



GRACE

Godly Response to Abuse
in the Christian Environment

Statement from the GRACE Board of Directors

The GRACE board is deeply disturbed about the revelations of sexual misconduct by Tullian Tchividjian. As an organization that deals with the abuse of God's lambs and the damage silence causes we feel compelled to speak. We believe that no material institution is more sacred to God than His lambs – be it church or mission or family. Institutions ordained by God were destroyed at His hand when they became corrupt. Given that we must be what He calls His people to be or we too will have chosen silence and darkness over truth and light.

Dear victims – and you are indeed victims. You have suffered and we do not want to add our silence to that suffering. Once again, one of God's shepherds used his position of authority, his gift of words, his intellect and personality to draw you in when you were vulnerable and in need of care. All power belongs to Christ. Any power we have is derivative and sacred and to be used only for His glory and the good of His people. Anything less is an abuse of that power. You have been victims of the gross misuse of power God intended for your good. We grieve with you. We stand with you in the light. You have with courage exposed the deeds of darkness. Thank you, for we as the Body of Christ need your voices but now that the light shines a failure to respond on our part means we have turned from the light you turned on. We pray for you, knowing full

well that each and every one of you has a hard road ahead as you seek newness of life, healing and a restoring of your souls. We pray that the failure of a shepherd will not lead you to forsake the Good and Great Shepherd who turns tables over and cracks whips when those in His church rob His sheep and distort the truth of who God is. We also pray that God will multiply the fruit of your hard labor to step into light to cause the greater body to examine itself regarding the many silenced victims that live in its midst.

Dear church of Jesus Christ, our God feeds and folds His sheep. He speaks truth and does not deceive. He protects us from wolves both inside and outside the fold. He does so by laying His own down at the gate. We fear that we have often helped wolves deceive others and hide themselves in sheep's clothing for our own gain and comfort. In doing so we have not loved those who prey on God's sheep for we have left them in their darkness and bondage. There are many untended, discarded victims in our midst. We are called by God to stand in the light they have brought, tend their wounds, lift the fallen and tenderly carry those who cannot stand. We are nothing like our Lord if we fail to do so. May the fruit of this grievous sin bring a sweeping of God's refining fire through the lives of His people across the globe.

At a minimum, God's "refining fire" requires the Christian community to put in place long overdue reforms that will limit the possibility of continuing transgressions against the vulnerable.

These reforms include:

- 1. Seminary education of pastors about maintaining appropriate boundaries.** Every seminary must provide education on maintaining appropriate boundaries between a pastor and the children or adults he or she may counsel. This training should include instruction

on understanding the impact of trauma¹ and when and how to refer survivors of abuse to professional mental health providers. If a church is hiring or has hired a pastor who has not received this sort of training, it can and should be conducted after the fact.

2. Rigorous screening and selection of pastors or other church leaders who provide

counseling. The Centers for Disease Control has promulgated guidelines for screening and selecting those who will supervise, counsel or exercise a leadership role over

children. These guidelines include background checks, social media checks, reference

checks and formalized interviews about child protection guidelines.² We believe the CDC

guidelines are a solid foundation for churches to use in the screening and selection of

pastors.

3. Implement checks and balances to minimize abusive situations. Those who provide

pastoral counseling must read and agree to adhere to an appropriate Code of Ethics such

as that promulgated by the American Association of Christian Counselors which strictly

prohibits sexual contact between pastors and those they are counseling. This includes not

only prohibitions on sexual contact but sexual innuendo, sexual “humor,” comments on

attractiveness, etc.³ Pastoral counselors must receive oversight from other pastors, elders

or others who can hold them accountable to the highest possible standard of ethics. If at

all possible, pastoral counseling should be conducted in a church office with windows.

¹ See e.g., Vincent J. Felitti & Robert F. Anda, *The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare*, in RUTH A. LANIUS, ERIC VERMETTEN, AND CLARE PAIN, *THE IMPACT OF EARLY LIFE TRAUMA ON HEALTH AND DISEASE: THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC* (CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS 2010).

² . Saul & NC Audage, *Preventing Child Sexual Abuse within Youth-Serving Organizations: Getting Started on Policies and Procedures*, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (2007).

³ AACC Code of Ethics, p. 16.

Clergy and other church leaders should also adhere to appropriate policies pertaining to texting and the use of social media.⁴

4. Implementing clear policies for responding to abusive conduct, including reporting abuse to the appropriate authorities, removing abusive pastors from any leadership role and, most importantly, supporting survivors.

a. Reporting abuse to the authorities. It is a crime for any pastor to engage in sexual conduct with a child and, in many states, it is a crime for a pastor to engage in sexual conduct with an adult he or she is providing pastoral care to.⁵ Every church must have in place a mechanism to ensure that any criminal conduct committed by a pastor or other called worker will be immediately reported to law enforcement and that the church will fully comply with any subsequent investigation.

b. Removing abusive pastors. Although Christ died for all sinners and paid the penalty for all sins, this doesn't mean a pastor who has violated one or more of his or her parishioners should continue to hold a leadership role in the church. Christ instructed us to be as "wise as serpents" (Mt. 10:16) and common sense compels us to remove abusive leaders so they cannot harm others. These leaders can and should be ministered to⁶ but this does not mean they should be given a second chance to violate the vulnerable. If Moses was denied entry to the promised land

⁴ As one example of a social media policy pertaining to interactions with youth, see these recommendations from the Jacob Wetterling Resource Center: <http://www.gundersenhealth.org/app/files/public/2113/NCPTC-Social-Networking-Policy.pdf>

⁵ In Minnesota, for example, it is a crime punishable by up to 15 years in prison for a pastor to have sex with someone he or she is providing "religious or spiritual advice, aid, or comfort..." MINN. STAT. SECTION 609.344, SUBD. 1(k)(1)(ii).

⁶ For appropriate guidelines in ministering to sex offenders, *see generally*, Victor Vieth, *Ministering to Sex Offenders: Ten Lessons from Henry Gerecke*, 112 WISCONSIN LUTHERAN QUARTERLY 209 (2015).

because he struck a rock the wrong way (Nu 20:12), clergy who violate the children or adults entrusted to them should be denied the pulpit.

c. Educating parishioners about what they can expect during pastoral counseling and where to report if they believe a pastor has exceeded his or her appropriate roles.

Patients at a hospital have explained to them various procedures and routinely receive a patient's bill of rights. Similarly, children or adults receiving pastoral counseling should be aware of guidelines for the counseling and what they can do should a pastor or other counselor engage in inappropriate conduct.

d. Supporting survivors of clergy abuse. When a congregation discovers a pastor has abused a child or adult in his or her care, the church has a responsibility to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual damage. This includes assuming the financial cost of medical and mental health expenses or any other reasonable requests made by a victim. If the victim remains in the congregation, the abusive pastor should not be allowed to remain in the same church.

Although we must continue to speak against abuse within the church, speech without action is a hollow reminder the church has done too little for too long to protect the vulnerable. In the midst of this most recent scandal, we pray the church's future will be better than our past.

GRACE Board of Directors

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