



Final Report

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I. Introduction

Leadership at Christ the Rock Church (CTR) engaged Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) in response to allegations made on a public website on May 29, 2022, Shouts of Joy Ministries, entitled “My Personal Abuse Story In The Church,” specifically: allegations of sexual misconduct against former staff member Dave VandeHey and allegations of behavioral misconduct, including emotional abuse, by Bill Lenz, founder and former staff member at Christ the Rock Church.

This Executive Summary presents the scope and methodology of the GRACE process (Part II) and the investigative team’s findings, analysis, and proposed recommendations. These include GRACE’s assessments regarding sexual misconduct allegations against Dave VandeHey (Part III), behavioral misconduct and emotional abuse allegations against Bill Lenz (Part IV), and CTR’s response, protocols, and culture (Part V).

Christ the Rock Church and its leadership should be commended for initiating an independent third-party investigation into the difficult issues covered in this report. “Independent investigations are the primary way of legitimately addressing allegations of past abuse, while also investigating and assessing the organization’s knowledge of the abuse and if and how it responded to it.”¹ Current CTR leaders wisely noted that “We need to bring somebody in to help us do this because we are biased... We need somebody who’s got ears different than us to help us walk through this.”² The significance and courage of CTR leadership’s decision—and its implications for the positive trajectory of CTR culture—were noted by many witnesses throughout the investigation, including several individuals who have had difficult intersections with CTR in the past.³

Throughout the investigation, the pain and conflict experienced by current and former members of the CTR leadership teams and the surrounding community were evident and profound. The GRACE investigative team is mindful that the sensitive issues discussed in this report are likely difficult for many to read and process. This dynamic makes the decision by CTR leadership to grapple with these important issues all the more significant and sacrificial. We pray that though this may be a difficult season, CTR will ultimately find healing through its commitment to truth and transparency.

We also pray that in the midst of the pain in this report, readers will recognize the same hope that GRACE encountered through many witnesses, including current CTR leaders: the hope of the Cross. The hope of a Savior who expended Himself to the point of death to demonstrate love for hurt souls. God did His most powerful work when Jesus was at His most vulnerable and transparent. We now pray for God’s presence, comfort, and guidance as Christ the Rock follows the example of Jesus.

¹ “Independent Investigations,” GRACE, <https://www.netgrace.org/independent-investigations>.

² Transcript.

³ E.g., “I’m so glad, again, that they called you guys because no matter what happens now, they’ve done the right first step.” Transcript. “The fact that they reached out to [GRACE] was a good sign to me... that’s a hopeful sign to me.” Transcript. “Maybe this, that they called GRACE is an indication that [leadership] is on track.” Transcript.

II. Methodology

GRACE's assessment was limited to the scope defined in the Engagement Agreement and was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews⁴ and qualitative content analysis of collected relevant documents. The following section provides a summary of the scope and methodology.

A. Scope

Per the Engagement Agreement with Christ the Rock, "GRACE shall investigate allegations stemming from a May 29, 2022 posting on a public website, Shouts of Joy Ministries, entitled My Personal Abuse Story In The Church, specifically:

- allegations of sexual misconduct against Dave VandeHey.
- allegations of behavioral misconduct, including emotional abuse, by Bill Lenz, and Christ the Rock.

GRACE shall also investigate whether Christ The Rock had any knowledge of the allegations, and if so, how the organizational culture of Christ The Rock impacted 1) the way Christ The Rock responded to the allegations and 2) how Christ The Rock responded after being informed of such allegations. This includes assessing: What information Christ The Rock received, what Christ The Rock did and should have done with said information, including its response to the allegations, how the Church's response compares to best practices, Scriptural values, and SAMHSA's Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice. As part of this agreement, GRACE may assess the existing safety protocols related to behavioral misconduct and reporting, the administrative environment and community culture of Christ The Rock and how such may impact matters relating to behavioral misconduct within the organization."

The investigation was limited to the scope of the Engagement Agreement. It does not seek to confirm or refute any individual's spiritual gifts or engage in a particular position or role in the difficult conflicts external to the scope of the investigation or otherwise, and should not be interpreted in this manner.

B. Witness Interviews, Documentation, and Investigation Limitations

GRACE reviewed relevant church policies, elder meeting minutes, emails, social media communications, and text messages. Thirty-one individuals agreed to speak with GRACE as part of the assessment, including Dave VandeHey. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The allegations relate in part to events occurring in the early 1980s, and multiple pertinent witnesses are deceased, including Bill Lenz. Additionally, several individuals with significant leadership roles or historical connections to CTR and/or relevant incidents either declined to speak with GRACE, were unresponsive to interview requests, or could not be located.

⁴ Questions included a mix of open-ended, direct, and hypothetical prompts towards both factual and policy-oriented subject matter.

III. Assessment of Sexual Misconduct Allegations Against Dave VandeHey

A. Summary of Allegations

The May 29, 2022 posting written by Joie Pirkey⁵ on a public website, Shouts of Joy Ministries, entitled “My Personal Abuse Story In The Church,” includes allegations of sexual misconduct by Dave VandeHey. In the Engagement Agreement sexual misconduct is defined as “any verbal, nonverbal and/or physical acts of an immoral, indecent, improper, or sexual nature that are 1) unwelcome or 2) performed without consent or 3) committed by one in a position of authority upon a subordinate or 4) committed by an adult upon someone under the age of 18 regardless of consent.”⁶

The nature of the allegations is that in 1981 and 1982 when Joie Pirkey was beginning her walk with Jesus and a newcomer to the street ministry that would birth Christ the Rock, Dave VandeHey showed interest in her, later articulating a romantic interest that progressed to physical interactions including kissing and more than one incident of sexual contact to the alleged victim’s breasts.⁷

“Just after turning 18, Pastor Dave professed love for me. I was shocked to the point of becoming physically ill. I was feeling very afraid but beyond that, confused. Panicked confusion. Trying to get my bearings as my world crashed. I knew that I had to get out but I had no idea how and to be honest I didn’t want to. I was in such turmoil that it felt like torture... He was twisting things about our relationship, saying that it was God who brought us together. He showed me scriptures to explain how this could be and what it meant. He had been one of the two people that had been discipling me for the previous year. I had grown to trust him implicitly and to believe what he was teaching me.”

“Shortly after those days, the relationship became physical. We went on as usual at church events that we were expected at but spent hours, upon hours, together alone. Often coming in around 4:00a.m. People in church knew... During this time, on a couple of occasions, he had offered to get a hotel room. He had asked me to have sex with him directly. He pushed me to leave the state with him. But I kept finding ways to get out of it because I knew that what we were doing physically was wrong.”⁸

⁵ GRACE does not typically include the names of alleged victims in its reports. However, given the public nature of the allegations and other contextual considerations including an alleged victim’s consent, Joie Pirkey’s name is included in this report.

⁶ The Engagement Agreement further states “Examples include, but are not limited to, derogatory or indecent statements about a person’s body; slurs, epithets, anecdotes, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual or intimate nature; verbal advances, propositions, or invitations of a sexual or intimate nature; suggestive or obscene gestures or communications; unwanted attention such as leering or staring; ‘groping’ or any unwanted touches of a sexual or intimate nature, adult sexual assault, and sexual abuse of a minor. ‘Without consent’ means that consent is not freely given or obtained, and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, manipulation, coercion, threat, deception, aggressive come-on, disregard for nonverbal cues of discomfort, or misuse of authority or power.”

⁷ Transcript.

⁸ Shouts of Joy Ministries, “My Personal Abuse Story in the Church,” May 29, 2022, <https://shoutsofjoyministries.com/stand-in-the-truth/> (last accessed January 31, 2023).

The posting on Shouts of Joy Ministries includes multiple statements that GRACE has determined to be incorrect, often in relation to timing. For example, the post indicates “Just after turning 18, Pastor Dave professed love for me.” Dave VandeHey was not hired at Christ the Rock as a pastor until years later, on September 28, 1990.⁹ Other witnesses identify or allege inconsistencies in references to CTR campuses in the alleged timeframes, whether CTR had a formal existence at the time, and other details.

B. Dave VandeHey possessed significant influence including relational and spiritual authority, a fact both he and Joie Pirkey recognized.

Several witnesses described Dave VandeHey as a trusted, empathetic, and authentic leader.¹⁰ Mr. VandeHey befriended many and was loved at Christ the Rock. This theme was reflected throughout the investigative process and further demonstrated by a July 2021 Christ the Rock Facebook post and related comments.¹¹ Witnesses also noted Mr. VandeHey’s significant spiritual gifts.¹² This dynamic of fondness towards Dave VandeHey emerged in the early years before Christ the Rock’s formal existence when Bill Lenz led a small group street ministry and Dave VandeHey assisted. While his role in the early 1980s was at times minimized, multiple relevant witnesses and CTR leaders did not share the belief that Dave VandeHey’s role was insignificant at this time.¹³ It should also be noted that a leader’s power is derived from the role that he or she assumes in the institution, formal or informal. While Dave did not have a formal role at Christ the Rock until 1990, it is clear that he was viewed as a spiritual “big brother” before then, as he indicated to the GRACE investigative team:

“I think she [Joie Pirkey] viewed me as one who cared for her. I think she viewed me as a big brother kind of person. I think she viewed me as a spiritual type of mentor... I think she saw me as someone higher in my spiritual faith than I did, if that makes sense.”

“Most of our conversations, I tried to keep her on spirituality. ... what we talked about was about Christ or doctrine or church issues, or what the church could be.”

⁹ The hiring date was confirmed in email correspondence from CTR.

¹⁰ E.g. current and former CTR leaders’ descriptions of Dave included “Pastor, father of many, grandfather, humble, servant.” Transcript. “Best friend.” Transcript. “I don’t know anywhere with him that I would’ve had a question like he had wrong motives or a heart that didn’t genuinely care for other and for kids and for seeing them know Jesus.” Transcript. “He was caring, He was a shepherd, a pastor and he loved them where they were at. He will listen, he will care. He tried to encourage them in a way that was a beneficial for whatever they would be going through and usually to get back to the word of God.” Transcript.

¹¹ “Tonight, CTR’s staff and the Vande Hey family surprised Pastor Dave Vande Hey with a celebration before he retires next week! ...several staff members shared heartfelt tributes, and everyone enjoyed a meal together. We are so very grateful for more than 30 years of witnessing Pastor Dave’s great love for Jesus and for people. Godspeed to you, Pastor Dave!” Facebook, Christ the Rock Menasha WI.

¹² “[Interviewer:] ...you viewed Dave as having a gift of discipleship? [Witness:] Oh yeah. And encouragement. Dave is a tremendous encourager... and positivity.” Transcript.

¹³ Witnesses who interacted with Mr. Vandehey or Ms. Pirkey during the early 1980s described their belief of Dave VandeHey as follows: “Well it was my understanding that he was a youth leader in the youth ministry at that time.” Transcript. “We started to go to this youth group that Dave VandeHey was leading.” Transcript. “Well Dave was Joie’s youth group pastor...” Transcript. “There were other staff that would help support that, but he would be a point person for the youth ministry in those early years. And some of that was involving taking kids home.” Transcript.

Interviewer: “You said you talked to her about when it comes to what marriage should look like... what did you talk to her about when it comes to marriage?”

VandeHey: “A husband and a wife being one together, equally yoked, having a vision together. Being a husband and a wife, they're your first love. And that talked about raising family together and things of that nature.”

“It [relevant conversation] was about Jesus and reaching people for him and those kind of things.”¹⁴

Although several witnesses portrayed Dave VandeHey and Joie Pirkey as being in similar stages of spiritual growth in the early 1980s—and indeed, both experienced significant and ongoing mentorship by the same leader—it is undisputed that there is a significant age gap between Dave VandeHey and Joie Pirkey. As one witness noted, “Joie was 17 [in high school] and turned 18 in [birth month]. Dave was in his late twenties, married and had 2-3 kids by then.”¹⁵ Dave indicated that he “was probably about 27, 28” at the time of the allegations.¹⁶ The attempted leveling of their social status and power is naive at best, and particularly problematic when engaged in by CTR leadership.

Dave VandeHey’s position of influence was recognized by multiple witnesses, including Joie Pirkey. He was looked up to as a leader and brought power to relevant conversations. Holding authority like this demands a constant examination of how that power is being used. Dave VandeHey was able to command influence over others in Joie’s position because it was functionally expected, whether based on the role individuals assumed he was assigned, or the role he consciously filled.

C. Dave VandeHey engaged in actions constituting patterns of grooming behavior.

GRACE’s conclusion regarding Mr. VandeHey’s behavior is informed by the broader facts and circumstances detailed in Part D, *infra*. Literature on clergy sexual misconduct defines “grooming” as behavior by spiritual leadership seeking to develop a close relationship with targeted individuals, including flattering language, affection, sharing private information, religious language, and erosion of boundaries.¹⁷ Though not typically utilizing academic terminology, multiple witnesses described communication and interaction by Dave VandeHey that appeared to constitute grooming behavior towards Joie Pirkey in the early 1980s. These descriptions included at least one express characterization of the behavior as grooming:

“...we could tell that [Joie Pirkey] liked him. At first, I think it was innocent. We're pretty naive and sheltered here. **We don't think anybody's going to manipulate us or groom us.**

¹⁴ Transcript.

¹⁵ Transcript. Mr. VandeHey was aware of Joie’s age. “Interviewer: ...[when you met Joie], at this time. How old is Joie? Dave VandeHey: I believe she was a senior in high school. Interviewer: Okay. So probably 17 or thereabout? Dave VandeHey: Probably.” Transcript.

¹⁶ Transcript.

¹⁷ See Garland, Diana & Argueta, Christen. (2010). How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts. *Social Work & Christianity*. 37.

We go in thinking you love everybody unless they give you a reason not to. And I think she trusted him as her youth pastor. And he would say things to her that are like, oh, and then she'd be like, well, he didn't really mean that or little innuendos... she felt uncomfortable, but she liked it being [that she was] 17 and liked the attention. And she did talk to him many times. We're going too far here, we're going too far here. ...say, no, it's okay, and she fell in love with him... and she knew what was wrong. Yet her heart was falling in love with him."¹⁸

*"He wrote her letters... I remember her getting letters from him and phone calls all the time. He pursued her that way a lot."*¹⁹

*"I'm wondering if it's because Joie had a more confident personality and Dave came across as gentle & soft spoken? But, they weren't there to witness the long hours he spent talking to Joie. Even though I was with them, it was still so inappropriate to hang around for an hour or two after the youth group was over with young girls. I had turned 18 in [month], Joie was 17 and turned 18 in May of 1982. Dave was in his late 20's, married and had 2-3 kids by then."*²⁰

Perpetrators of sexual misconduct often "isolate the victim to increase dependence on them, create a sense of shared responsibility... and further reduce the likelihood of reporting."²¹ Isolation was identified by the disclosing woman and multiple eyewitnesses, often but not always in a vehicle. Statements regarding physical contact were made contemporaneously by Ms. Pirkey to multiple individuals.²²

*"When Joie and I were young and I believe in high school and involved in ministry with Dave, [he] paid a lot of attention to her and they spent a lot of time together...He spent a lot of alone time with her."*²³

*"I remember that they went on walks a lot outside. That I know. Alone."*²⁴

¹⁸ Transcript.

¹⁹ Transcript. Mr. VandeHey was evasive on the topic of letters in his GRACE interview.

Interviewer: "Did you ever write her letters or anything like that?"

Dave VandeHey: "No. I could have wrote her a note, but I don't remember writing. I wrote her that letter to terminate that relationship, but I can't remember writing any other letter or note. I could have sent her a Christmas card, but I don't remember doing that."

Interviewer: "I want to go back and just be clear, if you don't remember doing it, could you have done it and just not remember doing it?"

Dave VandeHey: "Maybe. Yeah, I could have."

Mr. VandeHey corroborated the disclosing woman's allegations of sending her songs: "I could have. I could have, an artist, a song I liked." Transcript.

²⁰ Correspondence regarding editing of Transcript.

²¹ Peters R.J. (2020) Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse. In: Geffner R., Vieth V., Vaughan-Eden V., Rosenbaum A., Hamberger L., White J. (eds) Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan. Springer, Cham.

²² Transcript. "One of the things I did remember was Joie calling one evening. It was actually later in the night. She needed a ride home from work...Well I wasn't happy...Oh my gosh are you kidding me? And [Dave] said 'Well she doesn't have another ride...'" Transcript.

²³ Transcript.

²⁴ Transcript.

“When they first initially met, maybe she was with him maybe once a week or something like that... It came to be instead of once a week now, it was getting to be every other night or every other day.”²⁵

“He spent a lot of alone time with her... And he kissed her.”²⁶

“So we were telling her what happened and that Joie and Dave had spent a lot of time together and they were getting closer and then they were starting to just say they loved each other and now it's becoming physical, and now they're kissing.”²⁷

“...there had been a relationship with Dave in the past and the snow makes her think of that because that is when [he] kissed her when she was younger. ...That's the first time.”²⁸

An early stage of grooming involves victim selection, which can be based on a number of victim or perpetrator characteristics including physical preferences or ease of access to an intended victim. Dave VandeHey's description of his discussions with Joie Pirkey reflects his ability to gain unique and private access to her through rituals of discipleship and by discussing what he characterized as “wounds” from her father:

“I just remember she had some ill feelings with her dad. That's initially how we started to get our conversations.”

“There were some wounds there by her dad and I'm not sure exactly what the details were but she didn't present them in a very respectable way... ..He was a guy that was rough around the edges anyway. And so he wouldn't talk with her, from her point of view he wouldn't talk respectfully about her.”²⁹

Grooming behavior in the category of boundary erosion may include the use of sexualized language or acclimation of the targeted individual to physical contact. The Shouts of Joy Ministries blog post alleges that Mr. VandeHey discussed “things about his past that were sexually deviant” with Ms. Pirkey. When asked to respond to this allegation, Mr. VandeHey recalled an incident where “as a youth pastor” he was “giving a sex talk” and referred to “when I was in high school, a group of us guys mooned somebody... Even that, as fun as people think it is, it's still sexual in nature and it ought not be.”

While Mr. VandeHey did not concur with Joie's allegation, even in isolation his statement to a group of minors is problematic. Furthermore, a witness with proximity to relevant parties in the early 1980s corroborates a discussion between Mr. VandeHey and Joie Pirkey, consistent

²⁵ Transcript.

²⁶ Transcript.

²⁷ Transcript.

²⁸ Transcript.

²⁹ Transcript.

with her allegation, involving his sexual “struggles” “that you wouldn’t tell probably anyone except... wife and pastor and counselor maybe.”³⁰

Exposure to materials normalizing romantic or sexual contact between adults and minors is another documented grooming behavior in academic literature.³¹ Ms. Pirkey also alleged that she read a book with Mr. Vandehey that involved an “inappropriate relationship” between a minor and an older man, and provided some minor details to GRACE, but could not recall the name of the book. She alleged that they would read the book chapter by chapter and discuss the book and its emphasis on “forbidden love.” GRACE identified a book in print during the allegation timeframe that matched Ms. Pirkey’s descriptions, including the primary character names and the central “relationship” between an adolescent and an older man. Mr. Vandehey denies this allegation and indicates that it is “absolutely not true. I never spent time reading that type of material nor any other books with her. She may have read it, but not with me. I did not engage in nor discuss any inappropriate material with her.”³²

D. Assessment of Credibility for Dave VandeHey

Prior to and separate from the GRACE investigation, three individuals at CTR interviewed Dave VandeHey regarding the allegations of sexual misconduct. Dave VandeHey indicated that he was surprised and shocked when CTR initiated an investigation of the allegations through a third party.³³ GRACE reviewed CTR’s summary of the discussion and interviewed each of the three individuals as well as Dave VandeHey.

Significant discrepancies are present between the GRACE and CTR interviews, in terms of Mr. VandeHey’s responses to the questioning, the individuals conducting the interview, and the assessment of Mr. VandeHey’s credibility. To their credit, CTR leadership, including all three of the individuals who interviewed Mr. VandeHey, acknowledged their bias and the importance of obtaining an independent third-party investigation.³⁴ The CTR team concluded that Mr. VandeHey “was open, honest, and clearly bothered by the accusations. There was no blaming, deflecting when asked questions.”³⁵ Mr. VandeHey’s interview with GRACE had significantly different dynamics and outcomes, as demonstrated below.

³⁰ Transcript.

³¹ Peters R.J. (2020) Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse. In: Geffner R., Vieth V., Vaughan-Eden V., Rosenbaum A., Hamberger L., White J. (eds) Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan. Springer, Cham.

³² Email correspondence from Dave Vandehey to the GRACE investigative team, January 30, 2023.

³³ “Well, part of me. My insecurity. My insecurity said, ‘What? You don’t believe me? You don’t believe what I’m telling you?’ And so that was the part of... I don’t know if shock’s the right word, but that’s the part that I thought, ‘Man, come on. You got to believe me.’ And yet there’s some of me that just entertained that thought of maybe they don’t.”

³⁴ However, some description emerged of push-back to questions regarding their close relationship with Mr. VandeHey; one individual stated “Now just because I’m his friend... doesn’t mean I can’t ask [] a difficult question.” Transcript. Some statements reflected an interest in establishing a formal process for future allegations relating to leadership. “Yeah, I think it might be more objective to have people who don’t know either party involved in the conversations.” Transcript.

³⁵ Summary of Interview, Dave VandeHey, CTR.

1. Dave VandeHey communicated with Joie Pirkey more extensively than he admitted to both GRACE and Christ the Rock.

Mr. VandeHey's discussion with GRACE was frequently characterized by inconsistency and an unwillingness to provide accurate information until pressed and prompted by external sources of evidence. For example, early in the interview, Mr. VandeHey indicated that he "was not involved with the youth department at all" from 1981 to 1990. Later he correctly stated that he met Joie "at that youth group back in 1981 or '82. That's where I first came in contact with her." Initially, Mr. VandeHey denied engaging in any discipleship with youth,³⁶ but later admitted to significant spiritual mentorship of Joie including discipleship on topics relating to theology, evangelism, and marriage, as well as a youth group discussion about sex and "mooning."³⁷

Mr. VandeHey stated that he may have expressed non-romantic love for Joie.³⁸ In both the CTR and GRACE interviews, he acknowledged a "relationship" with Ms. Pirkey. He described it as platonic or something that only existed in her mind,³⁹ but conceded some statements that weaken the credibility of these characterizations.⁴⁰ Furthermore, multiple witnesses corroborate Ms. Pirkey's contemporaneous statements to them, that Dave VandeHey professed a romantic interest to Joie in the 1980s:

*"But he was saying he loved her and he shouldn't be there telling her he loved her; [he] should be home with his wife."*⁴¹

*"He told her that they were meant to be but it wasn't the right time in his life or whatever."*⁴²

*"[Dave] said that [Joie] was like, I don't know if this is exact words, but his soulmate or his person."*⁴³

"I saw the way he looked at her. I saw the way he was with her. It made me uncomfortable. I knew it was wrong that they were spending so much time together. And

³⁶ Interviewer: "And in that time they, did you engage in any sort of discipleship or anything else with adults or minors?" VandeHey: "No."

³⁷ See Part III.B, *supra*.

³⁸ "Did I tell people that I loved them? I did, but it wasn't an emotional or a romantic type of love. So that surprised me when I read that, because I thought, I never told you that I loved you like romantically. I might have said, 'Hey, you're loved, love who you are.'"

³⁹ "And I was like, 'I don't need to be talking to you about this. This is finished. We're done.' And not that... Done in that relationship that she was pursuing... The relationship that she felt that she had with me... And I probably did it in a mean sort of way, but I didn't know how to do it. I just said, 'This is it. This isn't right. This is done. It's got to stop.'" "I listened to what Bill had to say, and I terminated that relationship with Joie." "I wrote her that letter to terminate that relationship, but I can't remember writing any other letter or note."

⁴⁰ See Part III.D.3., *infra*.

⁴¹ Transcript.

⁴² Transcript.

⁴³ Transcript. At times these professions of love were alleged to be justified through the use of Biblical themes. "He started to tell me things like, What God has joined together let no man put asunder." [G]od has brought us together. God has a person for you to marry." Transcript. "I know Dave always told her things like, nobody understands me like you. I do know he said to her that with [another woman] ...he felt like things just kind of happened and he wasn't really happy. He felt trapped, like Joey understood him but [another woman] didn't." Transcript.

she would say, no, that's not it. And whatever. But I could tell by the way he was with her, just the way he looked at her and spoke to her."⁴⁴

"He had a candle in the window and some kind of insinuation that meant he was still thinking about her... I know he left it in there a long time."⁴⁵

"Somewhere in the fall, winter of 82, [Joie] started telling me that Dave was just saying he had feelings for her and she pretty much had those feelings but was overwhelmed and scared. It's like she knew it wasn't right, but yet she couldn't seem to help herself kind of thing. And I was just listening and not sure what to do with the information... I felt guilty because I was her ...friend and she was confiding in me, but it was torturing me because I just felt like this is just really concerning."⁴⁶

2. Dave VandeHey was evasive and inconsistent when questioned about providing transportation to Joie Pirkey and related events.

When offered open-ended opportunities to provide correct information, Mr. VandeHey instead gave narratives that contradicted the weight of other evidence. For example, he was asked a series of questions culminating in "I just want to be clear. Did Joie ever ask you to pick her up?" Mr. VandeHey replied "No. Not from work." This is contradicted by a credible account establishing that Ms. Pirkey called the VandeHey residence late at night requesting a ride from her work. The witnesses recall that a family member was not pleased, but Mr. VandeHey insisted that he pick up Ms. Pirkey because she needed a ride.⁴⁷

Similarly, in a pre-GRACE investigation interview with Christ the Rock, Dave VandeHey communicated that he gave Joie Pirkey rides "occasionally but not regularly." When interviewed by GRACE and questioned regarding whether he dropped Joie off at her house, Mr. VandeHey initially said "No." After being told that others indicated he had, he stated that he was "surprised. I don't... I can't remember dropping her off by her house." He gave several other responses denying that he dropped her off or that he could recall doing so.⁴⁸ Ultimately, Dave indicated that he may have given Joie a ride home from church, but did not concede any memory of approaching the driveway. **However, several witnesses place Mr. VandeHey in the driveway alone with Ms. Pirkey, late at night, on numerous occasions:**

"I was not attending the youth group at that time. No, I wasn't there. So I don't know what took place at the youth group or wherever they went. I don't know any of that. I just know that I saw them almost on a nightly basis in [the] driveway, late at night. Well late at night, somewhere around 11:00."⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Transcript.

⁴⁵ Transcript.

⁴⁶ Transcript.

⁴⁷ "One of the things I did remember was Joie calling one evening. It was actually later in night. She needed a ride home from work...Well I wasn't happy...Oh my gosh are you kidding me? And he said well she doesn't have another ride..." Transcript.

⁴⁸ E.g. "I don't remember." "I don't ever remember on the street bringing her to her driveway or anything like that." "That's what I'm saying I didn't. The best I know I didn't."

⁴⁹ Transcript.

“It started to get uncomfortable. They would be out in [the] driveway pretty late at night. I mean, late, I thought, for being a married man.”⁵⁰

“The other kids would talk about it. Joie would say, [redacted] is mad because I was in the driveway again, Dave wouldn't leave or we were talking too long or whatever. I never thought they were doing anything inappropriate when they were together, but I could tell she was falling for him. And so it was getting in that iffy, okay, you got to stop spending time with him if you're getting feelings for him.”⁵¹

“So a lot of times I would be there waiting for her and she'd be with Dave and they'd come home one o'clock or two o'clock in the morning.”⁵²

“They did go [do] a lot of street evangelism and they did a lot of stuff as a youth group. So it wasn't unusual that they would be together a lot, but not sitting in the driveway after... That's where they screwed up.”⁵³

“The family talked about [Joie and Dave parking in the driveway] all the time. We were all concerned about it at the time that it was inappropriate behavior.”⁵⁴

“Even being in a car late at night like that with a married man is not appropriate... I knew that, and so I would ask her about it. She would just say, ‘Nothing. We're just talking about God.’ But then it got to be where I know they kissed. I know they were doing that in the car and things like that.”⁵⁵

“I don't know how far they went... but I know that they kissed passionately.”⁵⁶

“It could have been 82, December 82 or January of 83, it was somewhere around there where she told me that he kissed her, that they were kissing. She was just telling me about they were just kind of flirting or whatever and something about a pack of candy. I don't know, that's all I remember. Then he just leaned in and started kissing her and she kissed him back, then she was freaking out about it.”⁵⁷

Similarly, Mr. VandeHey was provided an opportunity to provide an accurate narrative of his interactions with Ms. Pirkey's father: “Do you recall what you and he talked about in those few interactions?” He replied, “Oh, just about the retreat we made and things that we did during that time, basketball that we played and that sort of thing.” Mr. VandeHey was also asked to describe his interactions with Ms. Pirkey's parents, and stated “Pleasant. Yeah, they were good.” Mr. Vandehey failed to describe an incident where he was threatened by Ms. Pirkey's father:

⁵⁰ Transcript.

⁵¹ Transcript.

⁵² Transcript.

⁵³ Transcript.

⁵⁴ Transcript.

⁵⁵ Transcript.

⁵⁶ Transcript.

⁵⁷ Transcript.

“I remember everybody was talking about how upset [Joie’s father] was because [he] isn’t one to get upset or to confront somebody. That’s not [him]. So I remember us all thinking, oh my God, [he] said something? They sat out in the driveway a lot, I guess, and [he] would see that and what’s my 17 year old daughter doing with this guy every night sitting in the driveway? So he went out and confronted him. And I do remember Joie saying, mom and dad are getting on my case about this too.”⁵⁸

“I remember different days where [Joie’s father] would ask [her mother], ‘What are they talking about out there? What are they doing out there?’ I remember that. I remember saying to [him], ‘It’s just about church. It’s all okay,’ or whatever. But I do remember him being concerned and [Joie’s mother] too was like, ‘It’s about church. ...they’re trying to get their youth group going and it’s okay.’ ...As this went on, this was making [him] more and more uncomfortable. I remember he was furious. He went out the front door. He told Dave, something like, ‘You belong back home with your wife and I don’t want to see you here again like that. I don’t want to see you in this driveway or on my property again.’ ... Joie came in crying and he left.”⁵⁹

Thomas Doyle, a leading scholar on issues of abuse in faith contexts, stated that a perpetrator’s lack of awareness can be “akin to disavowal or denial and is a delusional suspension of reality.”⁶⁰ The evasiveness and substantive inconsistency of Mr. VandeHey’s statements, and their refutation by multiple witnesses, strongly suggest the presence of denial and deception. Even if Mr. Vandehey’s statements were consistent, they are not supported by the weight of the evidence.

3. Dave VandeHey was not transparent regarding his knowledge of Joie’s feelings towards him prior to his conversation with Bill Lenz in the early 1980s.

It should be noted although the phrase “Joie’s feelings” is used in this section to accurately reflect witness statements, the framing of what transpired in this manner is problematic given social and developmental disparities of Mr. VandeHey and Ms. Pirkey, and other contextual factors. A summary of Dave Vandehey’s interview with Christ the Rock reflects that Dave was “caught off guard by the news” that “Joie had romantic (infatuated) feelings toward” him. Consistent with this narrative, Mr. Vandehey repeatedly told GRACE that he learned of “Joie’s feelings” when he was confronted by Bill Lenz and Bill’s family member:

“The first time I heard about allegations between me and her was the time Bill and [a family member] sat down with me and said ‘She’s got feelings for you and you need to cut this off.’ And so I did.”

⁵⁸ Transcript.

⁵⁹ Transcript.

⁶⁰ Thomas Doyle, ARTICLE: CATHOLIC CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE MEETS THE CIVIL LAW, 31 Fordham Urb. L.J. 549, 562.

*“And I went over and they just informed me that Joie had some feelings that she expressed... that were not right about me. And so that time Bill Lenz gave me the whole scenario of the frog and the kettle, and you need to get rid of this right away. And so I said, ‘Yeah, absolutely, I will. **I didn't realize it.**’ And so I wrote her a letter and ended it and said it's not right.”*

*“...that's the thing I was **shocked at. I was not aware of the feelings that she had for me. But after I was informed by Bill Lenz [and a family member] about her feelings towards me, then I ended that.**”*

Mr. Vandehey was not transparent regarding his knowledge of Joie's feelings with either the CTR or GRACE teams. Following probing questions later in the GRACE interview, Mr. VandeHey admitted that prior to his meeting with Bill Lenz, Ms. Pirkey discussed “us being together... she just would say, ‘God told me that we should be together and we should do this together.’” Mr. VandeHey claimed that when Joie told him this, he “was surprised like, ‘You got to be kidding me’”--though he later claims to be surprised by the same information when it was shared by Bill Lenz. Ultimately, Mr. VandeHey admitted that he knew of Joie's “feelings” for him prior to the conversation with Bill Lenz.

When asked to share how he knew of Joie's feelings prior to the conversation with Bill Lenz, he indicated that Ms. Pirkey “started talking about us doing a church together, or me and her being together, moving away, some of that kind of stuff.” Mr. VandeHey stated that his response to her was to say “I wouldn't do that with you, I wouldn't move away with you, I have family here.” The GRACE team pushed him on this response:

Interviewer: *“You said that she said move away with her, was your actual response, ‘No, because I have family here?’ Was that your response?”*

VandeHey: *“Yeah, probably that's what I did say. Yeah, I have family here. Why would I move away somewhere with you?”*

Even assuming that Ms. Pirkey, then a recent high school graduate, articulated an interest in being with Mr. VandeHey and moving away, the above response from a self-described “spiritual type of mentor,” “big brother,” and married father is problematic.

Mr. VandeHey further admitted that he did not tell anyone in church leadership about her feelings prior to meeting with Bill Lenz, “because I wasn't in leadership.” He maintains that this was not a long gap of time.

It should be noted that Ms. Pirkey alleged that Mr. Vandehey, not her, proposed moving away, specifically to Colorado,⁶¹ an allegation bolstered by accounts from other witnesses recalling Ms. Pirkey's statements in the 1980s:

“He did try to keep things going with her. He had suggested to her to move to Colorado and start a life there.”⁶²

⁶¹ Transcript.

⁶² Transcript.

“I think she fell in love with him and he acted as if he was with her. I know at one time he wanted her to move away with him or they had this fantasy about going to Colorado or something. So I don't know if Dave actually fell for her or what he was doing because he had a family.”⁶³

Mr. VandeHey's statements provide additional context for this allegation:

“And that master plan thing, I put in there that someday I'd like to plant a church out in the country with... And kind of described it how serene could be. And I remember her being at that table with me and she said, ‘Oh, I want to do that with you.’ And I said, ‘Oh, great. My first member.’ So she... When we would have our conversations, some of what she would refer back to is, ‘When are we going to plant this church? And when are we going to do this?’ Kind of involving me and her in doing this.”

“I was starting to get some weird, uncomfortable feelings about, because she said that she wanted to move away with me, and plant this church with me and things of that nature... That was right after that master plan thing. And what I said was, ‘Oh, you're my first member,’ and, ‘Great, I'll do that with you. We can...’ So that's kind of the conversation that evolved right after that.”

It bears repeating that as a married man and spiritual mentor, Mr. VandeHey's response to a recent high school graduate's statements expressing romantic interest, even assuming their truth, are problematic, and the description of his “master plan”⁶⁴ casts doubt on his assertion that the Colorado church plant concept originated with Ms. Pirkey.

E. Conclusion

Mr. VandeHey maintains that the allegations are false: “In regards to anything else of importance to include in this report. I want it noted that her initial blog/facebook allegations about me are not true.”⁶⁵ He framed Joie's descriptions as “perverse” and an attack on his character. “I was not attracted to her in any way (spiritually, emotionally, mentally, or physically. Her fabricated narrative about what she said is not true, (i.e. spending long hours with her every night often till 4:00 am; asking to have sex with her; stalking and/or calling her; etc.).”⁶⁶

One common error in investigations of sexual misconduct is an over-emphasis on inconsistencies in the memory, reactions, and demeanor of alleged victims. Often, explanations for these inconsistencies may be found in the dynamics of trauma itself, either from the immediate offense or prior victimization.⁶⁷ Some witnesses in this investigation attributed darker

⁶³ Transcript.

⁶⁴ Current CTR leaders recall training conducted with leadership in this timeframe by an external trainer, on the topic of “Master Planning” including goal setting for “Various categories of life.” Email correspondence.

⁶⁵ Email correspondence from Dave VandeHey to GRACE Investigative Team, January 30, 2023.

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ E.g. “Too often, a lack of understanding about how victims of violence react to trauma leads police officers to wrongly dismiss the accounts of survivors, which is why IACP's trainings also include detailed lessons on how trauma can negatively impact survivors' memory, reactions, and demeanor when recounting how they were abused

motives,⁶⁸ and some reported changes to the Shouts of Joy Ministries blog posting. Ms. Pirkey acknowledged an inconsistency and imprecision regarding some details, noting the lengthy period of time since the immediate allegations.⁶⁹

To borrow from criminal justice system terminology, certain key facts establish the “elements” of a crime and must be established in a court of law in order to secure a criminal conviction. Some facts are not included within the elements of a crime. In many jurisdictions, these include the date and time of the offense or the particular street address where the crime was committed. The prosecution may fail to establish these details, yet still obtain a conviction if the critical facts are established. The elements of the crime are addressed through the substantive allegations themselves, and the evidence, including witness testimony, that either corroborates or refutes these allegations. The blog includes details that GRACE has determined to be incorrect, but would not constitute the “elements” of misconduct. The core of the substantive allegations, however, is a separate consideration.

In a courtroom setting, one route to the admission of evidence is the prior consistent statement hearsay exception. “Statements that are consistent with the witness’s testimony can be offered to rebut attempts to impeach that witness via an express or implied charge against the witness of recent fabrication or improper influence or motive.”⁷⁰ In this case, Ms. Pirkey has made a series of prior, substantively consistent allegations against Mr. VandeHey to numerous witnesses, dating back to 1982. It is noteworthy that multiple witnesses who do not currently have a favorable opinion of Ms. Pirkey nonetheless reiterate and at least partially affirm her prior consistent statements to them decades ago:

“She’s caused a degree of harm in our community... [but] her behavior doesn’t justify someone else getting away with something that was wrong. There was something that occurred. There was some type of relationship that happened between Dave and Joie.”⁷¹

*“I do not know Joie to be someone who lies directly. In other words, she’s not going to say something’s black if it’s white. What I have come to know about Joie is that the truth that is told is always shaded. And so details are left out or things are portrayed through a filter, that she always has an agenda. And sometimes that agenda isn’t a bad agenda, but there’s still an agenda. And so the truth that is told in any scenario is told to fit in advance whatever cause that she’s on at that moment. **So do I think something bad happened between her and Dave? I do.**”⁷²*

or attacked.” Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, “The Importance of Understanding Trauma-Informed Care and Self-Care for Victim Service Providers.” See generally Strange D, Takarangi MK. Memory distortion for traumatic events: the role of mental imagery. *Front Psychiatry*. 2015 Feb 23;6:27. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2015.00027.

⁶⁸ See Part V.

⁶⁹ Transcript at 3.

⁷⁰ Robert J. Peters & Christa Miller, “Getting Forensic Interviews Admitted: 11 Strategies for Child Abuse Prosecutors,” Zero Abuse Project (citing D.C. Code § 14-102; KRE 801A; MD R Rev. Rule 5-802.1(b)); Robert J. Peters, et al., Child Statement and Forensic Interview Admissibility, National District Attorneys Association, National Children’s Alliance, & Zero Abuse Project (2022).

⁷¹ Transcript.

⁷² Transcript.

Ms. Pirkey’s prior consistent statements are also present via pseudonyms in a popular Christian book published several years ago, including a consistent description of how Ms. Pirkey struggled with the spiritual dynamics of her interactions with Mr. Vandehey.

Throughout the investigation, numerous motives were assigned to Joie for making false accusations. In legal parlance, however, her disclosures to several individuals occurred prior to any alleged motivation for fabrication. For example, some argued that Ms. Pirkey made these allegations due to being turned down for a position at the church. Aside from the failure of any witness to provide documentation of this alleged event, this does not explain why Joie Pirkey made substantively identical statements in both 1982 and 2022. Others say the allegations flow from a desire to harm the Lenz family, but according to these witnesses, that desire arose in the early 1990s—rendering this a motivation that 18-year-old Joie Pirkey would not have. Mr. VandeHey attributes the allegations to Joie being inspired by “Willow Creek, and then the Southern Baptist” scandals to achieve celebrity via abuse fabrication. It is simply not reasonable to conclude that in 1982, Ms. Pirkey could have been motivated by events in 2018 and 2021.

Significantly, some former CTR leaders assert that the allegations against Mr. VandeHey were widely known for years.

Interviewer: *“Am I hearing you say it was common knowledge that there was some sort of relationship between Dave and Joie in the 1980s?”*

Witness: *“Yes, clearly. Everybody on staff, everybody on the pastoral staff would’ve known that. No one talked about it, but everybody knew about it.”⁷³*

Interviewer: *“So am I understanding correctly, that you shared about this conversation with Joie [years ago] with [member(s) of current CTR leadership]?”*

Witness: *“Yes.”*

“Culturally we were still in a very much a don’t ask, don’t tell mentality.... So common knowledge was, I think everybody on our staff knew that Dave had that in his past because even though it was in his past it was seemingly dealt with in some way or handled or whatever.”⁷⁴

Witness: *“...[The relationship] was fairly common knowledge.”*

Interviewer: *“...How would you describe that relationship?”*

Witness: *“That they were doing some sort of ministry work together. That Dave was a leader, that Joie was a student leader... Attraction developed. There was some type of mutual attractive relationship, I guess you’d say that probably everybody with a brain would’ve known was going a wrong direction, seeing as though Dave was married... And fast forwarding, it seemed like whatever happened that got out of control must have been dealt with or taken care of or something.”⁷⁵*

⁷³ Transcript.

⁷⁴ Transcript.

⁷⁵ Transcript.

Accordingly, given the significant weight of the evidence, GRACE has determined the allegations of sexual misconduct against Dave VandeHey to be credible.

IV. Assessment of Behavioral Misconduct and Emotional Abuse Allegations Against Bill Lenz

As Part II, “Methodology and Scope of the Investigation” and the Engagement Agreement indicate, GRACE was contracted to investigate “allegations of behavioral misconduct, including emotional abuse, by Bill Lenz.”

A. Emotional abuse. As defined in the Engagement Agreement, emotional abuse is “a pattern whereby a person in a position of authority and/or trust uses that position to domineer and control others through behaviors such as shaming, dismissing, bullying, threatening, intimidating, humiliating, degrading, or insulting.” Emotional abuse may include spiritual abuse, defined as “abuse using the tools of religion to control and domineer. Like emotional abuse, spiritual abuse is typically understood as a pattern of behaviors with the goal of keeping a person under control and using them.”

The May 29, 2022 posting on a public website, Shouts of Joy Ministries, entitled “My Personal Abuse Story In The Church,” includes the author’s perception of marginalization and isolation by Bill Lenz.⁷⁶

A current CTR leader noted the complexity of describing Bill. “There are two sides to him. There are some sides of him that were amazing, and people really were blessed by him. And then there was a side that certain people were extremely hurt and wounded and abused by him.”⁷⁷ It should be noted that most witnesses, including several who shared allegations, credibly expressed affection and positive sentiments towards Bill Lenz. Even witnesses with a lengthy history of conflict with Bill expressed hesitancy or declined to provide relevant information out of a concern for his legacy:

“I mean, if you want to talk to women who have been mistreated by Bill, that's your business. I just am not comfortable giving you any names and putting them in that position. Or frankly, I don't know. I'm reluctant, in a way, for Bill's sake and his name's sake, I'm not interested in, I don't know, sully his legacy further.”⁷⁸

“I have a little trepidation about joining this because... I have no interest in diminishing Bill's name or legacy. I just don't. So, I would say what the hoped for outcome is that for the victims, that something would be done to make things right. They deserve that.”⁷⁹

Nonetheless, the majority of witnesses who served with or under Bill in his leadership capacity, including multiple witnesses currently in CTR leadership, either expressly indicated

⁷⁶ E.g., “...subtly pushed out by Pastor Bill.” Shouts of Joy Ministries, May 29, 2022.

⁷⁷ Transcript.

⁷⁸ Transcript.

⁷⁹ Transcript.

that Bill Lenz acted in an emotionally abusive manner, or described behavior constituting the same.

*“There have been leaders who have left here who have been hurt by Bill. As any leader, he has not always handled conflict very well. Sometimes he pulled powerplay[s], sometimes he didn't listen very well. Sometimes I feel like his own insecurities were in play, so people got hurt and they left.”*⁸⁰

*“Bill had difficulties dealing with situations that may question his intelligence or character. He was somewhat insecure... He didn't like to be seen as a fool, as he was not enough or not good enough.”*⁸¹

Witness description of actions constituting emotional abuse included bullying, intimidation,⁸² insults or name-calling,^{83,84} and controlling behaviors.⁸⁵ One common theme involved Bill's leveraging of personal wounds, particularly those disclosed in a church program, to manipulate or discredit individuals' perspectives based on hurts in their past.⁸⁶ These actions created an incentive for CTR leaders to acquiesce to Bill Lenz rather than maintain concerns or differences of opinion.⁸⁷ As a current CTR leader shared:

“Bill had this habit of learning things about you by walking through those kinds of things with you, by asking you questions, by saying ‘Do you think that's maybe connected to

⁸⁰ Transcript.

⁸¹ Transcript.

⁸² “Yes, I did. Only when it was somebody who was leaving the church, and it wasn't women, it was primarily people who left the church who he thought were his friends, his circle... How can you leave the church? Where's your loyalty?” Transcript. “I think his anger sometimes hurt people.” Transcript.

⁸³ These included nicknames to reflect and highlight the recipient's perceived theological errors, and feminization of male names, including those of employees. Transcript [redacted]; Transcript [redacted]. At times the shaming would leverage the broader credibility of CTR's collective leadership and contrast that to the credibility of the individual. Transcript.

⁸⁴ Some current or former CTR leaders stated that Bill did not engage in name-calling. “He was not a name caller, he didn't threaten me with my job, he didn't do things like that in my experience.” Transcript. “I never saw him degrading, insulting. He didn't go to that extreme.” Transcript.

⁸⁵ “I think he pulled people he perceived as a threat even slightly closer, because he [modified staff working environment(s) to enable closer supervision].” Transcript. “I do think people did feel shunned by Bill when he felt loyalty to him was violated by them. So you don't have to look far to find others who feel rejected by Bill.” Transcript. “Bill would find these weak areas in people's lives and capitalize on them.” Transcript.

⁸⁶ E.g. Transcript [redacted], Transcript [redacted], Transcript [redacted]. “The format for class was that everyone got a turn going in the middle of a circle. It was where people could pick out what's wrong with you. It's your come to Jesus moment... Bill's going to find your flaws. Someone would need to share a weak area that they were struggling in. Bill would try to analyze them and find out how it went back to their childhood, dismantle this human being to build them up again and pray for them... People in the middle would be shamed and crying [and] feel that they had to admit private things like pornography.” Transcript. One alleged victim reported attempting to follow Matthew 18 and confronting Bill regarding behavioral misconduct: “He starts spinning things around. And because I had been in character development with him, so exposing all of your hurts and all this stuff, he starts attacking me in some of these areas.” Transcript.

⁸⁷ “There were some leaders who will [acquiesce]... It was important for them to have Bill's approval.” Transcript. “I did not see them challenging Bill very much, and how he did things. I could see where Bill's charm would win them over, and they wanted to be okay. Again, these are guessing on my part, but felt it was more important to be in Bill's inner circle than it was to tell him the truth.” Transcript.

something in your past?' He'd sort of help you process things. But then later on, if you were to challenge him on something in his leadership, he would look at you and say something like, 'I think that's a family of origin issue for you. You're coming at me with these issues that you think are me, but it's really you.' I'm not a psychological expert, but I think that's gaslighting."

Other CTR staff and alleged victims concurred:

*"...Bill could be difficult to deal with... he could be a bully, I'll just say that. With me, there were other staff people who felt bullied by him. I felt that way, and there were others."*⁸⁸

*"He had a very strong personality and if you were confronted by him, even strong people would get shaky."*⁸⁹

*"The people around him had to have loyalty, and if he felt you were violating that loyalty, you knew it."*⁹⁰

*"I would see that the elder team was a yes team for him, and I experienced that. So it was very difficult to talk to an elder without them backing up Bill."*⁹¹

*"They had no opinions, they were all milquetoast. Bill had manipulated them."*⁹²

Some current and former CTR leaders indicated that they did not experience emotional abuse by Bill Lenz, but referred to others who did.

*"...because I was not looking for his approval, I may look at it differently.... But somebody who is not secure or that is wounded or has a history of woundedness, they may look at it as emotional abuse."*⁹³

*"I didn't experience the same emotional abuse that [redacted] or others might have."*⁹⁴

Witnesses noted that at times Bill would respond well when confronted with emotionally abusive behavior, demonstrate empathy,⁹⁵ and attempt reconciliation.⁹⁶ Current CTR leaders noted that most individuals would not have experienced emotionally abusive aspects of Bill's behavior.

⁸⁸ Transcript.

⁸⁹ Transcript.

⁹⁰ Transcript.

⁹¹ Transcript.

⁹² Transcript.

⁹³ Transcript.

⁹⁴ Transcript.

⁹⁵ "Bill was very empathetic to people who struggled or were down and out. He could connect at a heart level." Transcript.

⁹⁶ "When I confronted him about it, he stopped.. [He] responded well, with kindness and remorse." Transcript. "Bill also tried hard to reconcile with people. He would spend a long time with people that he felt had [it out] against the church trying to make peace, correct whatever was wrong, including at times owning his piece of it." Transcript.

“Unless you’re near the center of this, poking the bear, ruffling the feathers, you don’t see it come out.”⁹⁷

Finally, threatening suicide if someone does not behave in a desired manner is widely regarded as emotional abuse and is often a sign of relationships characterized by power and control instead of respect and agency.⁹⁸ It is the final power play that someone can make, the final warning not to cross them. This dynamic was present in Bill Lenz’s final interactions at CTR. Throughout the course of the investigation, it became clear that Bill Lenz threatened multiple employees if they did not follow his directives, including a threat of suicide. Bill Lenz followed through on this threat.

The weight of this tremendous tragedy and the trauma it inflicted on CTR leaders and others was evident and profound. One ongoing source of pain for current CTR leadership is the incomplete framing of Bill Lenz’s death as solely a mental health issue, and the impact of that framing on CTR’s staff and congregation.⁹⁹

GRACE has determined the allegations of emotional abuse against Bill Lenz to be credible.

B. Behavioral misconduct. As defined in the Engagement Agreement, behavioral misconduct is “any verbal, nonverbal, and/or physical acts which are improper, immoral, indecent, or unlawful. For the purposes of this investigation, behavioral misconduct includes emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, and sexual misconduct.”¹⁰⁰

1. Allegations of behavioral misconduct perpetrated by Bill Lenz.

⁹⁷ Transcript.

⁹⁸ <https://www.thehotline.org/resources/when-my-partner-threatens-suicide/>.

⁹⁹ See e.g., Leonardo Blair, “Bill Lenz, Pastor Who Dedicated Ministry to Suicide Prevention, Takes Own Life,” Christian Post, December 6, 2017,

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/bill-lenz-pastor-who-dedicated-ministry-to-suicide-prevention-takes-own-life.html> (last accessed February 19, 2023). *Contra* Transcript (“And the reality is, that’s not entirely true. Sure, he was struggling. We have no idea how much he was struggling. But part of what was behind it was... His world was imploding from behind... His job had become an idol. It was his identity, and it was caving. And he was an extremely unhealthy man, emotionally and mentally. And it imploded.”); Transcript (“And so the average person in the body sits there [] going, ‘Oh, so that could happen to me too.’ And we’re like, ‘Okay, I don’t ever want to do that again.’ ... That was awful. And that breaks my heart.”)

¹⁰⁰ In the Engagement Agreement, sexual misconduct is defined as “as any verbal, nonverbal and/or physical acts of an immoral, indecent, improper, or sexual nature that are 1) unwelcome or 2) performed without consent or 3) committed by one in a position of authority upon a subordinate or 4) committed by an adult upon someone under the age of 18 regardless of consent. Examples include, but are not limited to, derogatory or indecent statements about a person’s body; slurs, epithets, anecdotes, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual or intimate nature; verbal advances, propositions, or invitations of a sexual or intimate nature; suggestive or obscene gestures or communications; unwanted attention such as leering or staring; “groping” or any unwanted touches of a sexual or intimate nature, adult sexual assault, and sexual abuse of a minor. “Without consent” means that consent is not freely given or obtained, and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, manipulation, coercion, threat, deception, aggressive come-on, disregard for nonverbal cues of discomfort, or misuse of authority or power.”

The May 29, 2022, posting on a public website, Shouts of Joy Ministries, entitled My Personal Abuse Story In The Church, includes allegations of behavioral misconduct by Bill Lenz:

“A friend of mine from high school started to attend CTR. I was so happy because she had been abused by her father and then much older boys in High School, so I was glad that she would be safe here in church. Such a strikingly beautiful, graceful young woman. But as the relationship between Pastor Bill and her started on the same course that I had just been through with Pastor Dave, I couldn’t just stand by and say nothing. I went to other leaders and was nearly attacked. By that time the leadership had marginalized me...”

“I watched this young lady be devastated by the Pastor. The Pastor of an influential megachurch... Years later as the list of women grew, I created documents with their names, dates, and detailed incidents of their abuse. I included the proof that they shared with me, including names and contact information of witnesses.”

Several witnesses noted the precautions that Bill Lenz took to avoid the appearance of impropriety in opposite-sex interactions, including office layout. (One allegation involves an office context.) These precautions were known and approved by Bill’s family members.¹⁰¹

“Bill never met with women alone. All pastors had windows on their office doors and he had a door between his office and his assistant... The door was always open and he always made sure the lady knew [the assistant] was next door. He didn’t meet with women alone if [the assistant] or someone else was not there. He also would not ride alone with another woman. If he and [redacted] were going to the same place, (or any other woman on staff, etc.) they always took separate cars.”¹⁰²

“In my conversations with [redacted] through the years she said she never heard or saw Bill doing anything sexually inappropriate. That was not his character or nature. In [those] years... no one made any accusations against him.”¹⁰³

Witnesses also described multiple boundary-violating physical interactions by Bill Lenz, but several witnesses characterized the behavior as innocuous, harmless, naive, more prevalent in earlier years of ministry, or well-intended.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ “He was very careful [in his boundaries with women]...he was so careful about not even leaving room for anything.” Transcript.

¹⁰² Transcript.

¹⁰³ Transcript.

¹⁰⁴ “He needed to be a little bit smarter about the way that he interacted with people. And he was just, he’d bump into your shoulder and it’s like, when guys do that with guys, fine. When guys do that with girls, not fine. And just some of those basic things that, to my knowledge at least that I’ve heard, never got out of place. But it’s like, “Bill, you got to use a little more common sense. You can’t interact with some of the girls the way that you did with some of the females.” Transcript.

“Sometimes he treated friends, lady friends, like they were guys. Punch them on the shoulder. And I said, ‘You can't do that. They are ladies.’ Could be misconstrued.”¹⁰⁵

“I noticed him doing it with this other woman, very flirty. He took her by the hand, pulled her to the back of our bus to sit together. They were in the very back seat, I was in the seat in front of them, just laughing and giggling. And I thought if this was my husband, I would not be comfortable with this as his wife and the fact that he's the pastor and taking young women by the hand, pulling them into the back of the bus to sit with them, it was just like all these just really kind of inappropriate behaviors.”¹⁰⁶

“I was directly involved with situations especially... Well, I'll show you. These are my folders of this information that we're talking about today. Bill was a very sports minded guy. He treated everybody the same. He treated women like guys, like punch you on the shoulder; kind of knock you, whatever. He was just too rough and treated everybody like one of the guys. And he had a playful side to him. And so there were women who had him on a pedestal, thought he could do no wrong, and developed crushes on him.”¹⁰⁷

“But I said, ‘Women can put you on a pedestal and really think that you really care for them.’ As he was a shepherd, he was a very good counselor. And so the care that he would give people, they would take that to heart. So he really changed how he related and he became very aware that, “Man, I can't say things. I can't punch anybody anymore.”¹⁰⁸

One former CTR leader who described some of these interactions by Bill Lenz reasoned that they were not problematic since they were conducted in public:

Witness: “I would be very concerned if those allegations would happen in the context of being alone with these ladies in different places. The allegation at [location]. There were 20 some other people there. Those incidents that I observed were always public and happened in [location] when there were hundreds of people there.”

Interviewer: “So if what was happening in public happened in private, that would cause you concern?”

Witness: “Oh, certainly.”¹⁰⁹

Former and current leaders stated that these types of interactions were addressed with Bill, yet they continued.¹¹⁰ Accordingly, the above exchange and dynamic demonstrate a significant gap in former CTR leadership's ability to both engage in effective accountability processes for leadership, and comprehend potential grooming behaviors.. This gap is made more problematic by the fact that Bill leveraged known boundary violations to discredit allegations, as

¹⁰⁵ Transcript.

¹⁰⁶ Transcript.

¹⁰⁷ Transcript.

¹⁰⁸ Transcript.

¹⁰⁹ Transcript.

¹¹⁰ E.g. Transcript; Transcript.

demonstrated below.¹¹¹ See Part V, Assessment of CTR Response, Protocols, and Culture, for opportunities in increasing perception of grooming behaviors and appropriate responses.

Throughout the investigation, allegations were made or referenced regarding Bill Lenz initiating physical contact with four women.¹¹²

Alleged Victim 1: *“Bill came right up behind me and jumped on top of me in the water... we went down to the bottom, and that just got way too interactive. I got up and was like, ‘What are you doing?’ I was really upset, because I knew he did it on purpose, he didn’t come out of that water like he should have bounced off and went up... I had to struggle to get out back from underneath him... He didn’t hit me in a private part. I had my back to him the whole time... And I was struggling, but he wasn’t groping me or anything like that. Nothing like that. But he had me contained.”*¹¹³

The above allegation shares similarities to multiple other allegations in that it occurred in a public context, did not involve sexual contact, and included Bill’s initiation of physical contact primarily by falling on women during physical activities, as two separate instances involving two separate alleged victims demonstrate:

Reference to Alleged Victim 2: *“They were horsing around. They fell and he got up. ...He [Bill Lenz] said, ‘This happened in my house, may have happened at a church picnic I believe. ...So Bill brought it up again and shared with the current elders that they were horsing around and fell and he fell on top of her but got up immediately. He wanted the elders to know what happened and that nothing sexual happened, etc.”*¹¹⁴

Alleged Victim 3: *“[Bill] grabbed me, threw me in the water. I had to get out of the way so he wouldn’t land on me... we hit each other’s bodies but nothing sexually inappropriate that I recall.” “He was inappropriate with me. He enjoyed seeking me out, grabbing me around the waist, throwing me in, and jumping in after me.”*¹¹⁵

The third alleged victim also described a meeting with Bill Lenz and his commiseration regarding her husband who was not emotionally connecting with her. In this meeting, the alleged victim indicated that Bill stated “You must be all alone in your marriage,” then approached where she was sitting on a couch, wrapped her in his arms, “didn’t say any words and wouldn’t let me go. Way too close. I wasn’t comfortable. He held me for a long time. Up close in my face,

¹¹¹ E.g. “They were horsing around. They fell and he got up. And he came and he told the elders what happened. And that was before I was an elder. But it was brought up later on... And the elders confirmed ‘Yeah, he brought it up to the elders right away.’ He [Bill Lenz] said, ‘This happened in my house, may have happened at a church picnic I believe. I want you to know.’ ...it was brought up [again] because of [accusations] ... sent to the accountability council.... So Bill brought it up again and shared with the current elders that they were horsing around and fell and he fell on top of her but got up immediately. He wanted the elders to know what happened and that nothing sexual happened, etc.”

¹¹² It should be noted that this section provides summaries of the allegations, with a few key details. Additional aspects and details, such as the timeframe(s) of allegations, are omitted in order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of the alleged victims.

¹¹³ Transcript.

¹¹⁴ Transcript.

¹¹⁵ Transcript.

he said, ‘Now that’s how Christ loves the church. That’s how husbands should love their wives.’ The alleged victim recalled that she was “already in a vulnerable position. . . . I remember [being] shaky, sweating. I moved away, couldn’t wait until it could be over so I ran.” She stated that Bill “takes advantage of people. He was very good at it.”¹¹⁶

This alleged victim also described Bill being “inappropriate in trying to get me up on [an object] with my bathing suit on [and being] quite interested in holding me around the waist. . . . Having his hands on you in and out of the water. It looks like he’s helping but he’s enjoying himself. Hanging on, making sure he was there for a second and third attempt [with the object].”¹¹⁷

A fourth alleged victim detailed repeated violations of physical boundaries by Bill Lenz and their persistence with multiple women after this was directly addressed by an alleged victim.¹¹⁸

Alleged Victim 4: *“[I told Bill that] this is not pastoral behavior that I feel is appropriate and it’s uncomfortable, I need it to stop.”*¹¹⁹

Notably, some of the alleged victims did not have significant social connections to other alleged victims.

One alleged victim, through tears, described her decades-long struggle to attend church following her experience with Bill Lenz. Multiple alleged victims and witnesses articulated the mental and spiritual toll of their experiences:

*“I was a very strong Christian and it threw me for a loop as far as [being] able to trust, not wanting to get involved in church for fear of this happening again. Yeah, it definitely brought me into a real valley. We kind of church hopped for a while just because I would start seeing, this is wrong or this is wrong. I was so fearful.”*¹²⁰

*“I’ve had nightmares about Bill Lenz since I first spoke to you.”*¹²¹

*“[It was] difficult for me and what it did to my faith.”*¹²²

*“[I]t was so devastating to her she ended up walking away from the faith completely.”*¹²³

¹¹⁶ Transcript.

¹¹⁷ Transcript.

¹¹⁸ “And then it just got a little bit more touchy feely. I mean, he was seeking me out between services all the time. Every time I turned around, somebody would be rubbing my back, I turned around and it’s Bill. . . . He was always touching me, my shoulders, rubbing my back, my arm. When he would stand next to me and talk to me, he’s always being touchy and just real, very flirty. Very flirty . . . And I went to his office and we sat down and I said, ‘Look, I don’t know what’s going on here, but it needs to stop.’ And I said, ‘This other woman came to me and asked me if I noticed how much you’re flirting with me. . . .’” Transcript.

¹¹⁹ Transcript.

¹²⁰ Transcript.

¹²¹ Transcript.

¹²² Transcript.

¹²³ Transcript.

Some observers may contend that Bill Lenz’s behavior constituted misunderstood but innocuous affection. This paradigm, however, cannot credibly be applied to a proclivity for falling on top of multiple women in swimwear, particularly by a spiritual leader. The frequency of the falls, their striking similarities, the fact that some alleged victim(s) were unaware of each other’s allegations, and Bill’s statements to alleged victims strongly suggest that his falls were not accidental:

*“And then [Bill] kind of leaned into my seat with a hand on the front, a hand on the back. And he leaned into me. He said, “I almost fell. **What would you do if I was on top of you?**” ... That’s when I was like, this is wrong.”*¹²⁴

*“[Bill said] I would’ve married a girl like you if I was choosing a woman in my flesh.”*¹²⁵

The Shouts of Joy Ministries blog post referenced a “list of women” experiencing “abuse.” Four alleged victims of behavioral misconduct described consistent dynamics and behavior by Bill Lenz across a significant breadth of time. Given the corroboration present in these accounts and external evidence, the weakness of alleged motives, if any, for fabrication by these women, and the statements of Bill Lenz, GRACE has determined the allegations of behavioral misconduct by four women against Bill Lenz to be credible.

GRACE has determined that emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, and sexual misconduct were perpetrated on Alleged Victims 1, 3, and 4. GRACE has further determined that physical misconduct was perpetrated on Alleged Victim 2.

Throughout this process, witnesses expressed concerns for multiple other women in addition to the four women referenced above. Witnesses also referenced an additional accusation of flagrant sexual misconduct. Due to an inability to locate and speak with these women or obtain sufficient evidence through credible alternative sources, GRACE does not make a finding regarding either the concerns expressed for these women, or the additional accusation.

Furthermore, GRACE does not corroborate one allegation of behavioral misconduct made by the Shouts of Joy Ministries blog post.¹²⁶ This determination was also reached based on GRACE’s inability to locate and speak with the alleged victim or obtain sufficient evidence through credible alternative sources.

2. Response to allegations of behavioral misconduct

Issues relating to the CTR culture within the scope of the investigation are set forth more fully in Part V, below (i.e. “the administrative environment and community culture of CTR and how such may impact matters relating to behavioral misconduct within the organization”). However, we briefly address the relevant components here. It is a tragic reality that processes for

¹²⁴ Transcript.

¹²⁵ Transcript.

¹²⁶ This post referenced a “relationship between Pastor Bill and [an alleged victim that] started on the same course that I had just been through.”

accountability surrounding Bill Lenz were particularly anemic and harmful. The GRACE investigation encountered a historical process that ranged from nonexistent to openly hostile to women disclosing concerns about the behavior of leadership.

To GRACE's knowledge, one alleged victim never directly voiced concerns to CTR leadership. When asked why, she indicated, "They would've stamped me as a liar [and] put a scripture verse on it. I never would've done it ...there was no one to talk about it so I didn't talk about it..."¹²⁷

The experience of women who did disclose validated these concerns:

*"And so in my case, that's basically the problem was I went to the wrong people. Or maybe none of them would've held them accountable because Bill would then say, 'Oh, all those crazy women making all these allegations.' Well, okay, what do all the crazy women have in common, Bill? You. We don't have any other crazy men in our lives, but you have all these crazy women."*¹²⁸

*"...those who were protected, were protected. Those who were the harlots and the F ups, they were dealt with more punitively.. If there was a man and woman involved, the woman was likely the harlot."*¹²⁹

*"'Well, you might be the harlot.' So the women would hear that from leadership for sure."*¹³⁰

When a current leader was asked to describe historic accountability processes, they stated "The elders would then bring [a disclosure] to Bill. Bill could perhaps explain it in such a way that the elders would believe him, and then they would defend Bill."¹³¹ One current leader indicated that they "always assumed that it was never Bill's fault. It was always a fixation on Bill being the leader and a man."¹³² Another current leader shared that "I think that it would be hard to think that [accusations] would've been investigated" by the previous Elders.¹³³

The Shouts of Joy Ministries blog claims that "Not one reported incident was followed up on. Not one witness or victim was contacted. Nothing." This statement is incorrect, as multiple individuals at CTR did contact some relevant individuals. The reality, unfortunately, is also problematic. Witnesses described processes riddled with conflicts of interest and self-protective impulses. For example:

- 1) One alleged victim described that an elder at the time attempted to record a conversation regarding her allegations without her consent or knowledge. However, this former elder indicated to GRACE that he never heard of allegations

¹²⁷ Transcript.

¹²⁸ Transcript.

¹²⁹ Transcript.

¹³⁰ Transcript.

¹³¹ Transcript.

¹³² Transcript.

¹³³ Transcript.

other than from Joie Pirkey, and claimed that none of the referenced women ever made allegations against Bill Lenz.¹³⁴ The statements by this former elder are credibly contradicted by witness statements.¹³⁵

- 2) One faith leader with a then-positive relationship with Bill Lenz stated that he attempted to bring concerns to CTR regarding “the names of [multiple alleged victims] that had come to me... they acted like this was not new information to them.” He was met by a family member of Bill Lenz and an elder, and stated his concern: “I have a problem with this meeting because A, you’re his [family member], B, you’re on the board, and you’re a staff member. So, how does that work when your job’s potentially on the line? That’s a conflict of interest.”
- 3) A former elder defined accountability as including “a clear sign of repentance... a 180-degree turn.” He was asked to provide an example where Bill was held accountable, and described a serious incident in which Bill was challenged by the elders. In the example he provided, however, he acknowledged that only two elders were initially made aware of the concerning incident. He acknowledged that he did not see the fruits of repentance from Bill in this process, and when asked how, by his definition, there was still accountability, he stated “at the time... I had a job that took me many places, including overseas...” He later indicated that accountability was implemented, but was not sure if it was fully received.

Witnesses also describe a problematic response by CTR when allegations were made against a member of the Lenz family. GRACE does not assess the veracity of these allegations, which we have determined to be outside the scope of the investigation. However, per the Engagement Agreement, GRACE does assess “...the administrative environment and community culture of Christ the Rock and how such may impact matters relating to behavioral misconduct within the organization.”

A current CTR leader concurred that the arrangement of having counseling provided for a member of the Lenz family by Dave VandeHey, then a staff pastor “ultimately answerable and accountable in some way”¹³⁶ to Bill Lenz, presented a conflict of interest. A current CTR leader also met with the family member in this process, while they were on staff, and acknowledged that this is also a conflict of interest. Yet another conflict of interest manifested when this individual separately met with both the family member and an alleged victim, and was not certain whether the alleged victim was aware of the meeting with the family member.

¹³⁴ “I met with them because they were disgruntled. There were issues that they had. But in my interaction with these ladies, and I talked to them a few times, there was never a mention of any allegations against Bill. All their allegations and their issues were with his [family member]... They have issues with [the family member], and I was trying to find out what happened. So those were the allegations. These ladies that Joie said they had allegations of sexual misconduct. As an elder, they never brought those up to me, if there were any. The issues they had was with [the family member]... They never told me of any allegations against Bill of sexual misconduct or anything like that.”

¹³⁵ Transcript [redacted] at 6-7; Transcript [redacted] at 12, 20-21.

¹³⁶ Correspondence provided to GRACE.

A final dynamic noted with regards to how CTR historically responded to allegations of behavioral misconduct, was described by witnesses as nepotism.

*“I said to [a former elder regarding] Bill [and Bill’s family members], that there was this nepotism that was very unhealthy. And he looked at me and said, ‘I agree with you. I know it’s happening, but if you tell anybody that I say that, I’ll deny ever saying it.’ And at that point, I was like, ‘Oh my goodness, this is an elder of the church. This is somebody I looked up to.’ I still do. I love the guy. But just that moment of him saying, ‘Yeah, it’s real, but guess what? I want to keep my job, so we’re just going to keep on keeping on.’”*¹³⁷

*“They just ran a family business here, and I think Bill and [family member] had a family business mentality...”*¹³⁸

*“We’re very clear, there needs to be some repentance of allowing some of these actions and this behavior to go on behind the scenes. It has nothing to do with investigation. It has more to do with some of the use of power, the treating this more like a family business instead of a church.”*¹³⁹

V. Assessment of CTR Response, Protocols, and Culture

As Part II, “Methodology and Scope of the Investigation” and the Engagement Agreement with CTR indicate, GRACE was contracted to investigate “whether CTR had any knowledge of the allegations, and if so, how the organizational culture of CTR impacted 1) the way CTR responded to the allegations and 2) how CTR responded after being informed of such allegations. This includes assessing: What information CTR received, what CTR did and should have done with said information, including its response to the allegations, how the Church’s response compares to best practices, Scriptural values, and SAMHSA’s Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice. As part of this agreement, GRACE may assess the existing safety protocols related to behavioral misconduct and reporting, the administrative environment and community culture of CTR and how such may impact matters relating to behavioral misconduct within the organization.”

The following analysis is conducted through the lens of the six principles of a trauma-informed approach developed by the National Center for Trauma-Informed Care: Safety; Trustworthiness and Transparency; Peer Support; Collaboration and Mutuality; Empowerment, Voice and Choice; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.¹⁴⁰ The hallmarks of these also unsurprisingly find their place within biblical principles, as “all truth is God’s truth.”¹⁴¹

For an organization to be one of safety, staff and the congregation, whether children or adults, feel physically and psychologically secure; the physical setting is safe and interpersonal

¹³⁷ Transcript.

¹³⁸ Transcript.

¹³⁹ Transcript.

¹⁴⁰ See generally SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁴¹ Buck Hatch.

interactions promote a sense of safety. Understanding safety as defined by those served is a high priority.¹⁴² It is clear that there has been thought invested by Christ the Rock in child protection policy development and the church's practices around access to young children appear to be well-considered.

For example, CTR developed a policy articulating "Guidelines for Sexual Offenders," thereby contending with a prevalent and critical issue that numerous churches have yet to consider, much less address. However, the CTR Student Ministries Protection Plan and Volunteer Guidelines do not clearly articulate mandated reporting as reflected in Wisconsin Statutes 48.981 (2)¹⁴³ for members of the clergy—specifically, the responsibility of the church to report concerns or incidences to law enforcement and child protection authorities first.¹⁴⁴ One current leader illustrates this issue: *"We would have talked to the children's pastor or the senior high director of those departments about it, that's where we would have addressed it, we may have started with our senior pastor first."*¹⁴⁵

The investigation revealed that when staff and leaders were asked about how concerns for the safety of a child would be handled, there was a consistent inability to accurately account for their individual responsibility to make a report to the county where the child resides or to the law enforcement agency where the possible abuse and/or neglect occurred. When the investigative team asked staff and elders about how concerns for the safety of an adult, receiving an adult's allegations of mistreatment, or dysfunction within the leadership team was explored, the answers ranged from nothing, to something mirroring the CTR Employee Manual's Grievance Policy.

*"We have a lay counseling department team. So, it could go to one of those people, or it could go directly to a pastor."*¹⁴⁶

Another leader shared,

*"I also felt like this is a dysfunction of the whole team, that there wasn't a right process to go about bringing a concern that I felt like, and maybe even still do, feel like it would be taken seriously. And I desire for that to be clearer moving forward about when there's a significant concern that relates to the overall church health, where do you go to? And I know that people can go to their supervisor, whatever, but sometimes it involves their supervisor, and what does the process look like?"*¹⁴⁷

There are clear and felt gaps and opportunities here. Additionally, Christ the Rock must consider the challenges to disclosure in an organizational setting, particularly disclosures involving misconduct by those who are in places of influence in it.

"I don't even know of an adult protection policy. If there is, it's probably in the Restore Team. But I would love to see this. I would love to see a church-wide policy and then it's

¹⁴² SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁴³ [http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/statutes/48.981\(2\)](http://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/statutes/48.981(2))

¹⁴⁴ <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/cps/mandatedreporters>

¹⁴⁵ Transcript.

¹⁴⁶ Transcript.

¹⁴⁷ Transcript.

broken out in not only the policies, what protections to put in place, what to make it possible for this not to happen, what to happen if and when it does happen, just the chain of command, how to do this, and then I would love to see it talked about every six months. I would say having an outside source come in and go, 'Okay, let's look at all your policies. Let's look at all your child protection policies and student protection and adult protection. Let's look at them all and let's organize them so they're all on the same page and they're all understood by everybody.' I think somebody who does this professionally, I don't think we've ever done it like that. We've taken other policies and we've synthesized them, but an outside source coming in to do that and saying, 'Okay, let's lay it out, make sure it all happens, make sure everybody hears it every six months,' that would really be helpful."¹⁴⁸

Finally, Matthew 18:15-17 frequently emerged as a framework for confronting misconduct and abuse. This is problematic in light of the inherent power differentials in cases involving church leadership and laity or church leadership and minors.¹⁴⁹ Tragically, Matthew 18 “has all too often been a justification for 1) not reporting abuse disclosures to the authorities and 2) convincing 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.” Matthew 18 mandates a process for addressing personal offenses within the local church, but misconduct “is not merely a personal offense.... [and] does not even fit into the paradigm of what 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.”¹⁵⁰

Leaders can honor God and those they are responsible for uniquely by protecting the vulnerable even at a cost to themselves (John 10 & Ezekiel 34).¹⁵¹ Seeking partnership with experts and lifting up the recommendations of those who have experienced danger and threats at Christ the Rock can promote an environment for more fruitful ministry. Recommendations for the church include:

¹⁴⁸ Transcript.

¹⁴⁹ Tchividjian, Boz. “‘If Your Brother Sins Against You...’ and He’s a Sex Offender,” <https://www.netgrace.org/resources/if-your-brother-sins-against-you>.

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ Ezekiel 34:1-6, “Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophesy and say to those shepherds, ‘This is what the Lord God says: “Woe, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should the shepherds not feed the flock? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat sheep without feeding the flock. Those who are sickly you have not strengthened, the diseased you have not healed, the broken you have not bound up, the scattered you have not brought back, nor have you searched for the lost; but with force and with violence you have dominated them. They scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every animal of the field and scattered. My flock strayed through all the mountains and on every high hill; My flock was scattered over all the surface of the earth, and there was no one to search or seek for them.”

John 10:1-5, “Truly, truly I say to you, the one who does not enter by the door into the fold of the sheep, but climbs up some other way, he is a thief and a robber. But the one who enters by the door is a shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep listen to his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he puts all his own sheep outside, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.”

- Staff and Elder training on the ‘Basics of Grooming,’ by an organization like Darkness to Light¹⁵² or RAINN.¹⁵³ Staff and Elder skill development in the specifics of grooming involving clergy.¹⁵⁴
- Staff and Elder Training on ‘Trauma 101,’ by an organization like Trauma Informed Churches.¹⁵⁵
- Staff and Elder Training on, ‘Bystander Intervention.’
- Engagement in professional consultation for revision in all staff and church policies.
- Invite the voices of survivors of misconduct as youth members at Christ the Rock to help revise the CTR Student Ministries Protection Plan and Volunteer Guidelines.
- Regular (at least annual) Mandated Reporting training through the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families for Elders, Staff, and all other ministry leaders.

A **trustworthy and transparent** culture is one where organizational operations and decisions are conducted with the goal of building and maintaining trust with congregants, among staff, and with others involved in the organization.¹⁵⁶ Historical themes across interviews with past staff, current staff and volunteer leaders at Christ the Rock included an overemphasis on all information “needing to go to the top,” a consistent failure to circle back or provide feedback to relevant parties once a concern or issue had been shared, and tight control over information that could be challenging to the reputation of top leadership—which was often conflated with protecting the reputation of the church. One current leader shared,

“A start-up little church grew into a decent-sized church. Certainly big for here. And there wasn’t an evangelical church like it around, so it had some notoriety. But it just kept running like a family business. I think they thought this was something that wasn’t like the other churches....This was ours to oversee, and there was an ownership and identity.”¹⁵⁷

Another leader shared,

“I think Bill and [a former CTR leader] controlled the flow of information, and I think there was an arm of the elder board that was healthy and provided healthy care to the church in the midst of all this, amazingly. But I think that when it came to decision making and accountability, I think that they were often in the dark about the culture. And maybe they knew more and just closed their eyes to it, but I feel like that they honestly didn’t know what they tasted and experienced from Bill.”¹⁵⁸

Self-protection was integrated into the culture of church leadership as an acceptable value. This led to a pattern of deceit when the image of top leadership was potentially threatened

¹⁵² Darkness to Light, <https://www.d2l.org/>.

¹⁵³ RAINN, <https://www.rainn.org/>.

¹⁵⁴ Garland, Diana & Argueta, Christen. (2010). How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts. *Social Work & Christianity*. 37.

¹⁵⁵ Trauma Informed Churches, <https://www.traumainformedchurches.org/>.

¹⁵⁶ SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁵⁷ Transcript.

¹⁵⁸ Transcript.

and by omission of accountability between colleagues, volunteer leaders, and ministry community partners. An interviewee shared the following:

“I remember a conversation I had with Bill that he was clearly wrong in how he had treated me... And I remember him saying, ‘Well, isn't that great about God that even things that aren't always [] handled the best happened for good. Look at the good that came out of it.’ So I was like, ‘Maybe for you, but not for me.’ I mean, in any scenario, God, the Bible, the Holy Spirit, all that can be weaponized so subtly and so simply, and that was part of the operating system there at times. Not always, but at times.”¹⁵⁹

Another current leader shared,

“One of my bigger concerns, is what does accountability look like, because we're not a part of a larger denomination.”¹⁶⁰

Meaningful mercy (Proverbs 28:13, Psalm 32:3-5),¹⁶¹ deeper Christ-like relationships (Ephesians 4:25),¹⁶² and ongoing liberation (Psalm 139:23-24)¹⁶³ are there for the receiving. Interviews with some current leadership indicated a desire and intention to repair and nurture trustworthiness and transparency at Christ the Rock. Recommendations for the church in addition to what was shared include:

- Holding communal spaces to process historical patterns that compromised trustworthiness, transparency and pursue communal repentance. Consider resources available through the Center for Courage and Renewal.¹⁶⁴
- Developing whistleblower policies that are developmentally appropriate and sharing them across the church in settings that promote understanding about them, i.e. Elder Meetings, Staff Meetings, Youth Group, and Small Groups.
- Revisiting the term limits on the Elder Board to promote healthy transition. It should be noted that the recent reform on Elder election and appointment that was shared in interviews is a strong indicator of efforts at building greater trust and transparency.

¹⁵⁹ Transcript.

¹⁶⁰ Transcript.

¹⁶¹ Proverbs 28:13, “One who conceals his wrongdoings will not prosper, But one who confesses and abandons *them* will find compassion.”

Psalm 32:3-5, “When I kept silent *about my sin*, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long.

For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;

My vitality failed *as* with the dry heat of summer. *Selah*

I acknowledged my sin to You, And I did not hide my guilt;

I said, “I will confess my wrongdoings to the Lord”;

And You forgave the guilt of my sin.”

¹⁶² Ephesians 4:25, “Therefore, ridding yourselves of falsehood, speak truth each one *of you* with his neighbor, because we are parts of one another.”

¹⁶³ Psalm 139:23-24, “Search me, God, and know my heart; Put me to the test and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there is *any* hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.”

¹⁶⁴ Center for Courage and Renewal, <https://couragerenewal.org/partner-with-center-for-courage-renewal/>.

- Investing in radical candor for all staff and volunteer leadership. Receiving training in communicating “personal care and speaking directly.”¹⁶⁵ Establishing regularly scheduled mechanisms for these encounters such as regular supervision of staff, evaluations of the elder board from the congregation, and annual reviews across the organization. It should be noted that the request of the Lead Pastor for comprehensive annual reviews is a strong indicator of building greater trust and transparency.

Peer support and mutual self-help are key vehicles for establishing safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and utilizing individual stories and lived experience to promote recovery and healing. The term ‘peers’ refers to individuals with lived experiences of trauma, or in the case of children, this may be family members of children who have experienced traumatic events and are key caregivers in their recovery. Peers have also been referred to as ‘trauma survivors.’¹⁶⁶ The investigation revealed two primary challenges to the concept of peer support at Christ the Rock. The first challenge is the pattern of controlling the narratives of victims through the practice of making them stereotypes—destroying any hope of victims finding true ‘peers’ on their journey towards seeking accountability. This pattern was demonstrated most notably in the dismissive slander of women, and the men supporting them, bringing allegations of misconduct by leaders in the church. These women were consistently referred to as angry. In one example,

“Interviewer: You mentioned [redacted] being marginalized to some extent, and then I think you mentioned, quote, a handful more. Witness: She was told at one point in a conversation, “You’re just a woman who’s angry that [redacted] isn’t getting his way.” That was so dismissive, so ridiculously inaccurate and dismissive.”¹⁶⁷

They were also described as bitter: *“Interviewer: When you refer to [redacted] being painted as the guilty party, and having a thing out for the [redacted]. Do you feel that those are correct beliefs or postures on CTR’s part? Or would you differ from them in some way? Interviewee: I wish I would’ve asked more questions at the time. I wish I would’ve had the guts to say, ‘Hey, this keeps coming up. What’s the deal here?’ But I think I was probably afraid to be blacklisted, or fired, or something like that. Maybe that’s too strong, be fired, but don’t have influence anymore. But I wish I would’ve said, ‘This is coming up time, and time again. What is the deal here?’ I didn’t.”¹⁶⁸*

Allegations were often framed by witnesses in uncharitable and ultimately incorrect ways to demonstrate their lack of reliability. For example, witnesses pointed to the physical layout or size of buildings as a reason to disbelieve Joie Pirkey’s allegations. In reality, Joie did not make any allegations of sexual misconduct occurring within buildings.¹⁶⁹

Finally, some women were characterized as having “crushes”, dismissed based on their background, or attacked using Scripture:

¹⁶⁵ Radical Candor, <https://www.radicalcandor.com/the-book/>.

¹⁶⁶ SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁶⁷ Transcript.

¹⁶⁸ Transcript.

¹⁶⁹ E.g. Transcript; Transcript.

“And some of those girls, I think, were dismissed because of inappropriate things that they were dealing with.”¹⁷⁰

“I was involved very often with him in conversation just because I knew of women who had crushes on him.”¹⁷¹

“I truly believe this is satanic - [the alleged victim] ... etc. they are serpents in the guise of angels of light.”¹⁷²

“Re [an alleged victim] - ‘present your case says the lord. Set forth your arguments... bring in your idols to tell us what is going to happen...tell us what the future holds, so that we may know that you are gods. Do something, whether good or bad, so that we will be dismayed and filled with fear. But you are less than nothing and your works are utterly worthless, he who chooses you is detestable.’ Isaiah 41, v. 21-24.”¹⁷³

When witnesses were asked why they believed the women to be as they described them, the common response indicated that they did not have evidence or firsthand knowledge of the characteristics they were ascribing to the women, but that “they had heard it somewhere.” In some instances, “somewhere” was determined to be the alleged perpetrator,¹⁷⁴ who later himself acknowledged that he had no evidence of the knowledge ascribed to the woman.¹⁷⁵ One interviewee shared this common theme:

“This is before I was there, so I speak from reading documentation or talking to others that were there at the time when she wanted [redacted] and she did not get [redacted], there was a big problem.”¹⁷⁶

Extensive documentation held by long-time church staff express radical and demeaning assumptions of motive and intent by men and women who sought acknowledgement of their mistreatment by CTR leadership, accountability for the misconduct, and a commitment to not perpetrate against others.

Delays in disclosure were also cited as grounds for skepticism towards allegations. Setting aside the fact that some key elements of allegations were made early in CTR’s history, it is important to note that many victims wait for years, often decades, before disclosing to others that they have been victims of abuse.¹⁷⁷ Barriers to immediate disclosure include confusion around what occurred, the victim feeling responsible for the abuse, fear of disbelief or judgment,

¹⁷⁰ Transcript.

¹⁷¹ Transcript.

¹⁷² Email correspondence.

¹⁷³ Email correspondence. See Part IV.A and footnote 82, *supra*, for discussion of CTR leadership’s leveraging of personal wounds disclosed in a church program to manipulate or discredit perspectives.

¹⁷⁴ E.g. Transcript.

¹⁷⁵ Interviewer: “What makes you believe that it was Joie calling and hanging up?” Dave VandeHey: “I don’t know who else it could be. We didn’t have no identification on our landline, so I couldn’t even track the number. So again, I’m only assuming. I’m only thinking it had to have been her. My wife picked up the phone a couple times and it would be a click.”

¹⁷⁶ Transcript.

¹⁷⁷ The National Think Tank for Child Protection. March 2020. Accessed January 8, 2023. <https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Delayed-Disclosure-Factsheet-2020.pdf>.

fear over a loss of community, family, or friends, and institutional power dynamics. As a result, a U.S. study indicates that the average age of the disclosure of child sexual abuse is 52. Another study of “487 adult male survivors of child sexual abuse found that, on average, these victims delayed disclosure for 21.38 years and delayed a full discussion of the abuse for 28.23 years.”¹⁷⁸

The second challenge was the overemphasis on protecting the reputation of key leadership and lack of accountability for their behavior, which undermined the concept of peer support at CTR. These patterns are identified by Dr. Jennifer Freyd as part of institutional betrayal and the DARVO principle—Deny, Attack, and Reverse the Victim and Offender. The power of the church repeating and constructing narratives aimed at discrediting alleged victims make the concept of peer support impossible without a philosophical shift.

One witness privately confronted Bill about his behavior toward her that made her feel uncomfortable. In that conversation, she noted that another woman was also uncomfortable about Bill’s behavior towards the witness. In response, Bill allegedly attacked the other woman:

“He turned it, around onto that woman and started telling me that they had her on staff and all the trouble they had with her and they had to remove her. So he made her out to be this crazy woman. (He) Never addressed it. Never addressed it. Right away, turned it on her. And the whole conversation, he went in depth about her psychological problems. She was bipolar, I mean, he ripped her to shreds and that was the conversation, and that’s how it ended. Never acknowledged what I said. Just basically that this woman is a liar, is this and that, and they can’t get her meds adjusted and all this stuff he’s telling me about her and just completely evaded. But isn’t that what sin does? Deflect.”¹⁷⁹

When asked what staff and leadership hoped for survivors of mistreatment in general at Christ the Rock, respondents clearly articulate a biblical and trauma-informed vision. One interview,

“I would like them to be heard and believed... I want people to feel like this is a safe place to bring [allegations], and that we take that stuff seriously. I’d like there to be aftercare. I’d like us to consider how we help people with that. And I think we’re equipped to do that. We have people here that can help them, and we have people we know that we can refer out to that can help them process and heal from that. But I don’t ever want to hide, or I never want to bury or spin those things. I hope we could be as honest and clear as possible when we need to be.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ Victor I. Vieth, Rita Farrell, Rachel Johnson, Tomiko Mackey, Caitie Dahl, Kathleen Nolan, Robert J. Peters, & Tyler Council, “Where the Boys Are: Investigating and Prosecuting Cases of Child Sexual Abuse When the Victim is Male,” Zero Abuse Project (citing Scott D. Easton, Disclosure of Child Sexual Abuse Among Adult Male Survivors, 41 Clinical Social Work Journal 344-355 (2013); O’Leary et al., The Effect of Severe Child Sexual Abuse and Disclosure on Mental Health During Adulthood, 19(3), The Journal of Child Sexual Abuse 275-289 (2010)).

¹⁷⁹ Transcript.

¹⁸⁰ Transcript.

Where dignity has been sacrificed for reputation, there can be restoration (Philippians 2:3);¹⁸¹ where voices have been dismissed out of convenience, there can be a platform offered; where interests have been narrowed to an individual, broader goodness is achievable (Philippians 2:4).¹⁸²

Recommendations for the church include:

- Elevating the experiences and perceptions of survivors of misconduct at Christ the Rock in the creation of a whistleblower policy, including these voices in the creation of the document itself.
- Strategic dismantling of the historical patterns and heavy investment in structures that perpetuate ‘circle the wagons’ behavior. One example of this would be diversifying the Elder Board and orienting new Elders to this report.
- Inviting survivors of misconduct by Christ the Rock to speak in public forums with current leadership.
- Elders and staff training on typical dynamics of disclosure of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse, including the normalization of delayed disclosures.

Collaboration and mutuality reflect partnership and the leveling of power differences between staff and the congregation and among organizational staff at any level of authority, demonstrating that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.¹⁸³ Historical themes across interviews revealed actions by top leadership that demeaned, pushed personal boundaries, and enforced messages of superiority.

*“So, there was some conflict with Bill at times, some disagreements. Will I say that he emotionally abused me? Again, because I was not looking for his approval, I may look at it differently. I’m trying to be as candid and honest as I can. **But** somebody who is not secure or that is wounded or has a history of woundedness, they may look at it as emotional abuse.”¹⁸⁴*

Inequitable application of policies, processes, and information sharing often emerged when in the interest of top leadership or those close to them. One witness recounted confronting leadership about this dynamic:

“The protection and non-accountability for some, and hyper-accountability for others is wrong and unhealthy. His comment again was, ‘Yeah, I agree with you. I know it’s happening, but if you tell anybody that I said that, I’ll deny ever saying it.’”¹⁸⁵

A final theme that emerged across interviews that operates in opposition to collaboration and mutuality can be described as the intentional siloing of internal ministries that resulted in a

¹⁸¹ Philippians 2:3, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves;

¹⁸² Philippians 2:4, “do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”

¹⁸³ SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁸⁴ Transcript.

¹⁸⁵ Transcript.

disempowered and at times passive response even in situations that witnesses recognized as falling squarely within their job descriptions, and responsibilities.

“It felt like everybody was working their own independent contractor job, everybody was their own boss, doing their own thing, so it was very disconnected. And the staff culture wasn't healthy just in terms of collaboration or working together.”¹⁸⁶

What entitlement and arrogance have torn down, God seeks to restore (Psalm 10).
Recommendations for CTR include:

- Promoting equitable accountability to policies, shared values, and decisions regardless of role or association.
- Incorporating consensus-based decision-making practices.
- Engaging in shared decision-making that reflects full participation, mutual understanding, inclusive solutions, and shared responsibility.

Empowerment and choice reflect churches that understand the importance of power differentials and ways in which members, historically, have been diminished in voice and choice and were often recipients of coercive treatment. Staff and leadership are facilitators of recovery rather than controllers of recovery. Staff are empowered to do their work as well as possible by adequate organizational support. This is a parallel process as staff need to feel safe as much as people receiving services.¹⁸⁷ Christ the Rock's values for helping hurting people were consistent throughout the interviews and its investment in lay and professional counselors offers a needed service to the community while complementing ministry values. However, this service breaks down quickly for those seeking help for hurt committed by CTR leadership. Other challenges to empowerment and choice that emerged through the interviews within historic structures include conflict of interests across the organization and controlled accountability on the Elder board. Over-dependence and bias was created by employment and membership on the Elder board within the same family at the same time. Someone required to report misconduct by leadership was not just required to work their way through a typical organizational hierarchy but one that also involved individuals dependent on the accused for their livelihood as gatekeepers in the process.

“There was nepotism and covering up. A lot of those pastors were paid staff as well, and so their jobs depended on the whole ship staying afloat.”¹⁸⁸

A dynamic that has changed recently at Christ the Rock is that the lead pastor no longer selects the elders, and there is movement toward growing the supportive offerings and pathways outside the church. One leader shared,

“I would like to see coaching where they have a person of their own choosing outside of the (organization) as an accountability partner that they can go to. And I do think it would be helpful to have outside people do the coaching. I think the coaches we have are

¹⁸⁶ Transcript.

¹⁸⁷ SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf> (2014).

¹⁸⁸ Transcript.

pretty unbiased and have stepped into challenging some of the senior leaders on staff on behalf of other staff people, but it's still an awkward thing. I'm not sure how to handle HR issues without utilizing our HR department, but maybe outside mediators might be something in the future that might be helpful."¹⁸⁹

This is a tremendous development and a clear structural step towards healthy empowerment and choice.

God equips His children with gifts that are meant for service and His family is large and diverse. Depending on members of the family of Christ that exist outside of the ministry of Christ the Rock can celebrate this tremendous reality and offer deeper ministry. No one faith community is called to be everything that a person needs all the time. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)¹⁹⁰ Recommendations for the church include:

- Exploring policies and practices that account for the inherent conflict of interests that can occur when related people hold positions of power, particularly at the same time.
- Consistently make mandated reports to the appropriate entities for concerns about children
- Create a process that provides a clear pathway for adult survivors of misconduct to report outside of the leadership structure and supports their choice of healing services
- Exploring a policy that triggers automatic external referrals for counseling and coaching sought by staff
- Explore joining an alliance of similar churches and/or church network that could provide assistance and structures in these efforts

Cultural, historical and gender considerations are characterized by the church actively moving past cultural stereotypes and offering equitable access to responsive services and incorporating policies, protocols, and processes that are responsive to the needs of individuals served and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.¹⁹¹ Interviews with current leadership indicate that there is a concerted effort to nurture a new culture at Christ the Rock. This is important work. Cultural characteristics that emerged across interviews to consider in these efforts included leadership paranoia and sensitivity to criticism:

*"I learned to be very subtle, which was a form of obviously cowardice, perhaps on my fault, or my part, and safety, all of that. But I knew I would hurt him. I just instinctively knew I'd hurt him if I'd bring stuff up, or something. And I realized I shouldn't hurt him, and I knew if I did, I wouldn't have any influence anymore."*¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Transcript.

¹⁹⁰ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills."

¹⁹¹ <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>.

¹⁹² Transcript.

Other cultural characteristics that emerged included an emphasis on unreasonable loyalty, a tendency to blame others for in-group misfortunes, and a lack of diversity in top leadership. Importantly, there is clear evidence of a desire to both change the culture and ensure greater accountability for leadership.

“We don't protect people. We seek the truth. We keep the good of the church and community in mind ahead of protecting the feelings of people, even families. We don't want to hide, we don't want to be an organization or a church that is a respecter of persons. We want to be [a] respecter of Jesus and of what God's called us to do. We want to be mission-driven, not person-driven.”¹⁹³

The church is most valid and effective in doing what Jesus did: supporting goodness and impartiality to reflect God’s original intention for all of creation to flourish—in particular, the outcast and the vulnerable, as directed in Jeremiah 22: 3-5.¹⁹⁴ Recommendations for the church include:

- Sharing public forums such as preaching with diverse voices
- Exploring Christ-like processes for receiving criticism and developing a culture of listening
- Diversifying the Elder Board with specific emphasis on historically marginalized populations in the church and broader community
- Devotion to accountability at all leadership levels

¹⁹³ Transcript.

¹⁹⁴ Jeremiah 22:3-5, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Do justice and righteousness, and save one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. And do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place. For if you will indeed perform this instruction, then kings will enter the gates of this house, sitting in David’s place on his throne, riding in chariots and on horses, the king himself, his servants, and his people. But if you will not obey these words, I swear by Myself,’ declares the Lord, ‘that this house will become a place of ruins.’”