



RESPONDING TO CONCERNS: QUESTIONS

These questions are **not intended to be included** in your Safe Church policy, but might be helpful for your policy development team.

The section of your policy that tells people what to do if there is a concern or suspected abuse needs to apply for each of the areas that often lead to allegations and lawsuits (clergy sexual misconduct, abuse of minors or vulnerable adults and sexual harassment). The questions below can help you design your policy.

1. EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN

- Do you have a “communication road map” that tells individuals who to contact to express specific concerns—before a concern rises to the level of a serious complaint?
For example, what kinds of concerns should go to the Mutual Ministry or Pastor-Parish Relations Committee? What goes to the youth director? What goes to the pastor? Etc.

2. INITIATION OF A COMPLAINT

- How is a complaint made (in writing, by phone, etc.)?
- To whom is the complaint officially made?

3. IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

- What are the initial steps in processing the complaint?
- How is the accused informed of the complaint?
- Will the accused be removed from job responsibilities temporarily?

4. THE INQUIRY (Inquiry is an investigation, not a trial!)

- Who will conduct the inquiry?
- What procedure will be followed to determine the validity of the complaint and the need to make further report of the alleged situation to the insurance company, congregation lawyers, ecclesiastical or secular authorities?
- How will the rights of all involved be respected in the process?
- Who will know of the findings of the investigating committee (the governing council, deacons, the whole congregation)?
- Who will make the decisions regarding response to the findings?

- What guidelines insure suspension of the investigation when referral to the denominational authorities, law enforcement, Child or Adult Protective Services, is mandated?
- How will appropriate and clear record-keeping be insured?

5. RECOMMENDATION FOR RESOLUTION

- Who will formulate recommendations for intervention?
- To whom will those recommendations be made?
- Who will implement them?
- Does the policy insure a reconciliation process, including
 - (a) discipline or vindication for accused
 - (b) a healing process for any injured by the abuse (the accused, accuser, their families and the congregation)?
- If discipline is recommended, is it tiered such that failure of timely compliance triggers more serious consequences?
- Does the discipline section allow any combination and/or a sequence of:
 - a) censure of the accused;
 - b) opportunities for acknowledgment of the violation and repentance;
 - c) description of expectations for future behavior, which may include (but are not limited to) restitution, counseling, supervision, education, spiritual direction, and/or removal from susceptible environments within the congregation's ministry for a stated period of time.
 - d) removal from active ministry and leadership positions, whether official or unofficial;
 - e) removal from membership in the congregation?

6. ACTION BY GOVERNING BODY

- If any party involved in the complaint disagrees with the recommendations, who has ultimate responsibility for their acceptance, rejection or modification?
- To whom may the party turn if not satisfied with the ultimate resolution at the local congregation level?
- Finally, who will monitor the rehabilitation compliance and recommend further intervention, if necessary?