

NOVEMBER 2024

# Responding with Integrity: Navigating Sexual Harassment Reports in Churches

THERESA SIDEBOOTHAM & BEA ROSENHAUCH

# Abide in Christ.

John 15: 1-7

# WHY THE CHURCH?

## HIGHLY TRUSTING

Church is where people trust that they will be cared for in times of vulnerability and need

## LEADERS ARE ELEVATED

Pastors, worship leaders, youth ministers, lay leaders are often seen as infallible, beyond temptation, and especially not predatory

## PRIVACY, ACCESS, CONTROL

Predators look for environments where they can meet with vulnerable people alone, and control them with words of power

# KEEP WATCH

## “TWO UP, THREE DOWN”

Train everyone to observe behaviors of two leadership levels above them, and three below. Everyone is accountable.

## MANAGER AWARENESS

Walk around, ask about family, set a cultural example, coach against winking, flirting, overly affectionate behavior.

## JOKING AROUND

Unclean jokes are the first sign of inappropriate thinking. “Where there’s smoke, there’s fire.” Be very aware.

# HANDLE SENSITIVE SITUATIONS

## 'CRUSHES'

Train leaders on handling situations where a church member, young or old, seems attracted.

Report to leader, team up and guard situations.

# OFFICE / TRAVEL POLICIES

## OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

- Calendars visible to team members
- Even married couples prudent with affection

## TRAVEL GUIDELINES

- Don't travel 1:1 with opposite gender, even to fast food
- No alcohol at any event or after-hours meeting
- One person per bed
- Spouses can pay to go along
- Meet in lobby, not in rooms
- Billy Graham's policies

# HR LISTENING POST

## **CARING, CALM LISTENER**

- Prove to be caring and take issues seriously

## **KNOWN TO BE CONFIDENTIAL**

- Never gossip; coach the person to speak up; HR has access to top leaders

## **OFFICE IN A PRIVATE AREA**

- Employees can stop by without the world knowing; near exit if crying

## **ABLE TO INVESTIGATE**

- Ability and empowerment to look into matters as a team, report to leadership

## **WILLING TO CONFRONT**

- Bring the matter to light in appropriate HR manner

# HEARING REPORTS

## WATCH FOR

- Anxiety
- Exhaustion
- Sadness or depression
- Change of countenance
- Loss of appetite or sleep
- Nervous, silenced easily
- Asks to be moved, resigns

## REACT WITH EMPATHY

- Acknowledge the concerns
- Take it seriously
- Care for the flock
- Don't assume good intentions of accused

# HOW TO ADDRESS QUICKLY

## ENSURE SAFETY

- Remove the victim from the situation
- Suspend the alleged offender immediately
- Prevent retaliation

## RESPOND IMMEDIATELY

- Listen with empathy and patience
- Report wrongdoing
- Consult HR immediately to begin investigation

# HOW TO ADDRESS

## SOURCE INVESTIGATORS

- If escalated, bring in a third-party investigator
- Must be well-trained and experienced
- Ensure the same gender as interviewee is present
- Ask for witness names, interview everyone
- Ensure proper documentation

## RESTORE A HEALTHY WORKPLACE

- Communicate within legal and respectful boundaries.
- Support the alleged victim(s) and witness(es)

# UNDERSTANDING ALLEGATIONS

## FALSE ALLEGATIONS?

The large majority of reporters tell the truth

## DELAYED REPORTING

May be caused by embarrassment, trauma, memory blocks, lack of awareness or distrust

## STAY CALM

Don't let your reaction startle the reporter

## KNOW GROOMING BEHAVIORS

Read about common predatory behaviors that get others comfortable and test boundaries

# GUIDANCE ON FINAL STEPS

## AFTER INVESTIGATION

- Consult legal counsel in every step
- Present allegations and hear the accused's story
- Align reports for corroboration
- Offer professional counseling for victims & witnesses

## TERMINATION

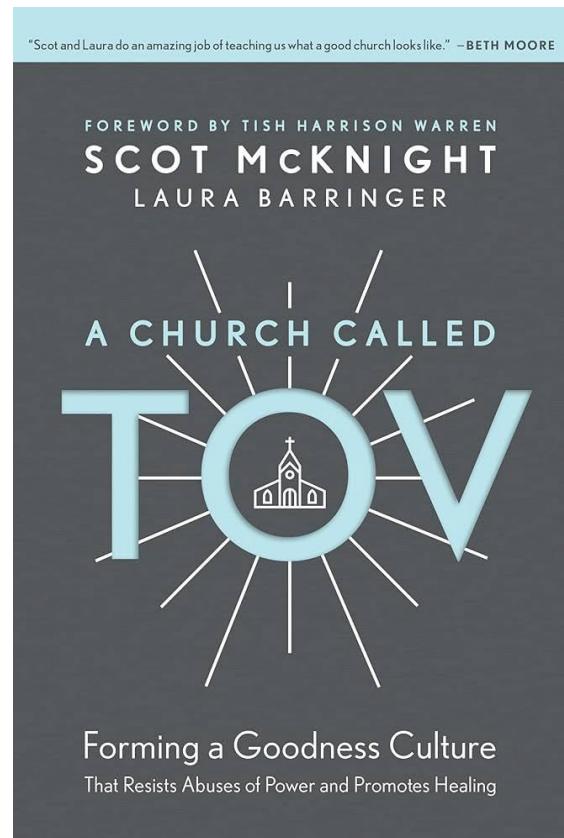
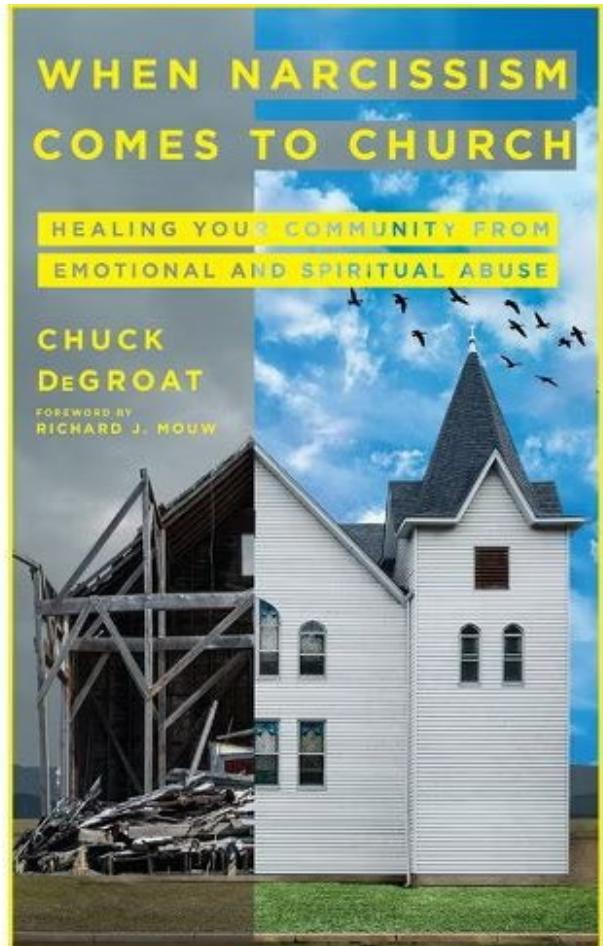
- Terminate for confirmed pattern of sexual harassment
- Don't provide severance
- Seek legal counsel about how to respond references

# HOW TO BE HONEST PUBLICLY

1. Speak God's Word - that is, "use the words God would use to describe sin."
2. Be specific and succinct, honest and direct.
3. Take unconditional and comprehensive responsibility.
4. Express genuine remorse, and humbly ask forgiveness.
5. Submit to change.
6. Make appropriate restitution.
7. Seek full reconciliation - with an important caveat - "The goal of reconciliation is to restore the sinner to fellowship, not the leader to power."

-Jim Van Yperen, Metanoia Ministries

# RESOURCES



[Telios Law Courses](#)



Ministry HR Group  
Christ in the Workplace

Seek God's guidance  
and protection.