



CITY CHURCH
of Richmond

City Church of Richmond
Response to Abuse Policy

What follows is a general policy meant to guide City Church in its response to allegations of abuse, including, but not limited to, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child abuse, and spiritual abuse. While we recognize that the specific details of each response will be different, the general principles and procedures outlined here should be followed in every case. These policies are meant to provide protection and care to the victims/survivors/reporters of abuse while also preserving the rights of any accused of abuse. This policy has been informed by the denomination's Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault Report to the PCA General Assembly, by the PCA Book of Church Order, and by Scripture.

"When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit." (Psalm 34:17-18)

City Church of Richmond will cultivate a healthy culture of response to abuse by:

1. Teaching regularly on abuse—explaining what it is and how to respond to it. This teaching will include reference to physical, sexual, verbal, and spiritual abuse.
2. Requiring that the leadership of City Church (staff, Session) set a positive example in their treatment of one another, women, children, church members, etc.
3. Believing victims and striving to protect their safety first. Once their safety is assured, the church will carefully explore the claims/allegations to discern the truth.
4. Recognizing that the church's responsibility includes providing care throughout whole process. This care will include proper investigation of reports *and* gentle pastoral care for all offering such reports.
5. Being willing and ready to seek help from third party investigators and experts (both inside the church and outside the church) to faithfully respond to any abuse allegation. Examples of third party resources include:
 - GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment)
 - Help|Her
 - Diane Langberg

City Church will develop and maintain two teams ready to function in any situation of alleged abuse: an Abuse Response Team and a Crisis Response Team.

Abuse Response Team

The purpose of the Abuse Response Team is to provide frontline care for and advocacy on behalf of all accusers/victims/survivors.

- In every case an Abuse Response Team will be composed of at least 3 trained congregation members and will have at least one male and one female member.
- The Abuse Response Team will carefully listen to any allegation and decide as soon as possible if it is reportable or non-reportable (*vis a vis* civil authorities).

The duties of the Abuse Response Team shall include (but are not limited to):

- Meeting with the individual reporting abuse to understand and verify the allegation.
- Recommending immediate medical, counseling, and pastoral resources to the individual and his/her family.
- Reporting the abuse to appropriate law enforcement and/or social services.
- Communicating regular updates to the the Shepherding Committee and the City Church Session (through the Moderator) in an effort to facilitate effective pastoral care, discipline, and follow up.
- Providing ongoing and long-term support and care to the individual making an allegation.

Crisis Response Team

The purpose of the Crisis Response Team is to guide City Church through a proper response to any allegation of abuse by conducting a fair and impartial investigation and advising the church on THE proper process to follow.

- In every case to be composed of at least: 1 elder, 1 deacon, 1 female shepherd, 1 lay person.
- Must be visible to congregation and well-trained in both abuse and church polity processes.

The duties of the Crisis Response Team shall include (but are not limited to):

- Meeting with or being in contact with the accused individual at least biweekly during the initial investigation.
- Coordinating (alongside the Session) ongoing shepherding care for any and all victims and their families.
- Communicating regular updates to the Session (through the Moderator).
- Recording, when an accusation is found to be unwarranted, why that decision was made, and explaining the decision to the accuser.
- Presenting, when necessary, a written complaint to both the accuser and the accused
 - Detailed responses from the accused should be recorded, using direct quotes where possible.
- Conducting an investigation according to BCO 31-2, when appropriate
 - *"As part of Session's exercising care they must demand satisfactory explanations concerning reports affecting Christian character. If an investigation results in a strong presumption of guilt, the court shall institute process."*
- Resourcing both accused and accusers with understanding of the PCA discipline process as outlined in the BCO.

Additional Considerations:

Given the PCA's position on only ordaining men, specific and special care must be taken when allegations of abuse come from women. Every woman should receive representation from other women (considered safe) throughout the process. Similarly, in a situation before the Session involving a female accuser, the Session may consider reducing the number of men present and ensuring advocates for the accuser.

After a prompt preliminary investigation by City Church's in-house Crisis Response Team, the Session should decide as to whether, and how, to engage outside, third-party assistance. (It is recommended that third-party investigators be used in situations of abuse because they bring an expertise and objectivity not provided through investigation by the church. However, the Session must assess the financial costs associated with a third-party investigation and to what extent the findings of the investigation will carry authority within the formal discipline processes of the church.)

If the accused in any allegation is a church leader (staff, elder, pastor), that leader may be removed from his/her role immediately (with pay if applicable), pending the initial investigation.

If the accused in any allegation is a church pastor, a member of the Crisis Response Team should contact the James River Presbytery (through the Stated Clerk) as soon as possible.

During the Fall of 2023 City Church constituted a Shepherding Committee composed of experienced, empathetic, and approachable trauma-informed men and women who are prepared to serve as Abuse Response Team members. These individuals have been announced to the congregation and will remain visible during their 2-year term of service. Service on the Shepherding Committee will be re-affirmed every two years and this Response to Abuse Policy will be reviewed every two years.