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What We've Learned

Here are a few high-level learnings which came out of the last 12 months related to the allegations brought forth, our care for all parties involved, and our engagement with trauma-informed experts. Some of these learnings were known to some of us already, but all of them are crucial takeaways we do not want to forget if we find ourselves in this type of situation again.

What we've learned about the process:

- Enlisting the help of trauma-informed experts from the outset of an incident will be helpful to ensure we are not missing anything in the way we care, the words we choose, and the actions steps we take.
- As a church we have a responsibility to both fulfill all legal requirements *and* provide care, compassion, and support to those who have experienced pain and trauma. And we must do both *at the same time*.
 - If our hands are tied and we find it difficult to engage in a shepherding role because of legal obligations, we should engage the help of an outside organization which can provide direct support to the affected parties.
- When the church is not viewed as safe or supportive, our ability to communicate and respond effectively is hampered.
- It is vital for Grace to take ownership of what it can, to apologize for what it needs to apologize for, and to be transparent and honest about where it could do better.
- Rather than referring to our “policies of sexual misconduct,” it is better to talk about our “standard of care.”

What we've learned about trauma and pain:

- We cannot tell another person what is and is not their trauma. If they experience a visceral response to a past experience, it is trauma, regardless of whether others feel that it should be.
- Sometimes those who have experienced trauma will stay in long-term relationships and community with those who were the cause of their trauma.
 - Just because someone has been in community with another does not mean they do not harbor feelings of pain and trauma towards that person.
- It is vital to honor the autonomy of those who have experienced trauma (i.e. whether to communicate directly with them, whether to use their names publicly, etc.).

- When past trauma involves a misuse or abuse of authority, we must be doubly cautious about how those with *current* authority respond to the situation.

Here are some of the resources we have referred to and consulted with throughout the situation:

GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)

Caroline Poland, founder of Landmark Counseling

***A Church Called Tov*, by Scot McKnight and others**

***SafeConduct* resources serving The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Presbyterian Church USA, Alliance of Baptists, and United Church of Christ**

***Becoming a Church That Cares Well For The Abused*, Brad Hambrick, General Editor**

Current initiatives include a significant updating of our policies, procedures, and guidelines for all staff and those volunteers working with kids and students. Annual, mandatory training is accompanying these updated instructions. We are also looking into putting together a team of professionals to help guide us through situations where abuse is suspected or reported.



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