed, or have a window large enough to view the activities from outside the room.

A minimum of two adult workers will be in attendance at all times when children are being supervised during our programs. Some classes or programs may have only one worker in attendance during the class or program session; in these instances, doors to the classroom should remain open and there should be no fewer than three children with the worker. We do not allow minors to be alone with one adult on our premises or in any sponsored activity

unless in a counseling situation.

All junior workers shall work with and be supervised by an approved adult worker

## INJURY OR ILLNESS

- Persons who are ill will not be permitted to participate in any ministry activity. An approved substitute must be used to take the place of workers who are ill.
- Participants should be returned to their parent or guardian as soon as illness is discovered. If this is not possible, then the person who is ill should be isolated in a manner that will allow supervision to continue until the person can be returned to their parent or guardian.
- Reasonable steps should be taken to avoid contact by anyone with body fluids.
- Any coordinator/supervisor who becomes aware of an injury to a worker or participant will take steps to ensure proper medical attention is sought for the injured person.
- Persons who have received an injury, which is obviously minor, should be given first aid as needed at the time of injury. If any doubt to the extent of the injury the person's parent or guardian should be notified at the time of the injury and an incident report should be filed with the church.
- Any injury, which may require medical treatment beyond simple first aid, should be given immediate attention: the parent or guardian of the injured person should be immediately notified, and an incident report should be filed with the church. An ambulance should also be called immediately if warranted by the injury.
- If a participant in a ministry activity develops a communicable illness within 24 hours of the activity (i.e. measles) the other participants who attended that activity will be notified by the department head as soon as they are aware of the illness. Also, an incident report should be filed with the church.

## DISCIPLINE

The goal of the children and youth programs at *Sample Bible Fellowship Church* is to provide a safe and beneficial environment for the spiritual growth of children. Our desire is to work alongside the parents in the development of their children and to provide open and honest communication with regard to matters of discipline. Positive behavioral management strategies will be used to direct and redirect children. (See separate “Discipline Involving Children and Youth” policy)

If any child is misbehaving in a manner that puts other children or themselves in danger, that child will be safely kept away from the other children and the parents will be notified immediately to assist. We reserve the right to temporarily deny child care services to any child who has and continues to pose a threat to themselves or others while under our supervision.

## ADULT GUESTS

Occasionally, guest speakers may be used for special events or classes. Guest speakers, whether a regular attendee or not, will be approved at the discretion of the designated representatives and will not be permitted to be responsible for the well-being of any children. There must be two adult workers, aside from the guest speaker, present at all times.

Legal guardians are permitted to stay in a class with their child. However, they will not be given responsibility for any other child(ren) unless they are cleared to be a worker.

## TRANSPORTATION

Certain special events require the transportation of children to offsite locations. All children must obtain permission in writing from a legal guardian to travel in a car, van, or bus driven by any adult as part of a church sponsored event.

All drivers must be an adult and have submitted clearances to *Sample Bible Fellowship Church* or to their employer who is being used to hire drivers. No driver is permitted to be alone in a car with any minor during a sponsored event. We will aspire to have two adults in each vehicle for the protection of our children and workers.

Legal guardians are responsible for any transportation to or from the church. Legal guardians

should use their own discretion when arranging transportation for their child. Workers must receive verbal or written permission from a legal guardian before driving any child before or after any church event or for any other reason.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Churches that screen employees/volunteers will generate a number of highly confidential documents. It is critical that the confidentiality of these documents be maintained. To insure confidentiality of all personnel forms the following will apply:

All confidential documentation pertaining to employee/ worker information will be kept in a locked file drawer in the church office and folders will be marked CONFIDENTIAL.

All documentation pertaining to reports of child abuse or other files directly related to child protection and safety will be kept in a locked file drawer in the church office and folders will be marked CONFIDENTIAL.

Information on former employees will be placed in a secured envelope and retained in a confidential file.

Church staff must be made aware of the location of all confidential files and warned that unauthorized access to any confidential information will be grounds for dismissal and possible legal action.

The disposal policy for information relating to individuals who apply for but are not hired/permitted to volunteer will comply with EEOC and state laws requiring that they are retained for a period of three years.

All files relating to workers or junior workers that are approved to serve in our ministries shall be kept for as long as they are a part of our church or ministries, and for at least an additional three years.

All files relating to reports of child abuse or other similar claims shall be kept at least as long as all legal statute of limitations or sentencing related to those claims.

All confidential files that are to be disposed of must be shredded by someone with proper authorization to access and administer those files.

## INSURANCE

*Sample Bible Fellowship Church* will obtain a sufficient level of liability insurance that would cover child abuse and sexual misconduct claims. The church will have levels of coverage which are required for limited immunity.

If there are ever accusations of child abuse or the involvement of Child Line or other Law enforcement, or legal action against the church or its leaders, those will be immediately reported to the insurance company

## REPORTING SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE

All suspected child abuse or child sexual abuse MUST be handled immediately in accordance with Grace BFC's "Child Abuse Reporting" procedures (see separate document). This includes compliance with all Pennsylvania State Mandated Reporter laws and any other legal requirements.

## REPORTING VIOLATIONS TO CHILD PROTECTION POLICIES

Any violations to this Policy, including but not limited to unauthorized workers interacting with minors, policies not being upheld, suspected falsification of clearances, or charges against any worker that may disqualify them from working with children, should be reported to a Designated Representative who will be responsible to research the claims, follow-up with appropriate workers, place a written account in the Child Protection files, and report back to the Elders and the person making the original complaint.

## ADMINISTRATION OF, EXCEPTIONS TO, AND CHANGES TO THIS POLICY

This policy shall be administered by the Designated Representatives. Any questions about the intent of this policy, requests for exceptions, or changes to the policy shall go to the Board of Elders, whose decisions are final. If any part of this policy is found at any time to be in

volition of any local, state or federal laws, or if those laws require something not covered in this policy, those laws will supersede and replace the effected sections of this policy.

## Ministering to Children and Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

~ by Lisa Radcliff

*“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. For the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body...On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 22-26 (ESV)*

We cannot live in loving community as one body and ignore the deep wounds of those among us. We believe every person is made in the image of God and, therefore, has tremendous worth. Realizing there may be members and visitors in our congregation who were or are victims of abuse, we seek to be a safe place where all who worship with us are loved and protected. As Jesus put great value on children (Matt. 19:13-14), we as his ambassadors do as well.

Because sin is in the world, there may be predators among us, and we will make every effort to have safeguards in place to protect children. We also seek to be sensitive to adult survivors and to demonstrate the heart of God as we minister to them. We strive to be a loving community where victims can find healing.

### **Assisting child victims and their families**

All adults who work with children should undergo training in recognizing signs of abuse, the grooming process, and what to do when a child discloses abuse.

Learn all you can about Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). You cannot protect a child from something you don't understand. Historically, victims of sexual abuse have been silenced because disclosure of their abuse was met with disbelief, minimizing, or cover-up. Our goal is to change church culture from one of silence and ignorance to one of proactive engagement of all adults to protect children. The church should be



leading in this issue. To accomplish this goal, the congregation needs to know the basics of CSA: that it can happen to any child/family/church; the long-term effects; and ministering to victims and survivors.

Believe the unbelievable. Abuse happens in all kinds of families by people we may never suspect. When a victim discloses abuse, believe him or her. Victims have a hard time trusting people. It takes a lot of courage and trust for a victim to disclose abuse. Honor and respect them for making it known. Never react with horror, disgust, or fear. Remain calm and keep your face “soft.” Follow through with proper steps: call ChildLine or police, according to your state’s laws. Know/consult church policy. Do not initiate an investigation. It is important that properly trained professionals investigate allegations of abuse.

Support the family. If the abuse happened within the family, there could be many divisions: spouses being separated, parents being separated from children, siblings being separated. Find ways to reach out to the family members. Children may just need friends to play with and be “normal” with. They may need financial support if the breadwinner is taken away. They may need safe temporary places to stay. The worst thing members of a congregation can do is ignore the family. Silence brings shame to victims. If no one will talk to them, they will interpret the silence as blame; that the abuse was their fault - which is probably what the abuser has been telling them.

Be careful about physical touch and affection. Everyone’s body is autonomous at EVERY age. A child should never be required to hug or kiss someone who makes them uncomfortable. Often in heartbreaking situations, people want to offer hugs, but that may be inappropriate in cases where CSA has occurred. It is okay to ask a child if they want a hug or a high five, or to hold their hand, but let them decide with what level of affection they are comfortable. Whenever possible, give them power over their own bodies.

**In ministering to adult survivors, we recommend the following:**

Most survivors of CSA never disclose their experience. When an adult survivor discloses abuse, it is a major step in his or her healing. The first step in helping them is to know what not to say.

Here are some examples of wrong responses:

- Are you sure that it happened? It was such a long time ago.
- I know what you’re going through. We all have problems to deal with.
- Have you forgiven him (or her)?

- Sometimes it's best to just move on.
- What was your role in all of this?

Helpful responses include the following:

- I'm sorry this happened to you. It wasn't your fault.
- You are not alone. You are part of a church community that wants to support your healing.
- You are not responsible for his (or her) actions. You did nothing wrong.
- Thank you for sharing this with me. I know it took a lot of courage to do that.
- Healing is difficult, but it is possible. There are good resources to help with this. I'll get you the information.
- It's OK to feel angry, even at God.
- May I pray with you? (Don't push if they say "No.")

Everyone who desires to walk with a survivor through the healing process should educate themselves on the subject. It can be a long, difficult process, and a relationship with a survivor can be stressful. Much of the relationship is just being available to listen. Some victims won't want to share their story, but others will want to share it repeatedly or in small portions over time. It can be overwhelming, but the main thing is for someone to be there to let them know they are loved and protected. Pray for them regularly and with them whenever possible.

Female victims/adult survivors may be reluctant or fearful to discuss their abuse with a man. Since all BFC pastors and elders are men, we recommend that each congregation trains mature women who can minister to female victims. A woman can offer support by sitting in with the victim when they talk with their pastor or an elder regarding their abuse. These trained women should be made known, either in a church ministry brochure or website or bulletin announcement. We never know who will enter our church, but we believe if we are equipped, God will lead hurting souls through our doors.

Always tell a victim or survivor the abuse was not their fault. They are probably longing to hear those words. Because trust has been eroded in a victim's life, it may be hard for them to trust anyone, even God. They may need to be told every day that they can trust God.

The effects of CSA sometimes cause a survivor to make poor choices in relationships. Make sure they are safe at home. If they are not, help them find a safe place immediately.

Let them know that sexual abuse is not their identity; it does not define who they are. Their identity is in Christ; they are a beloved child of God, an heir with Jesus. When talking about being a child of God or God as Father, be sensitive to the victim's circumstances. If they were abused by their father, this imagery may be hard for them. But tell them that God is the perfect Father, not one who will do harm. Even children abused by a father will have a picture of what a perfect Father is.

Understand that this is a spiritual battle. The enemy wants to keep the victim ensnared, unable to find freedom in Christ (John 10:10). Stand with them against evil, interceding in prayer. Remind the survivor that freedom from the past is possible in Jesus.

Every victim is different. The healing process will vary in issues and time. Determine to walk with victims for a long time. Don't have a predetermined timeframe for healing.

**For elders and pastors:**

Put policies in place to do everything possible to make your church building a safe place for children and survivors.

Look at the difficult stories in Scripture with fresh eyes. Was Bathsheba complicit in adultery or was she raped? Explore the result of David's silence when Tamar was raped by her brother. Esther didn't win a beauty contest - she was prepped and forced to please the king sexually. Note Judges 19 - the violence, blame shifting, and loss of life because of hard-heartedness toward the woman.

Preach and teach the truth about sexual abuse; do not be silent. Don't simply react to cultural norms of sexuality but teach biblical sexuality to teens and adults and be proactive in teaching sexual abuse prevention to children.

Examine church practices. Consider how they might affect a victim of CSA? Do your practices have theological roots or are they just traditions? Can they be modified? For example, the BFC ordinance of baptism requires the baptismal candidate be immersed in water. But can the way it is done be modified when baptizing a victim of CSA? A simple change in how the pastor immerses the person, or having a spouse or friend with them in or near the water, may be all that is needed to avoid re-traumatizing the person.

Encourage survivors to get involved in the church, especially in fun activities. Keeping the secret of abuse keeps a victim in bondage. Their past controls their future. They

may feel broken, unusable, dirty, unable to grow spiritually, or unworthy of serving. Allowing them to contribute to the body of Christ will help them move forward.

Don't pressure a victim or survivor to forgive their abuser. Forgiveness is the work of the Holy Spirit and tends to be a process, and it requires repentance on the part of the abuser. Even in the case of a repentant abuser, reconciliation may not be possible and shouldn't be forced. Don't equate forgiving with forgetting. A victim will likely never forget what happened to them. There may always be triggers—people, places, senses—that cause recall of the abuse. If a survivor has not forgotten, it does not mean they have not forgiven.

Supply resources for victims and survivors. Have books available in your church library. Have brochures in your narthex/entry. Provide names of Christian counselors who have training in CSA. Recommend websites/organizations they can access.

### **Suggested Resources**

- *On the Threshold of Hope* by Dr. Diane Langberg
  - *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Child Sexual Abuse* by Dr. Dan Allender
  - *Hidden with Christ: Breaking Free from the Grip of Your Past* by Lisa Radcliff
  - *Forgiveness and Justice* by Dr. Bryan Maier
  - Christ-Centered Counseling Ministries ([c-ccm.org](http://c-ccm.org)) - counseling resource
  - Harvest USA - magazine, counseling, seminars, and resources (based in Philadelphia)
  - Samaritan Safe Communities - resources, counseling, and Safe Church programs (based in Lancaster)
  - Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) [netgrace.org](http://netgrace.org) - resources for churches in recognizing and responding to abuse
  - Victory's Journey - a small group Bible Study for survivors (leader training available)
  - Rise & Shine Movement - [riseandshinemovement.org](http://riseandshinemovement.org) - prevention seminars, children's books
  - Mama Bear Effect - handouts, bookmarks, posters, resources for parents (not faith-based) - [themambeareffect.org](http://themambeareffect.org)
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# Examining the Process of Rebuilding Relational *Shalom* in the Case of Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse through the Nexus of Forgiveness, Justice, and Reconciliation

By Philip E. Morrison

## Introduction

One of the most difficult discussions in the area of child sexual abuse is how the church should deal with perpetrators who are in their midst. In fact, although it is mentioned in the literature, in my estimation it is an underrepresented subject. Most attention is given, and rightly so, to caring for the abused child and giving support to the family.

Miroslav Volf acknowledges the difficulty of this truth when he writes, “No redeemed future is imaginable in which perpetrators—even judged and transformed perpetrators!—are dressed in white robes. Everything in us rebels against the image. Yet everything we know about the God of the cross demands that we seriously entertain it.”<sup>1</sup>

Ivan Karamazov in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov* dramatically expresses it as he reflects on the evil of child abuse when he exclaims, “I don’t want the mother to embrace the oppressor...She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother’s heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, James W. Fowler writes: “In the struggle against the structures of evil and oppressors, Christians must also struggle as those who hope for the redemption of the oppressor.”<sup>3</sup> Not to do this is to deny the transforming message of the gospel.

Therefore, as ones who do not want to deny the transforming message of the gospel, we must wrestle with the tension of our feelings of repugnance and revulsion towards the perpetrator and overcome our reluctance to work towards restoration of the offender and his<sup>4</sup> reconciliation without losing sight of our responsibility to work for the effecting of justice for both the abused and the abuser.

Here we must clarify that we are narrowing our scope of perpetrators to those who are members of the body of Christ. We are not ignoring the fact that often perpetrators are not within our local congregations. However, our focus in this paper is on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) within the church.

### ***The goal: a reestablishment of the state of shalom***

The heart of the gospel is the reconciliation of the sinner to a restored relationship with God. This is made possible when a sinner repents of his sin, receives forgiveness by faith in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross as payment for his transgression, and is declared righteous in the sight of God. As a result, the sinner is reconciled to God and his broken relationship to God is restored.

This reconciliation of relationship is in reality a reestablishment of the state of *shalom*. But what is *shalom*? Walter Brueggemann writes, “The vision of wholeness which is the supreme will of the biblical God, is the outgrowth of a covenant of *shalom* (see Ezekiel 34:25), in which persons are bound not only to God but to one another in a caring, sharing, rejoicing community with none to make them afraid.”<sup>5</sup>

Sexual violence destroys the *shalom* of the Christian community. It is a violation of the vision of wholeness. Trust, mutual caring and sharing in joyful harmony has been replaced by fearful and tearful destruction and division.

What is true in the divine/human relationship should be reflected in the human/human relationship as well. As believers, in our forgiveness of those who sin against us, we can experience reconciliation and the reestablishment of *shalom* and fellowship with other members of the body of Christ. With this as introduction we can begin to look at the elements necessary to restore *shalom*: first, between the abused and the perpetrator, and second, between the perpetrator and the body of Christ.

### ***Forgiveness***

Whether victims or perpetrators, without forgiving and receiving forgiveness we remain stranded in the realm of enmity and estrangement where there is no hope of reconciliation. However, reconstruction of human relationships as a result of forgiveness moves us beyond the victim/victimizer relationship to the place where God’s ideal of communion can be restored. Just as God’s forgiveness graciously releases us from the status of condemned sinners and bestows upon us that of a redeemed saint, so we too must pass it on, or we remain forever trapped in an oppressed/oppressor state. Thus, freedom flows from forgiveness. From forgiveness flows communion with God and with the members of the body. This should be the goal for every broken relationship. Forgiveness, by definition, must come from the victim. And the victim will benefit from such an action as difficult and seemingly impossible as it may be. As psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela explains:

The victim in a sense *needs* forgiveness as part of the process of becoming rehumanized. The victim needs it in order to complete himself or herself and to wrest away from the perpetrator the fiat power to destroy or to spare. It is part of the process of reclaiming self-efficacy. Reciprocating with empathy and forgiveness in the face of a perpetrator's remorse restores to many victims the sense that they are once again capable of effecting a profound difference in the moral community.<sup>6</sup>

But this is no easy goal to reach and there is a danger. Often the perpetrator may want to rush through the process of reconciliation as James Newton Poling writes,

Scriptures about forgiveness and reconciliation frequently are used by perpetrators to avoid the consequences of their violence and to coerce others to remain under their authority. Not infrequently, a perpetrator of violence goes to his or her pastor immediately after being arrested and asks for forgiveness. Because the petitioner appears remorseful and seems to be following the prescribed formula to activate God's grace, many pastors utter the words of assurance: "You are forgiven."<sup>7</sup>

What is missing in this is the involvement of the victim within the context of the corporate ministry of the local body of believers. It is an individual's (the perpetrator) request for forgiveness given by an individual (the pastor) who happens to be one in spiritual authority. However, the one who has been abused is completely bypassed against all commands of Scripture.

Forgiveness and prerequisite justice are needed for the healing of both the abused and the abuser. However, these aspects take time and must not be rushed, no matter how difficult or uncomfortable they may be for all who are involved. Although easy or forced forgiveness may be desired by the perpetrator or the pastor, as it is a quick solution to the problem, it is, in reality, a further abuse of the victim and does not help the perpetrator to deliberately deal with his deviant behavior or the root causes of his sin.

John S. McClure stresses that the healing process and the justice and forgiveness that is necessary should take place within the body of Christ, which can support both victim and victimizer. "Perpetrators of violence need to be confronted and instructed that forgiveness for violence is a process of repentance and sanctification that will take many years within a disciplined fellowship of Christians," McClure says.<sup>8</sup>

L. Gregory Jones speaks to the process of forgiveness when he writes, “The practice of forgiveness calls us to willingly do things with and for one another so that communion can be restored...Being forgiven requires an ongoing willingness to honor a new claim that has been made on us, to speak with a new truthfulness and to live in a new way with one another.” 9

If we recast this in the context of CSA we might say that, “The practice of forgiveness calls [the victim] to willingly do things with and for [the perpetrator] so that communion can be restored...Being forgiven requires an ongoing willingness to honor a new claim that has been made on [the perpetrator], to speak with a new truthfulness and to live in a new way with [the victim].”

Desmond Tutu demonstrates how forgiveness and reconciliation relate to each other when he writes, “In the act of forgiveness we are declaring our faith in the future of a relationship and in the capacity of the wrongdoer to make a new beginning on a course that will be different from the one that caused us the wrong. We are saying here is a chance to make a new beginning. It is an act of faith that the wrongdoer can change.”<sup>10</sup>

However, it should be clearly stated that, depending upon the sin, it may be extremely difficult for the offended to come to the point where they can forgive the offender. Some may feel that it is merely an act of the will and almost give the impression that it can be readily, if not easily, done. Frank D. Hammond espouses this viewpoint when he writes,

Forgiveness is a decision not a feeling; therefore, it is not something that occurs over a period of time, or in stages, but in one fell swoop. We’ve all heard people say, “Well, I’ve tried to forgive him,” or “I’ve forgiven him a little.” Those who make such statements do not understand the nature of true forgiveness. Isn’t God’s forgiveness instantaneous and complete? Indeed, we are not waiting for God to have a feeling of forgiveness or to arrive at final forgiveness through some gradual process. God decided to forgive us through Jesus Christ. Make a quality decision to forgive one and all. Forgiving others is not a piecemeal or prolonged process; it is an instantaneous determination based on one’s expectation of the forgiveness of God.<sup>11</sup>

Even if this is the case, it must be granted that, depending upon the level of the abuse, it may involve a long process of internal wrestling by the abused before she can come to the point where she can make that decision. The problem with this approach is that it is too simplistic. It is not holistic. It only sees forgiveness on the



volitional and intellectual level. We *know* we should forgive and so we *will* to forgive. However, it ignores both the psychological and spiritual aspects of the victim's being. Célestin Musekura speaks to this psychological and spiritual dimension of forgiveness:

Forgiveness from the heart is a supernatural act. Our wounded hearts instruct us to harbor grudges and seek revenge in the name of justice when we are wrongly hurt or injured. This is true for both those who are born-again Christians and those who do not follow Christ. Even if we try to forgive, when forgiveness is done in our own strength and motivated by mere human kindness and goodness, it is often shallow and superficial, a postponing of a sort of revenge and punishment. It may also be a social mechanism used to distance the forgiven from the forgiver. This human forgiveness can be the killer of Christian fellowship or any communion. It's from the lips, not from the heart Jesus warned his disciples about this kind of pharisaic forgiveness and instructed them that granting forgiveness is closely related to the remembrance of our own forgiveness. *It must be granted from the heart in order to be a healing gift*, and it must be expressed in practical actions as the forgiver releases the debtors and welcomes them back into fellowship and friendship (emphasis mine).<sup>12</sup>

When the abused practices forgiveness her reconstrual of the perpetrator as "restored" centrally involves the perpetrator's status as a member of the body of Christ. Thus, the victim now regards the perpetrator as one who has been restored to fellowship with the body of believers. <sup>13</sup>The result is that through forgiveness, the victim breaks the power that the perpetrator still has over her.

### ***Justice***

What is this power that the perpetrator has over the victim? In the realm of political injustice, Daniel Philpott defines this power as a "standing victory." He writes, "This is the ongoing triumph of the perpetrator's evil deed, which persists victoriously and unchallenged in the absence of an authoritative countervailing message of justice."<sup>14</sup>

While forgiveness is vital and central to the reestablishment of *shalom*, the process will be incomplete if the issue of justice is ignored. It may be argued that the victim can forgive without experiencing justice, but the restoration of *shalom* is not possible without the execution of justice in some form. Without justice, the relational wound is still left open and long-term healing for the victim will be difficult. To this point Phyllis Kilbourn writes,

Children have a strong sense of justice, and the prosecution of the perpetrator can satisfy this basic need; it also grants the basic right of protection guaranteed a child. When children have worked through their trauma to the point where they feel confident and secure enough to pursue the legal prosecution of their offenders, they can find such action strengthening and therapeutic. The children and their families will need help in working through the legal issues involved.<sup>15</sup>

A biblical response to child abuse demands that we administer justice for both the victim and perpetrator. In *Protecting All God's Children*, the Archbishop's Council of the Church of England writes,

Justice is part of the outworking of love. The Church must hold in tension concerns for both justice and compassion. Nevertheless, those who have suffered child abuse have sometimes found an unsympathetic hearing. They may be disbelieved, discouraged and damaged further. Some people may side with the alleged perpetrator. This occurs in all parts of society, but it is particularly hurtful when it occurs within the Church. Such actions compound the sense of injustice that many feel. In answer to the question "What does God require of us?" the need to act justly is set alongside the need to love mercy and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8).<sup>16</sup>

Walter Brueggemann sees justice "as a positive and aggressive action...it is active intervention to transform society. And that transformation, on the one hand, means to act favourably toward the weak and, on the other hand, effectively against the abusive wrong."<sup>17</sup> This means that the church cannot ignore or avoid bringing the perpetrator to account for his or her abusive actions. Those who are involved in child sexual abuse are not only breaking the law of God, but also the laws of the land. If the church does not report child sexual abuse to the authorities, they are involved in a cover-up of a crime and thus become accessories to the fact. It is only by bringing the perpetrator to justice that justice can be gained for the victim.

Victoria L. Johnson speaks to this double obligation and points out a balanced approach:

Pastors and church leaders need to become more aggressive in dealing with sexual misconduct. They need to hold people accountable for their behavior toward their family and should exercise church discipline if they violate biblical principles. Sexual abuse should be reported to the authorities and discreetly

but thoroughly investigated. The offenders should be brought to justice and be made to come to terms with their actions.

Some churches cite 1 Corinthians 6:1—“Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”—to justify inaction against abusers. But this passage refers to civil suits against members of the church, not criminal behavior. Romans 13:1-5 establishes the fact that civil government is instituted by God to punish criminal wrongdoing. Sexual abuse is a criminal violation of the law and should be reported to a law enforcement agency...Any legal proceedings are then in the hands of the law enforcement and judicial system.<sup>18</sup>

Some might object that bringing to justice a church member or a family member would be harsh and unloving. Johnson counters that objection by saying,

But laws against sexual abuse were made a part of our system in the first place to protect the moral and ethical values of our families and our communities. Remember, it may be only during incarceration or court proceedings that offenders get the help they need. Offenders should continue to receive spiritual support from the church—especially if the family is too emotionally shattered to support them.<sup>19</sup>

Some hold the view that individuals and churches (as a group of individuals) forgive while states seek justice. In this way they compartmentalize forgiveness and justice. But this view abrogates the Christian duty of seeking justice by abdicating the role of being salt and light. The Scriptures are clear that we as individuals are to seek justice. Job is an example as he states, in his testimony of his life before the Lord in Job 29:11-17,

11 Whoever heard me spoke well of me,  
and those who saw me commended me,  
12 because I rescued the poor who cried for help,  
and the fatherless who had none to assist them.  
13 The one who was dying blessed me;  
I made the widow's heart sing.  
14 I put on righteousness as my clothing;  
justice was my robe and my turban.  
15 I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame.  
16 I was a father to the needy;  
I took up the case of the stranger.  
17 I broke the fangs of the wicked

and snatched the victims from their teeth.

His testimony is summarized in verse 14, where he employs the metaphor of wearing garments of righteous and justice as qualities which clothe his character. Christopher Wright, in his discussion of these two attributes, describes righteousness as “not an abstract norm, but a particular sense of what it means to do the right thing, as a parent, as a child, as a judge, as a king, as a brother, as a spouse, as a friend, as a worshiper, and so on. Righteousness is doing all that one ought to do in the given circumstances and relationships.”<sup>20</sup>

In regard to justice, he says that it “refers to legal action over a wide range.” It can mean:

to act as a lawgiver; to act as a judge by arbitrating between parties in a dispute; to pronounce judgment by declaring who is guilty and is innocent respectively; and to execute judgement in carrying out the legal consequences of such a verdict. In the widest sense, it means “to put things right,” *to intervene in a situation that is wrong, oppressive, or out of control, and to fix it* (emphasis mine).<sup>21</sup>

In his life and practice Job exemplifies these definitions, as he was one who intervened on behalf of the poor and helpless. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes,

Uprightness or “justice” (*sedaqāh*) and judgment (*mishpat*)<sup>22</sup> are two key words in the Bible. The practice of them is one of the great biblical commandments (see Gen. 18:19), because they are a task to which God is committed. Job has made their practice a permanent part of his life (“my cloak and my turban”). *Uprightness and judgment cannot be promoted in the abstract but only in relation to the inhuman situation in which orphans, widows, and strangers live* (emphasis mine).<sup>23</sup>

Thus, we see that Job was no idle spectator but that his life was characterized by intervention in a variety of ways to provide assistance to the afflicted and justice for the oppressed.

The prophet Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 22:3a, also shares God’s expectation for intervention on behalf of the oppressed. He writes, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed.’” The passage is speaking of those who had been robbed economically in one

way or another. But this principle of providing justice is applicable to the victims of child sexual abuse who have been robbed of their virginity, innocence, and dignity.

Although working for justice was expected, God himself was amazed that often this was not the case for his people. We see this in Isaiah 59:15b-17: 15b

The Lord looked and was displeased  
that there was no justice.  
16 He saw that there was no one,  
he was appalled that there was no one to *intervene*;  
so his own arm achieved salvation for him,  
and his own righteousness sustained him (emphasis mine).

John Calvin comments on why God should be shocked. He writes, “It was incredible and monstrous that there was not found in a holy and elect people any one that opposed injustice...Was it possible that there could be greater obstinacy of which they ought to be ashamed, since by their wickedness they moved God to astonishment?”<sup>24</sup>

This speaks to today’s need that the holy and elect people of the church must actively work to bring about justice when cases of injustice have become known. Therefore, God is not only appalled there is no one to intervene, but he examines the motives of his people’s hearts. In Proverbs 24:10-12 we see again that if one is aware of injustice, then one is expected to become involved:

10 If you falter in a time of trouble,  
how small is your strength!  
11 Rescue those being led away to death;  
hold back those staggering toward slaughter.  
12 If you say, “But we knew nothing about this,”  
does not he who weighs the heart perceive it?  
Does not he who guards your life know it?  
Will he not repay everyone according to what they have done?

These verses have been used by the pro-life movement in their opposition to abortion. The context, however, more likely deals with those who have been falsely accused and are condemned to death through a miscarriage of justice. However, what is true in this case of injustice can, by extension, be applied not only to the practice of abortion but also to those who are suffering as victims of child abuse. Thus, one cannot feign ignorance as an excuse for refusing to become involved. In fact, lack of intervention brings one under the judgment of God.

Therefore, according to Proverbs 31:8-9, intervention is an imperative for the believer, who must “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.” The passage repeats the need for the believer to “speak up” on behalf of the voiceless, the destitute, and the poor and needy, and in this way emphasizes the importance of becoming involved with them in the midst of their oppression to bring about justice.

### *The relationship of forgiveness and justice*

At this point, we must raise the questions, “Can one forgive and yet insist upon justice being done? Is forgiveness and the demand that the perpetrator face justice incompatible and contradictory?” The answer is “no,” because there is an interconnectedness between forgiveness and justice in the process of reestablishing *shalom*. This is because, as Philpott points out, “[Forgiveness] names and condemns the wrong.”<sup>25</sup>

This is an important step as the victim clearly frames the abuse in all its horror and atrocity. The victim in her act of forgiveness claims no responsibility for what was done to her. The abuse and trauma lie squarely at the perpetrator’s feet. For her to accept some fault or blame of the abuse against her in the very act of forgiveness is to perpetuate the injustice against her and thus to undermine the process of justice which will lead to her healing.

This naming and condemning the wrong in the process of forgiveness is equally as important on the part of the perpetrator as he must now confess the abuse in all its horror and atrocity without excuse, rationalization, or down-playing what he has done. This is biblical confession, which must be the initial step in asking for forgiveness. The Greek word for confession is *ὁμολογέω* (*homologeó*) which means “to speak the same, to agree.” How does this confession relate to justice? By admitting his evil actions, the perpetrator tacitly acknowledges he has committed a wrong that carries with it a certain penalty or punishment.

Through the payment of the penalty, or submitting to the punishment, the requirements of justice are met. This payment of a penalty is termed “restorative punishment.”<sup>26</sup>

A discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper but employing this response to the confession of abuse demonstrates the sincerity of the perpetrator and helps to

achieve some measure of justice on behalf of the victim. This by no means implies that the punishment is administered on a complimentary basis as there is no way to objectively quantify an equality of redressing the abuse that has been suffered by the victim. Philpott comments,

For societies addressing past evils, restorative punishment commends forms of punishment that not only censure perpetrators but also are likely to elicit a range of restorations: to bring about the perpetrator's acknowledgment of his wrongs, to encourage members of the community to recognize victims' suffering, and to restore the rule of law and respect for human rights. Since restorative punishment does not require an exact balance of wrongs and deprivation, it is flexible enough to perform this range of restorations as the circumstances allow. Restorative punishment may still involve imprisonment or disqualification from office and should impose these punishments on top perpetrators if possible.<sup>27</sup>

Philpott continues,

Such punishment reaffirms the values of the community, contributes to the rule of law, and invites the restoration of the perpetrator, encouraging [him] to recognize the injustice of [his] crime and to repent. Restorative punishment still entails the deprivation imposed by imprisonment or other forms of suffering, which communicates the seriousness of the crime to the perpetrator.<sup>28</sup>

Forgiveness, though, in its relationship to justice, takes another step in defeating the standing victory of injustice. Philpott (again in the political realm) writes, "through the victim's decision no longer to hold the perpetrator's wrong against him and to view him as restored to right relationship and in good standing, she wills a future in which the wrong no longer has force or status and where, in the political realm, she will respect the perpetrator as a full fellow citizen."<sup>29</sup> We could paraphrase this for the church context by saying, "through the victim's decision no longer to hold the perpetrator's wrong against him and to view him as restored to right relationship and in good standing, she wills a future in which the wrong no longer has force or status and where she accepts the perpetrator as a reconciled brother in Christ."

### ***Reconciliation***

This act of forgiveness as it is performed by the victim opens the door towards achieving justice and is essential for moving both the victim and the perpetrator

towards reconciliation or the reestablishment of *shalom*. In this way “forgiveness is a constructive act, one that builds something better.”<sup>30</sup> When seen in this light, forgiveness is not unjust to the victim, as it is part of the process that has in view the rebuilding of not only the victim’s life but also that of the offender. Gregory Jones writes, “Embodying forgiveness is the way that offers new life and hopeful future to those who suffer *and* to those who inflict suffering (emphasis his).”<sup>31</sup> In reality, the victim is fulfilling the command of the Apostle Paul, who says, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”<sup>32</sup>

Thus forgiveness, freely given, releases the victim from the emotional ties and negative psychological power and control of the oppressor. Without forgiveness, every time the victim remembers the painful act, the repressed memories rush back and the scenes of suffering are relived. But forgiveness defeats those feelings and deprives the perpetrator of an ongoing victory.

Further, forgiveness can be a means to begin reconciliation with the offender. It does not consign the perpetrator perpetually to the prison of his evil past. Thus we are back to the concept of grace, which Jesus illustrated by saying that we should do more than what is obligated by the law and freely offer something in excess of what is required by “going the extra mile.”<sup>33</sup> In this type of action there is a release from the pressure of demanding and insisting upon one’s rights to an appropriation of the freedom of voluntarily giving what is not deserved. This is something that restores personal dignity, as the gift of offering reconciliation is a reality that the oppressor cannot thwart or effectively oppose. The oppressor may refuse to be reconciled, but he cannot stop reconciliation from being offered. Perhaps this is what Paul had in mind in Romans 12:18, when he wrote, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.”

Building upon the gift of reconciliation, the victim’s forgiveness offers him the hope of making something better of his life. His acts of abuse do not necessarily consign him to an outcast status within the Body of Christ and even society at large. Charles Colson speaks of this new start, after restorative punishment has been completed, as reintegration. In his book *Justice That Restores*, Colson writes,

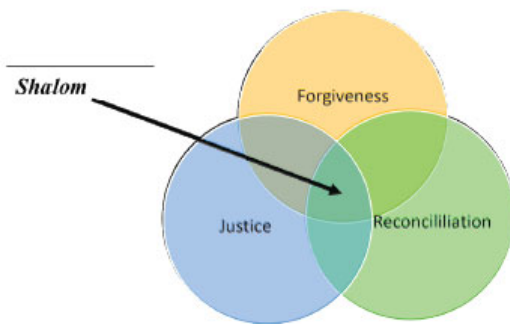
Communities [or we would say churches] must work with offenders to help them overcome the obstacles they face as they make the transition from prison to the community. The key to reintegration, one of the most critical elements of restorative justice, is the ability of the church to marshal volunteer resources to mentor and encourage inmates when they return to the community.<sup>34</sup>



This reintegration into the body of Christ does not imply that the victim would of necessity have to be involved. This, in many cases, would be a burden too heavy to bear. While the reintegration process is beyond the scope of this paper, it would have to be carried out with the protection of the victim, her family, and the local church body from further emotional trauma in mind. This means that the process of reintegration would require the involvement of outside and objective entities including other individuals and churches.

### ***Conclusion: The reestablishment of shalom***

This reintegration is, in reality, the reestablishment of *shalom*. It is the culmination of forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation working together in tandem. They are overlapping components working in a process to bring about healing and the reestablishment of harmony in the broken relationships of those who have been abused and traumatised, and those who have perpetrated the evil upon the victims.



### ***Practical Actions***

When child abuse of whatever nature has been disclosed, the church must not delay in addressing this issue with the perpetrator. The following gives a guideline to follow, especially in regard to the perpetrator.

#### **1. Things to do:**

- 1.1. Immediately call your church's attorney. No matter what level of understanding of the law church leadership may possess, it is imperative to obtain legal counsel so that proper procedures and protections for the church may be put into place.

- 1.2. Immediately put the perpetrator on administrative leave. This means that the perpetrator is to cease any and all contact with children and involvement in children's ministries. Not to do so may expose children to further risk and traumatization and the church legally liable.
- 1.3. Immediately report to appropriate governmental authorities. Check your state's laws on reporting and to which entities the report should be made.
- 1.4. Immediately inform the perpetrator of the above actions and advise him/her to contact their own attorney.

## 2. Things to avoid:

- 2.1. Easy forgiveness by church leadership. As stated above, sometimes pastors and people want to put the problem behind them and will quickly convey forgiveness, even publicly, if the perpetrator has confessed and asked for forgiveness.
- 2.2 Early restoration to ministry. Child sexual abuse is a serious matter which is indicative of deep-rooted psychological and spiritual issues. These issues disqualify one from ministry and need to be addressed through spiritual and therapeutic counseling. A confession and asking of forgiveness do not immediately or automatically re-qualify someone for leadership and ministry.
- 2.3. Eliminating consequences. Forgiveness does not eradicate consequences. Some perpetrators feel if they have been forgiven, then they should not have to suffer any consequences for their sinful behavior.

When the Israelites sinned against God by refusing to go into the Promised Land. God was angry enough to destroy them. Moses pleaded with the Lord to forgive and the Lord's response is very instructive in light of the issue of forgiveness and consequences:

20 The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, 22 not one of those who saw my glory and the signs performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who

disobeyed me and tested me ten times— 23 not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it (Numbers 14:20-24).

2.4. Pressure on the victim to meet with the perpetrator to confront him, based on a misapplication of Matthew 18. There are some churches who feel that biblically, the victim must go to the perpetrator and confront him with the fact of his abuse. This will only lead to further traumatization of the victim. A biblical procedure which would cause harm cannot be exercised as an act of love. Boz Tchividjian's comments on this are significant:

This well-known biblical passage has all too often been a justification for 1) not reporting abuse disclosures to the authorities and 2) convincing sexual abuse victims to privately confront their perpetrators. Needless to say, this misreading and misapplication of Jesus' words is incredibly harmful on a number of fronts. More importantly, it's simply not consistent with the person and character of Jesus.

He continues,

Child sexual abuse is not merely a personal offense. It is a serious crime. Child sexual abuse does not even fit into the paradigm of which Jesus was speaking about in this passage. Jesus never intended these statements to be twisted into the required method for handling murder, rape, torture, kidnapping, or genocide. Child sexual abuse is not a private matter, but rather a public offense against the victim, society and humanity as a whole. It is not a matter which can be handled quietly between two persons or between two families, as is wrongly done in many communities. It is a matter of public alarm, because of its pervasive, extensive, and expansive nature, causing a cascade of misery in countless lives.

Tchividjian concludes,

The common thread running throughout Scripture in the life of the Christian and the Church is something most fundamental of all to the Christian faith: Love. Love from God, love for God, and for humankind. The distorted interpretation and application of this scripture passage utterly fails to

demonstrate such a love to those who need it most. Throughout the course of history, the misinterpretation and misapplication of the Bible has resulted in horrendous acts and unspeakable pains. By working together, we can help our faith communities understand that “Let the disclosing little child come forward privately and accuse me” is a monstrous interpretation that destroys lives, protects offenders, and has not one leg to stand on before Jesus.<sup>35</sup>

- 2.5. Pressure on the victim to grant the perpetrator forgiveness. When forgiveness is pressured upon victims it disrespects their autonomy, and therefore that forgiveness, in and of itself, is unjust. Asking the victim to offer forgiveness too early in the process before dealing with the anger, hatred, and the desire for vengeance upon one’s enemies is to offer a “cheap forgiveness” for the perpetrator and leaves the victim with unresolved issues of the heart.

## Endnotes

- 1 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1996), 138.
- 2 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Kindle edition, location 5130.
- 3 James W. Fowler as quoted in Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2002), 609.
- 4 In this paper, we will use the masculine pronoun as the vast majority of perpetrators are male. However, we do recognize the fact that there are female perpetrators as well.
- 5 Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1982), 16-17.
- 6 Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, as quoted by Daniel Philpott, “The Justice of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2013, 410.
- 7 James Newton Poling in John S. McLure and Nancy J. Ramsay, eds., *Telling the Truth: Preaching about Domestic and Sexual Violence*, (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1998), 80., June 3, Accessed 2016,  
<https://www.google.com/search?q=Telling+the+Truth:+Preaching+about+Domestic+and+Sexual+Violence&cad=h>
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 L. Gregory Jones and Célestin Musekura, *Forgiving as We’ve Been Forgiven* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 41.
- 10 Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 273
- 11 Frank D. Hammond, *Forgiving Others* (Plainview, Texas: The Children’s Bread Ministry, 1995), 22.
- 12 Jones and Musekura, 80.
- 13 This idea has been adapted from the concept of forgiveness of one citizen with another in the political realm and in the case of political injustice in Daniel Philpott, “The Justice of Forgiveness,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2013, 408.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Phyllis Kilbourn and Marjorie McDermid, eds., *Sexually Exploited Children: Working to Protect and Heal* (Monrovia, California: MARC Publications, 1998), 194.
- 16 “Protecting All God’s Children,” Accessed January 23, 2017.

- 17 Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1982), 107.
- 18 Victoria L. Johnson, *Children and Sexual Abuse* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 22-23.
- 19 Ibid, 24.
- 20 Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2010), 90.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 "Uprightness" and "judgment" are translated as "righteous" and "justice" in the verses quoted above.
- 23 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 40.
- 24 Calvin's "astonishment" is an older way of saying "appalled". John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah*, ed. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948) 4:263.
- 25 Philpott, 409.
- 26 Ibid, 411.
- 27 Ibid, 412.
- 28 Ibid, 412.
- 29 Ibid, 409-410.
- 30 Ibid, 408.
- 31 Jones, 98.
- 32 Romans 12:21.
- 33 Matthew 5:41.
- 34 Charles W. Colson, *Justice That Restores* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 136.
- 35 Boz Tchividjian, "If your brother sins against you"....and he's a sex offender," Accessed July 12, 2019. <https://religionnews.com/2014/11/14/brother-sins/>.

# Report of the Study Committee on Child Sexual Abuse Prevention

*Note: this report was given at the 2021 BFC Conference. All proposed legislation passed at First Reading in 2021 and at Second Reading in 2022.*

The committee was formed at the 136th BFC Conference in 2019 for the purpose of examining the issue of sexual abuse of minors and the church's protection of the children and youth within our care. The committee met five times over the course of 2020. We examined best practices for child safety and counseling advice for both survivors and perpetrators of abuse, as well as developing proposed legislation to ensure the integrity of our ministries and the effectiveness of our witness.

## Legislative Proposals

Jesus was indignant. His disciples had been hindering children from coming to Him (Mark 10:13-19). The Lord gave a sobering warning to those who would cause "one of these little ones" to stumble (Matt. 18:6). Christ's compassion for those who are hurting, overlooked, undervalued, and needy is evident throughout the Scriptures. Meanwhile, the prevalence of sexual abuse in our world—particularly the abuse of minors—is staggering. Each instance of sexual abuse is a tragedy capable of producing unimaginable pain; how much more so when the abuse takes place within the church of Jesus? When the abuse is perpetrated by one claiming to be a "disciple" of Jesus?

As church leaders, we have been tasked with shepherding and watching over the flock of God among us (1 Pet. 5:13; Heb. 13:17). It is the opinion of this committee that a cavalier attitude toward sexual abuse, and especially the abuse of minors, is incompatible with God's character and our mandate as shepherds. Deliberate action must be taken to care for and protect the most vulnerable lambs within the flock of God—our children.

Secular culture recognizes the far-reaching effects and grievous nature of sexual abuse. We have been inundated with reports of men exploiting their authority to target their sexual victims. Society is outraged at accounts of powerful people covering up sin and silencing the abused. The culture is beginning to take sexual abuse seriously. The Bible Fellowship Church needs to make our stand on this issue public and official. It is a shame for a church to be more tolerant of sexual sin than the culture (1 Cor. 5:1).

Our churches cannot afford to lag behind when it comes to protecting our children from abuse. Our committee believes the Bible Fellowship Church will be better-equipped to fulfill the Great Commission when we have demonstrated that we not only cherish children but have taken the steps necessary to protect them. Before introducing our proposals, we want to briefly explain our rationale for these changes.

No sinner, not even the most heinous sexual abuser, is beyond the reach of God's grace and forgiveness. God desires that all would come to repentance and experience the joy of restoration and freedom from sin (2 Pet. 3:9, Rom. 6:1-12). However, we must remember that even though the sinner is forgiven, the consequences of his or her sin often remain. As a child of God, the Christian is afforded all the rights of salvation; however, the right to serve in any and every ministry role, no matter what you've done in the past, is not one of them.

The committee believes that the sin of sexual abuse against a child is so severe that it precludes a person from ever again serving as a minister, elder, deacon, staff member, or as a volunteer having contact with children. Job 29:17 mentions shattering “the fangs” of the predator to protect the prey. Notice that the predator is not destroyed but is rendered powerless and unable to harm his prey. A repentant sexual abuser could certainly find fellowship and even serve in some capacity within our churches. But as church leaders, we have an obligation to protect our sheep. We must be prepared to shatter “fangs” so as never to allow predators an opportunity to strike again.

A pastor is to shepherd and care for the Lord’s flock (1 Pet. 5:1-2). As overseers, the elders are to be blameless, above reproach, and have a good reputation with those outside the church (1 Tim. 3:2, 7, Titus 1:6-7). Deacons too are to be blameless and worthy of respect (1 Tim. 3:8-10). How can a man claim to be blameless, above reproach, and have a good reputation if he is publicly regarded as a Sex Offender? How could the flock under his care— especially those who themselves are survivors of abuse— be expected to follow the leadership of a man who has a history of manipulating his power and authority to target sexual victims?

A church’s decision to hire an individual or place such a person in a position of leadership is an endorsement of that person. While an elder, deacon, or church staff person may not necessarily have contact with minors, they are de facto examples to the flock and representatives of the church to the community; as such, they should be held to a higher standard.

Virtually any church staff position—whether custodial, office staff, or ministry staff—has the potential of significant contact with children. If a church hires a staff person who has succumbed to the sin of sexually abusing a child, even in his or her distant past, the church would not only be placing its children at unnecessary risk but would also be putting a stumbling block before a brother or sister by surrounding them with likely temptation (Rom. 14:13). For the sake of our children’s safety, the peace of mind of our families, and the reputation of the gospel in each of the communities in which our churches minister; we believe Child Abuse Clearances and Background Checks should be required from all ministers, elders, deacons, and staff, and all volunteers who have a significant likelihood of contact with minors. Many states already have laws requiring these preventative measures. The committee recognizes that by mandating this screening we are placing an extra burden upon our churches. However, considering the potential devastation that an instance of sexual abuse could wreak upon a person’s life, family, each of our ministries, and the Bible Fellowship Church as a whole, the inconvenience of appropriate screening seems insignificant.

Not all church volunteers will have contact with children in their ministry roles. For instance, some greeters, worship team members, or men’s ministry leaders are less likely to have contact with minors in their ministry work. It is more nebulous as to how state laws apply to this group of volunteers. We believe that elders should discuss together and have an internal policy on which of their church’s volunteers require clearances and which do not. Every member of Christ’s Body is a useful member of that Body and should be involved in serving the Head (1 Cor. 12). We do not believe that a perpetrator who has found forgiveness through the blood of Jesus is forever useless to the Body. The Church should find ways for this person to serve the Body.

With these explanations, we propose the following legislative changes to the Principles of Order at First Reading.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 204-2.3, Personal Qualifications for the Ministry:

(7) A man convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for ordination or the position of minister at any church. Additionally, a man will be ineligible to maintain his ordination credentials or his position of minister at any church if convicted of sexual abuse.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 204-5, Church Staff:

204-5.2 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all church staff. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for employment in any church.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 204-1, Elders:

204-1.7 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all elders. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A man convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for the office of elder.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 204-4, Deacons:

204-4.5 The elders shall ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all deacons. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for the office of deacon.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 404, Choosing Leaders Other than Elders and Deacons:

404-5 The elders will ensure that the church has obtained background checks and child abuse clearances for all volunteers that have a significant likelihood of contact with children in their ministries. In jurisdictions that require clearances, the elders will ensure that their policy complies with the law. A person convicted of sexual abuse or included in the national or state registry of sexual offenders will be ineligible for volunteer ministry where there is significant likelihood of contact with children. The elders shall define what “significant likelihood of contact with children” means in their context.

### **Child Protection Policy**

While we greatly value the safety of every person, the safety of children within our churches was the focus of our study. We do not think it is necessary to include one blanket protection policy within the Principles of Order; however, to aid our churches in crafting their own child protection policies, we have included “Guidelines for Writing a Church Child Protection Policy,” which examines each piece of a protection policy and asks the questions that your church can answer as you develop your own policy (see Appendix A). Additionally, we have created a “Sample Child and Youth Protection



Policy,” which will be available in the Extra Resources section of the BFC website. In order for our Fellowship of Churches to ensure that each member church is taking action on protecting the children to which it ministers, our Committee will be proposing that the following statement be added to the Principles of Order.

**Resolved**, that the following be added to Article 407 - Miscellaneous Bylaws:

407-7 Child Protection Policy. The church shall maintain a written child protection policy, enacted and overseen by its Board of Elders. The elders will ensure that their policy complies with the laws of their jurisdiction (Suggested guidelines are included in the 2021 Yearbook).

The pandemic greatly delayed our ability to address this urgent crisis affecting Christ’s Church. It was our original intention to hold back the proposed 407-7 legislation for a year to allow churches time to finish their own work on creating a Child Protection Policy. Pandemics do not eliminate our need to protect the children God has brought to our churches, and we therefore cannot delay any longer than we already have. The Committee therefore intends to bring all the proposed legislation in this report at the October 2021 BFC Conference for approval at First Reading. If approved at the October Conference, we intend to bring all the legislation to the April 2022 Conference for approval at Second Reading. This will put pressure on our churches’ elder boards to create a Child Protection Policy by April 2022, when all these new rules would go into effect.

#### **Ministering to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse**

We have written a guide to best practices in order to aid churches as they bring comfort and healing to survivors of abuse. Our study’s goal was primarily focused on survivors of childhood sexual abuse, but these best practices certainly help in counseling all survivors of any kind of abuse. You can read a summary about this in Appendix B. This guide will be made available in the Extra Resources section of the BFC website.

#### **Responding to Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse**

Those who have committed crimes of abuse against other image-bearers are also in need of spiritual and emotional cleansing. It can be a delicate process: restoring such a person both inside the counseling context and in helping others see the legitimate value of serving a perpetrator in finding God’s grace. You can read a summary of best practices for assisting the healing of the perpetrators of abuse in Appendix C. Our complete work is available in the Extra Resources section of the BFC website. Our committee will be producing a publication to preserve the content of these appendices for continued application within our churches.

**The Study Committee on Child Sexual Abuse:** Joshua P. Gibson, Chairman; Benjamin J. Triestman, Secretary; Ruth Barninger, Mark A. Bickel, Philip E. Morrison, Lisa Radcliff, Timothy J. Schmoyer.