

Report on the  
Independent Investigation  
of  
Allegations of Sexual Abuse by a Staff Member of  
The Falls Church between May 1990 and January 2002

*Sensitive Material Advisory: This Report contains numerous references to sexually explicit conversations, unwanted physical touching, and activities that may be seen as sexual grooming. Those who may have experienced past trauma should proceed with care and caution, and parents should exercise care over the access of this Report to any of their minor children.*

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I.  
BRIEF BACKGROUND

The Falls Church Anglican (“TFCA” or the “Church”) is an Anglican parish located in Falls Church, Virginia. Many of the events discussed in this Report occurred when the Church was under the ecclesiastical authority of the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia and the Episcopal Church in the United States of America (“ECUSA”). In December 2006, however, an overwhelming majority of the congregation (then referred to as “The Falls Church Episcopal”) voted to disaffiliate from the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia and ECUSA, and to join the Anglican District of Virginia, under the Convocation of Anglicans in North America. TFCA later affiliated with the Anglican Church in North America and its Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic and maintains those affiliations today.

TFCA is governed by a vestry, which is made up of the Rector, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, and other elected lay members. The Church operates under the supervision of the Bishop of the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic of the Anglican Church in North America.

John Yates (“Rev. Yates”) served as the Rector of TFCA from 1979 to 2019. He was succeeded by Sam Ferguson (“Rev. Ferguson”) in May 2019, who is the current Rector.

In 1990, the Church hired a new youth director, Jeffrey T. Taylor (“Taylor”). Taylor had previously served as the youth director of a church outside Chicago. He was a charismatic and talented youth leader and, after beginning work at the Church in or around May 1990, was successful rather quickly in building the Church’s youth program, which became known as Cornerstone. Under Taylor’s leadership, Cornerstone grew into a substantial

church youth program, at various times ministering to 300 to 500 young people. Taylor served in that position until September 1999, when he transitioned into a new role within the Church as Director of Adult Discipleship. He subsequently left the Church in January 2002 to assume a youth director role at Church of the Apostles in Atlanta, Georgia.

While employed by the Church, Taylor was known, in part, for his focus on discipling young men on the sexual challenges that young men face with lust and sexual desire. However, during his employment, the Church did not receive any reports or complaints of sexual abuse by Taylor (although, as explained more fully below, some of his actions or his approach to ministry raised questions in the minds of a number of others involved).

In 2007, five years after Taylor left the Church, Rev. Yates received a report from a former participant in Cornerstone that he had been subjected to overt sexual abuse<sup>1</sup> by Taylor. After confronting Taylor in person, Yates immediately reached out to Christ Church of Atlanta, where Taylor was then serving in Atlanta, Georgia. (At that point, Taylor had left Church of the Apostles and had become employed at Christ Church of Atlanta.)

Rev. Yates informed the Christ Church of Atlanta Rector of the allegations. Christ Church confronted Taylor, but Taylor denied the allegations of overt sexual abuse. He was directed to cease all youth ministry but allowed to remain on staff to assist with other ministry. Ultimately, after further investigation of Taylor's conduct by the Personnel Committee of Christ Church, in September 2009, Taylor was forced to resign and surrender his ordination (he had been ordained in the Anglican church in 2005).

Rev. Yates and the Church took some other actions in response to the disclosure in 2007 (which are discussed below), but no formal investigation was undertaken at that time, meaning there was no structured effort to systematically reach out to other Cornerstone participants.

In 2021, parents whose two sons had participated in the Cornerstone program reached out to Rev. Yates to express that before their eldest son had unexpectedly passed away, he informed them that he had been sexually abused by Taylor. Rev. Yates informed TFCA leadership of these allegations and sought to provide pastoral care to the parents, but the Church did not otherwise conduct an investigation or attempt to reach out to other former Cornerstone participants.

In 2023, the Bishop of the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic of the Anglican Church in North America became aware of the allegations referenced above. Because the Church had never conducted a formal investigation of the 2007 or 2021 charges, the Bishop directed TFCA to undertake this investigation.

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<sup>1</sup> This term ("overt sexual abuse") is defined in Section IV, below, as regards its usage in this Report.

Shortly thereafter, this firm was retained to conduct an independent investigation of the allegations that were raised in 2007 and 2021, as well as any other allegations of abuse relating to Taylor or the youth program that arose during the course of the investigation. Over the course of the first several weeks of the investigation, an investigation plan was developed, which is appended hereto as Exhibit 1.

The full scope of the investigation and the findings of the investigation are set forth below.

## II. COMMENTS ON THE NATURE OF THIS INVESTIGATION

Before delving into the full scope of the investigation, the findings, and the conclusions, it may be worthwhile to address some of the understandable skepticism and pessimism encountered in conducting this investigation. It is beyond regrettable that Christian churches, both Protestant and Catholic, over the years have done a poor job of investigating and addressing credible allegations of abuse, both sexual and spiritual.

Sadly, perhaps this is not to be unexpected, as churches are led by men and women who, while devoted to sharing and encouraging the knowledge of Jesus Christ, are nonetheless flawed and broken, prone to hiding and avoiding confrontation, more concerned at times with reputation than with truth, and more concerned at times with protecting abusers than caring for victims.

Given this history, it is not surprising that there are those who have assumed that my role (especially given my profession as an attorney for more than 35 years) has been to diminish or “whitewash” the events of the last three decades. To those who carry that skepticism or suspicion, I can do no more than ask you to read the Report and then judge accordingly. My commitment has been to find the truth, to neither understate nor overstate facts, and to faithfully convey the perspectives and beliefs of those who have been involved in these events.

It is worth noting that throughout this six-month investigation, a number of witnesses have shared their critiques of the process employed. Some of those critiques have been fair, while others (in my judgment) have been misplaced. Having conducted numerous investigations throughout my career, I can say with certainty that there is no perfect way to conduct an investigation of this magnitude, and in every investigation, hindsight allows one to identify ways in which the investigation might have proceeded differently. What matters in the end is whether the investigation was successful in deriving the truth and accurately describing the events in question, so as to open up doors for those wounded to find healing and restoration. I hope that will be the case here.

It should be noted that in order to maintain the independence of the investigation, drafts of this Report were not provided to TFCA in advance for review and comment. Relevant

excerpts of the Report were shared with some of the affected witnesses, both to confirm accuracy and to ensure the witnesses felt that their privacy was being adequately protected.

It also should not be surprising to the reader that, given the passage of time as regards many of these events, at times witnesses had different recollections of conversations or the timing of incidents. Where material (*i.e.*, not just related to a minor or lesser fact), we have noted the different recollections or memories of those involved.

In closing, we hope that this Report brings to light anything that has been hidden and that those who were involved in or affected by the events described below find freedom in the truth being brought to light.

### III. SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION

This firm was retained to conduct the investigation at the end of September 2023. In speaking with the leadership of the Church about undertaking this investigation, the leadership made clear that there were no limits or parameters, financial or otherwise, imposed upon the investigator as regards conducting the investigation or reaching the findings that would be produced by the independent investigation.

On Sunday, October 8, 2023, the current Rector of TFCA, Sam Ferguson, made an announcement at the end of each of the 9:00 am and 11:00 Church services<sup>2</sup> that an independent investigation had been commenced. That announcement was as follows:

I am sharing with you some profoundly sad news. We are looking into credible reports that between the years of 1990 and 2002 – when we were the Falls Church Episcopal – the church’s youth director may have engaged in sexual abuse with two adolescents.

We are grieved for any and all who may have experienced this abuse, and we are in the process of addressing this as best we can given the passage of time. Specifically, we have formed a Special Committee of the Vestry and have engaged an outside independent resource to conduct an investigation of this matter.

This investigation is intended to determine whether others were affected by the purported conduct, coordinate care for those impacted by these events, and our highest priority is to bring pastoral care and counseling to those affected.

We are in communication with our Bishop and he is in agreement with our approach to addressing this. We have pledged to keep him informed of our progress. While we expect this process to take some time, our goal is to be

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<sup>2</sup> The same announcement was also made at the end of the 8:00 AM service by another member of the Church’s clergy.

transparent with you while also being sensitive to those who may have been impacted.

Our deep desire as a church is to pastorally step into this darkness to bring the healing and light of Christ wherever we can.

We cannot fix whatever may have been broken in the past, but we can pray and work for healing in the present and the future. And we ask that you join us in doing so.

Two confidential email accounts have been set up – the first one [confidentialFCA@islerdare.com](mailto:confidentialFCA@islerdare.com) goes to the leader of the outside independent investigation. Please use this account if you have information to share that may be relevant to the investigation.

The second email – [specialcommittee@tfcanglican.org](mailto:specialcommittee@tfcanglican.org) is for questions and goes to the special committee of our vestry.

And, if you have experienced abuse in any setting, we want this church to be a place where you encounter the healing mercies of Jesus Christ. Our congregational care team has resources available for anyone in need of help.

Moments like this remind us that the world is indeed broken, but we do not lose hope, for He has promised to make all things new.

Several weeks later, a similar announcement was made at about a half-dozen churches that have sprung out of TFCA (often referred to as “daughter churches”). Over the course of the weeks and months that followed, 45 to 50 potential witnesses reached out via the confidential email box. Almost all of those email communications resulted in interviews being conducted.

In early January 2024, after compiling a list of email addresses for more than 75 individuals who had participated in the Cornerstone program, TFCA also sent out an email letter (signed by Rev. Ferguson) encouraging anyone who had any information pertaining to the sexual abuse allegations to reach out to the independent investigator. A number of former Cornerstone participants who received the email letter forwarded the communication to others with whom they had remained in contact, and several faithfully undertook to compile and share lists of other Cornerstone participants. Our sincere thanks and appreciation to those who participated in the process and encouraged others to reach out.

The efforts above led to interviews of numerous individuals with knowledge of the events in question. The investigation included 94 interviews of 82 witnesses (several witnesses were interviewed more than once), either in person, via Zoom, or by telephone.<sup>3</sup> These witnesses included the following:

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<sup>3</sup> It is anticipated that the publication of this Report may prompt others with knowledge of these events to come forward and share relevant information, and consequently, there may be additional interviews conducted in the future. Any person who has additional relevant information or wishes to share their story is strongly encouraged to reach out and contact the investigator at [ConfidentialFCA@islerdare.com](mailto:ConfidentialFCA@islerdare.com).



- 34 former students/Cornerstone participants;
- 19 parents of former Cornerstone participants, 7 of whom also served at various times on the vestry;
- 1 vestry member who was not also a parent;
- 2 parents of participants in the Atlanta youth program;
- 1 participant in the Atlanta youth program;
- 20 current or former TFCA clergy, staff, or volunteers;
- 4 representatives of Christ Church of Atlanta; and
- 1 representative of Church of the Apostles in Atlanta.

The investigator was given unfettered access to witnesses who were willing to participate, including Rev. Yates who met with the investigator on three separate occasions for multiple hours.

The total time spent interviewing witnesses amounted to almost 100 hours. In addition, there were several individuals who reached out to the investigator to comment on or raise questions regarding the investigation, but who ultimately declined to be interviewed (despite several follow-up emails).

The investigator was also given unfettered access to the Church's records, to the extent that such records could be located given the passage of time and the relocation of TFCA in May 2012 from its prior building to a temporary location (and subsequently to its current facility). In addition, TFCA reached out to the current Falls Church Episcopal ("FCE") to request that it conduct a good-faith search for any relevant records. In this regard, FCE was extremely responsive and helpful in producing records relevant to this inquiry, and its assistance and cooperation in this process have been greatly appreciated.

Included among the hundreds of pages of documents reviewed were the personal journals of Rev. Yates (some excerpts of which are included below), which Rev. Yates made fully available to the investigator.

Finally, in light of the investigator's understanding of the possibility of law enforcement activity, and a desire to cooperate with law enforcement, after considerable contemplation, no effort was made to reach out to Taylor, and thus this Report includes his responses to various allegations only as such responses were recorded by various individuals in the past.

For purposes of seeking to maintain the confidentiality and anonymity of those interviewed, individuals are identified in this Report in accordance with the following protocol:

- Former Cornerstone participants will be referred to as Student [No.].
- Other than senior clergy Rev. John Yates and Rev. Sam Ferguson, all Church paid staff and/or youth group volunteers will be referred to as Staff [No.].
- Any parent who provided testimony<sup>4</sup> relating to his or her role as a parent will be referred to as Parent [No.].
- Any parent (or non-parent) who served at various times on the vestry of the Church will be referred to as Vestry [No.] with respect to testimony relating to his or her role as a vestry member.<sup>5</sup>
- Any Atlanta church leader who participated in the interview process will be referred to as Atlanta Church Leader [No.].

Finally, in forming the findings and opinions below, the investigator also has relied upon the insight of Dr. William Clark, PhD, LPC, an experienced clinical psychologist and professional counselor with substantial experience in dealing with sexual abuse and trauma.

#### IV. DEFINING TERMS.

As those who spend their careers in the field of abuse and trauma can no doubt attest, defining critical terms is not always easy, particularly terms that have evolved over the course of many decades. What follows is a brief summary of certain terms that are used in this Report, including the way in which two key terms – “overt sexual abuse” and “covert sexual abuse” – are being used.

*Sexual Abuse.* In his book, Understanding Sexual Abuse: a Guide for Ministry Leaders and Survivors,<sup>6</sup> Tim Hein writes:

The term *sexual abuse* can cover a range of acts, but it most specifically refers to undesired sexual behavior of one person upon another. In this book, we’re exploring the subject of *child sexual abuse*, and in that case there is really no need for the word *undesired* in the definition. Any sexual behavior

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<sup>4</sup> Although this Report uses phrases like “testimony”, “testify”, or “testified”, these phrases are being used in a more general sense and not under a legal definition where typically those phrases are used to describe someone who is providing information under oath.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, for the avoidance of doubt, the same person might be recorded as both Parent X and Vestry Y, depending on whether the testimony being recorded was related to their role as a parent or their role as a member of the vestry.

<sup>6</sup> Available at <https://www.ivpress.com/understanding-sexual-abuse-ebook>.

by a person toward a child, that is, a person under the legal age of consent, is abusive.

*Id.* at 4. Diane Langberg, in her book, Counseling the Survivors of Sexual Abuse,<sup>7</sup> defines sexual abuse of a minor, as follows:

Sexual abuse of a child occurs whenever a child is sexually exploited by an older person for the satisfaction of the abuser's needs. It consists of any sexual activity – verbal, visual, or physical – engaged in without consent. The child is considered unable to consent due to developmental immaturity and an inability to understand sexual behavior.

*Id.* at 61-62. Dr. Langberg goes on to note:

Verbal sexual abuse can include sexual threats, sexual comments about the child's body, lewd remarks, harassment, or suggestive comments.

Visual sexual abuse includes the viewing of pornographic material, exhibitionism, and voyeurism.

Physical sexual abuse includes intercourse, cunnilingus, fellatio, sodomy, digital penetration, masturbation in front of the child or masturbation of the adult by the child, fondling of the breasts and genitals, and exposure of the child's body to others.

*Id.* at 62.

Likewise, Dan Allender, in his book, The Wounded Heart,<sup>8</sup> defines sexual abuse as follows:

Sexual abuse is any contact or interaction (visual, verbal, or psychological) between a child/adolescent and an adult when the child/adolescent is being used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or any other person.

*Id.* at 47.

The current policy governing the protection of children and prevention of sexual abuse at TFCA is the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic (DOMA) Policy Manual for the Protection of Children,<sup>9</sup> which was updated in November 2019 (hereinafter “the DOMA Policy Manual”). The DOMA Policy Manual defines sexual abuse as follows:

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse of a child is a criminal offense in every state in the United States. Regardless of state, an abused child is defined, in part, as

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<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://www.wtsbooks.com/products/counseling-survivors-of-sexual-abuse-diane-langberg-9781591605195?variant=9782770106415>.

<sup>8</sup> Available at <https://theallendercenter.org/store/products/the-wounded-heart/>.

<sup>9</sup> Available at <https://www.anglicandoma.org/policy-handbook>.

a child less than eighteen years old, whose parents or other persons responsible for his/her care:

Commit or allow to be committed any illegal sexual act upon [that] child, including incest, rape, indecent exposure, and prostitution, or to allow [that] child to be used in any sexually explicit visual material.

Sexual abuse encompasses acts of sexual assault and sexual exploitation by a parent or other caregiver. It includes a broad range of behaviors, such as fondling; oral, vaginal, or anal intercourse; indecent exposure; voyeurism; and sexual exploitation. It may consist of a single incident or of many incidents over a long period of time. Victims range in age from infants up to the age of 18.

*Id.* at 5.

*Overt Sexual Abuse and Covert Sexual Abuse.* Some abuse specialists utilize the terms “overt sexual abuse” and “covert sexual abuse” to categorize different types of abuse.

Overt abuse involves specific physical contact. An adult either touches a child in some inappropriate way or has the child touch the adult. Overt abuse includes such things as fondling breasts or genitals, masturbation of the child or adult (either coerced self-stimulation or done by another person), sexual kinds of kissing, oral sex performed on either the adult or child, or penetration (vaginally or anally) with the hand, penis, or an object.

....

Covert sexual abuse occurs without direct physical contact. Examples include inappropriate nudity, forcing a child to watch others being sexual, exposing a child to pornography, or spying on a child bathing or dressing. Sexual teasing or inappropriate comments about body development or sexual activity are also abusive.

....

Notice that none of these activities has to be “forced” in the traditional sense of the word. No weapon has to be used. No threats have to be made. The perpetrator simply uses his or her status as an older, more powerful person in order to achieve the goal of personal satisfaction. The imbalance of power is one of the characteristics of sexual abuse. It’s why sexual activity is still abusive even if the “child” is a teenager. Adolescents simply do not have the maturity to “choose” to be sexual with an older, and therefore more powerful, person.

....

Note, too, that most sexual abuse occurs with someone the child knows and trusts. Most perpetrators are close to the child such as a parent, stepparent, grandparent or other relative, teacher, coach, youth leader, or good family friend. The relationship provides easy access and often a (false) sense of safety.

Ferree, Marnie, No Stones: Women Redeemed from Sexual Addiction, InterVarsity Press (2010), p. 125-26.<sup>10</sup>

As regards the use of these terms – “overt sexual abuse” and “covert sexual abuse” – in this Report, they are being defined as follows:

“Overt sexual abuse,” as used herein, means physical contact of a sexual nature, typically involving the private areas (male or female genitalia, female breasts, anus) of the victim or the perpetrator, which is intended by the perpetrator to arouse or satisfy sexual desire of the perpetrator or the victim.

“Covert sexual abuse,” as used herein, means conduct that may involve some physical contact of areas other than private areas, but is primarily verbal or visual in nature, such as discussions about sexual practices, comments about the victim’s body or the perpetrator’s body, depictions of sex acts, inquiries about sex organs, etc., which is explicitly intended by the perpetrator, or that reasonably may be inferred from the actions of the perpetrator to be designed, to arouse or satisfy sexual desire of the perpetrator or the victim.

*Sexual Grooming.* According to the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network (RAINN), the largest nonprofit anti-sexual assault organization in the United States, grooming can be defined as “manipulative behaviors that an abuser uses to gain access to a potential victim, coerce them to agree to the abuse, and reduce the risk of being caught.” The following are common grooming tactics that abusers use:

1. **Target Selection:** Groomers observe and choose potential targets according to accessibility and perceived vulnerability. Life transitions, emotional challenges, and disruptions in one’s personal or family life are all examples of things that can make a target appear more susceptible to manipulation.
2. **Target Access and Isolation:** Groomers gravitate to opportunities that allow access to potential targets, whether it’s through things like work, volunteering, or social contacts....
3. **Building Trust:** Groomers work to build familiarity with the target and develop a trusting connection. Gifts, secrets, attention, praise, and encouragement are all forms of positive reinforcement used to facilitate a sense of safety.
4. **Emotional Connection:** Groomers continue to develop a connection with the target by exchanging more personal information, offering

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<sup>10</sup> Available at <https://www.ivpress.com/no-stones>.

emotional support, listening to one's feelings and problems, or offering guidance.

5. **Testing Boundaries:** Groomers gradually test and push boundaries in various ways such as introducing inappropriate topics, compliments, or activities to measure the target's reaction.
6. **Desensitization to Physical Touch and Sexual Topics:** Groomers start with seemingly innocuous physical contact such as a high-five, a hand on the shoulder, hugging, tickling, or wrestling. The appearance of harmlessness creates a false sense of safety for the target....
7. **Secrecy and Isolation:** Perpetrators encourage and pressure targets into increased secrecy from friends and family, including more time spent alone with the target....
8. **Favoritism:** Flattery can grow an emotional bond that makes it difficult to question the groomer's motives. Groomers want to make the target feel unique or special to the groomer which fosters a sense of exclusivity in the relationship. Groomers may highlight a target's specific talents and award them more privileges or opportunities to excel than surrounding peers.
9. **Gifts and Favors:** Groomers may use gift-giving or favors to create a sense of indebtedness in the target....
10. **Gradual Escalation:** Interactions become increasingly demanding of the target despite seeming innocent at first. This could involve escalated emotional or spiritual intimacy, physical contact, or both....
11. **Manipulation and Gaslighting:** Perpetrators are skilled in manipulative tactics that control the narrative and make it difficult for the target to question or challenge . . . what they're experiencing....
12. **Threats, Blackmail, and Intimidation:** In some instances, groomers may use threats or blackmail to maintain control of the target....

Woven Trauma Therapy, <https://woentraumatherapy.com/blog/what-is-grooming>.

V.  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As detailed more fully below, the investigation determined that Taylor, while employed with the Church, engaged in varying levels of conduct that was inappropriate and would fall within the definitions of sexual grooming or sexual abuse, especially when read in the context of the relationship and standing of Taylor and the male students in his ministry, with three incidents of that abuse being significantly more overt than the others.

The investigation also determined that, during the years that Taylor was employed, Church leadership had no knowledge or awareness that Taylor had engaged in acts of overt sexual abuse. This critical finding is addressed more fully below.

There was general knowledge amongst some parents (including Rev. Yates) and other youth staff and volunteers (who reported up to Taylor) that Taylor exhibited a strong proclivity for speaking with young men about lust and masturbation in the name of wanting to help them address sexual sin. But none of those interviewed believed, at the time, that Taylor had engaged in sexual abuse of any Cornerstone youth.

A few of those interviewed theorized that the change in Taylor's job responsibilities within the Church in 1999 likely reflected some knowledge on the part of the Church about Taylor's conduct and evinced an effort to cover it up by moving him away from the youth program. As outlined in significant detail below, there is no evidence to support that narrative, and, indeed, the available evidence contradicts that theory.

The investigation also determined that when the first allegation of sexual abuse was brought to the attention of Church leadership in 2007, the Church took several proper steps towards remediation of that situation but failed to take all of the necessary steps to determine whether there had been other victims of sexual abuse by Taylor. While the context and perceptions of those involved in the 2007 disclosure provide some explanation for why the Church did not do more at that time, the context and perceptions do not change the reality that TFCA failed to do everything reasonably within its power to address the possibility that Taylor had engaged in other instances of sexual abuse while on staff with the Church.

When a second credible allegation of overt sexual abuse was brought forth in 2021, TFCA again failed to initiate any kind of investigation. Although, as also discussed below, this failure may have resulted in part from some miscommunications and misunderstandings amongst the involved parties, TFCA, in 2021 (as in 2007), could have and should have done better in addressing these issues.



VI.  
FACTUAL FINDINGS

A. Taylor's Employment with the Church as Minister of Youth

*The Hiring of Taylor*

In 1988-89, the Church embarked upon a search for a youth minister. See Exhibit 2 (Job Description) (name redacted). Taylor was initially approached by the Church about the possibility of serving as its youth director in the spring of 1989. At that time, he was serving in a youth ministry position with Winnetka Bible Church in a suburb of Chicago. In May 1989, Taylor indicated that, while he was "flattered" by the Church's interest, he was "not currently looking for another position."

Rev. Yates subsequently spoke with Taylor about the position in June 1989, and then followed up with a brief letter enclosing some information about the Church. Several weeks later, Taylor communicated that he and his wife felt that it was not the right time for them to leave their current church, and declined the opportunity.

Apparently communications between the Church and Taylor continued, culminating in a meeting between Taylor and the youth minister search committee for the Church. See Exhibit 3 (Memo dated 12/24/89) (names, phone numbers, and salaries omitted).<sup>11</sup> The December 24 memo summarized Taylor's qualifications, accomplishments, and needs. It also included a brief summary of a reference check that the committee did with two administrative staff at the Winnetka Bible Church where Taylor was working. In relevant part, that memo included the following:

The staff does not know of his thoughts on leaving yet. I was able to speak with his secretary and the administrative assistant to the pastor who are the only ones that know of his possible departure. Both were very, very positive of Jeff, however both were concerned with his ability to meet his budget. In his defense, they felt the budget was not realistic, but he exceeded his \$9,100 budget by about \$3,000. He was not able to meet his budget in 1988 either. This was the ONLY weakness they could see, otherwise he is terrific with parents, outreach and the kids.

*Id.* (emphasis in original). The memorandum concluded, "I do think we should bring them out for an interview."

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<sup>11</sup> To remain consistent with the protocol of this Report, which is to maintain the confidentiality of those involved other than Taylor, Rev. Yates, and Rev. Ferguson, some names and contact information have been redacted from this exhibit and other exhibits. In addition, information pertaining to any staff salaries, including Taylor's, have also been redacted from these documents.



At some point, the search committee also obtained a copy of a brochure describing topics of ministry and topics on which Taylor was available to speak. See Exhibit 4 (Brochure) (phone number and address redacted). Perhaps most notably for purposes of this investigation, of the five messages that Taylor listed as being amongst his “most requested talks,” the first message listed was entitled “I Need Intimacy Not Sex.” *Id.*

It appears that Taylor and his wife visited Virginia and interviewed with the Church in January 1990, after which Taylor sent Rev. Yates a letter expressing his strong interest in continuing to pursue a position with the Church. Following these interviews, Taylor was offered the position as the Minister of Youth with a start date in May 1990. See Exhibit 5 (Ltr. dated 01/23/90) (address, names, and salaries redacted).

Taylor accepted the position and indicated that he had submitted a letter of resignation to Winnetka Bible Church, effective May 15, 1990, and intended to be in Virginia a few days later. See Exhibit 6 (Ltr. dated 02/07/90) (names and phone number redacted).

#### *The Birth of Cornerstone*

According to some of the students who were involved in the youth ministry at the Church at that time, Taylor arrived and began his new job in May or June 1990. During his first summer in the role, Taylor started a number of Bible studies and convened a group of students to serve as a leadership team. It was there that they came up with the name “Cornerstone” for the youth program of the Church.

Over the next couple of years, the group grew in popularity. According to students interviewed, Taylor was a very effective communicator and was very charismatic. By all accounts, Taylor was extremely effective in connecting with high school and junior high students. One student described him as “dynamic and charismatic.” Another student described Taylor as “a good speaker, an engaging leader who was a good mentor.” As noted by another student, during Taylor’s tenure, Cornerstone was “thriving,” and “business was good” at the Church. At its height, Cornerstone ministered to 300 to 500 young people.

Students and staff who were interviewed described Taylor as “beloved” by the families whose kids participated in Cornerstone. One staff member noted that families “idolized him.” Another staff member stated that Taylor “had an incredible grip on the culture [of the group] where he was this revered saint,” and commented that “parents adored him.” Still another staff member opined that Taylor was “revered as the mini-Jesus,” while yet another staff member referred to him as the “golden child” of the Church.

One former Cornerstone participant sent an email to express how grieved the participant was to have learned of this investigation, but also noted:

I can provide neither further accusation nor a substantive defense of him (since I cannot speak beyond what I know), but I do have many specific

memories of how he conducted himself with me and with other students, in individual, small group, and large group settings, and I hope that may shed some light on distinguishing what might be a normal range of behavior, and help identify whether there's an additional pattern of abusive behavior. I offer this in hopes that it can help you in your process, and because as I reflect on the years of our interaction, I'd offer that Jeff Taylor did right by me.

Many of the former Cornerstone participants interviewed expressed similar sentiments. As many as one-third of the 36 Cornerstone participants interviewed, and several of the 12 Cornerstone leaders interviewed, shared positive reflections about the impact Taylor had on their lives and in their Christian growth.

#### *The Growth of Cornerstone and Cornerstone Staff*

As noted, the youth program being overseen by Taylor experienced significant growth during his first few years. As Cornerstone grew, Taylor also expanded his ministry to include fifth and sixth grade boys. As of 1991, there was a program at the Church for fifth and sixth grade girls but no similar program for boys. In light of this, Taylor developed a program “to nurture the spiritual, emotional and social development of our 5th and 6th grade boys.” Exhibit 7 (Plan for the Development of 5th and 6th Grade Boys Program). He noted that a separate program for fifth and sixth grade boys was appropriate because “the younger boys are not ready emotionally, physically, mentally, socially, and most likely spiritually to be with the older kids. The difficulty and joys of early adolescence is nothing to rush into.” *Id.*

On August 7, 1991, Taylor sent a letter to the parents of fifth and sixth grade boys notifying them of the trial program. He noted:

For almost a year now, ever since I arrived at The Falls Church, I have received many inquiries concerning the possibility of a program for your sons' age group. Much of the interest has stemmed from the awareness that we have a ministry called “Narnia Club” for the 5th and 6th grade girls, but nothing for the boys. The boys are aware of this and some of them may even feel “cheated” or slighted in some way. The tide is changing!!!

Exhibit 8 (Ltr. dated 08/07/91).

It also became clear, after a relatively brief time, that Taylor was interested in expanding his role within the Church. In February 1992, he provided Rev. Yates a memo in which he recommended that the Church establish a position entitled “Director of Christian Education,” which would oversee children’s ministry in addition to junior high and senior high ministry. He followed up that proposal with another memo in April 1992 in which he proposed that he (Taylor) would fill this role, writing in part, as follows:

John, with this [staffing] formula, many of the time consuming elements of my current job could be delegated while maintaining those aspects that I am gifted in and called to accomplish.

I ask that you consider this approach as a viable plan, and know that I would not be suggesting it if I didn't feel #1 qualified for such a position, and #2 if I felt that it would hurt in any way our Cornerstone ministry. I would continue to give the quality of ministry to our students that you would want to see. I would in essence "work smarter, not harder."

Exhibit 9 (Memo dated 04/92) (names redacted). Rev. Yates recalled that they tried this type of arrangement "for a while," but said that "it did not work" and eventually Taylor just continued to focus on Cornerstone (and Crossroads<sup>12</sup>).

In the 1993-94 time period, the Church embarked upon a new venture, establishing a "Fellows" program, a Christian leadership program for recent college graduates. Taylor was made the initial Executive Director of the program, and was supported in that role by several key volunteers. However, by January 1995 (the middle of the second year of the Fellows Program), Taylor himself acknowledged that he had been stretched too thin by taking on the program. See Exhibit 10 (Memo dated 01/17/95) (names redacted). He stated, in part:

I am taking a good long look at my pride, my temperament, and my "Messiah-complex" nature, and realize that they are not serving me or the Lord well. I am constantly excited about all that is happening in the ministry, and would like to be able to devote more time to it. I also love the Bennett Fellows Program and feel more than ever that it is the right thing for the times. However, what Bennett needs to keep afloat is more than what I can shoulder.

*Id.* As a result, over the ensuing months, one of the other members of the Church, who had been closely involved with Taylor in overseeing the Fellows Program, took over as the Executive Director of the program. Over the next several years, a number of the Fellows assisted with the youth program, and so Taylor continued to have some involvement with the Fellows program in that way, but he no longer oversaw the program.

#### Concerns with Taylor's Leadership

Although Taylor and his leadership of the Cornerstone ministry were generally held in high regard by the leadership of the Church, some concerns were noted with regard to Taylor's leadership style, although notably for purposes of this investigation, these concerns were not focused on sexual abuse. Rather, in the midst of the success of

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<sup>12</sup> At some point, as the Cornerstone ministry (which included students in 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) grew, a separate group for middle school students (7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades) named Crossroads was established, but it is unclear from witness testimony precisely when Crossroads was founded as a separate group.

Cornerstone, some leaders were concerned about Taylor's disorganization when it came to finances and his tendency to focus on himself.

For example, one vestry member who served as a Warden during the mid-1990s recalled assigning another vestry member to work with Taylor on making sure that his expenses were properly recorded. Yet another vestry member, who was attempting to work with Taylor in managing the budget for Cornerstone, was surprised to learn that Taylor had sent letters out to parents of Cornerstone participants asking them to consider supporting the youth group, as it was this vestry member's understanding that the Church had directed Taylor not to make a separate financial appeal for the youth group. In a memo to Rev. Yates, this vestry member questioned whether Taylor had an issue with truthfulness.

In Taylor's Performance Evaluation for 1995, he indicated that he wanted to work on better communicating his vision and expectations. Rev. Yates noted a concern that Taylor worked as hard as he did and questioned his ability to delegate to others. Rev. Yates also commented that Taylor's "need for approval and need to succeed is a little unhealthy."

Notwithstanding these shortcomings in Taylor's performance and leadership, it was widely recognized within the Church that he was a very successful and charismatic leader. As Cornerstone continued to grow, Taylor recognized the need for additional full-time staff to help lead the program.

In August 1997, Taylor sent a memo to the Personnel Committee of the Church seeking approval to hire a Senior High Director in anticipation of growing from 425 active students to over 600. See Exhibit 11 (Memo dated 08/08/97). Taylor noted that he had been having in-depth discussions with Rev. Yates about expanding the scope of his (Taylor's) role. See *id.* In this 1997 memo to the Personnel Committee, he noted, "John sees me doing much more in ministering to the whole family, not just the student, and in training and equipping of other Youth Ministers." *Id.* Within two years, that change in focus for Taylor would come to fruition.

#### Mission Trips, Retreats, and Speaking Engagements

Throughout his tenure as Minister of Youth, Taylor advocated for and organized numerous mission trips. During the time that Taylor was on staff, Cornerstone students went on mission trips to South Dakota, New York (Syracuse), and Tennessee, among other locations. As referenced below, Taylor also took a small group of boys on a trip out of the country, even after he was no longer serving as the youth minister.

In August 1991, The Washington Post published an article entitled, "Youth Group's Journey of Faith Among the Sioux," which detailed Cornerstone's trip to the Lakota Sioux

reservation in South Dakota.<sup>13</sup> The article referenced “an advance trip to the reservation with Taylor.” According to several students, it was not uncommon for Taylor to take students on “scouting trips” ahead of mission trips. In speaking with one of the students who traveled to South Dakota on the advance scouting trip, he did not recall anything unusual or inappropriate taking place during the trip.

At the end of almost every year, Cornerstone held a youth retreat in Ocean City, Maryland at the Princess Royale hotel. In addition, the Cornerstone group typically was part of a churchwide retreat that took place at Shrine Mont Retreat Center in Orkney Springs, West Virginia. Taylor also held numerous leadership retreats at various locations for the student leaders of the ministry.

As the success of the Cornerstone ministry became more widely known within Christian circles, Taylor received a number of invitations to speak to other youth groups or at other youth retreats. On several of these trips, he obtained the permission of parents to have one or two boys accompany him in order to give them some exposure to other youth groups.

By 2001, Taylor was traveling to so many other churches and church retreats that it had become a point of concern for the leadership of the Church. In notes that Rev. Yates wrote to himself outlining concerns with Taylor’s role in the Church, he noted, “doesn’t keep us posted on travel; doesn’t run invitations by [leadership].”

## **B. The Culture of Taylor’s Ministry as Director of Cornerstone**

During the nine years that he led Cornerstone, Taylor embodied many positive aspects of youth ministry. He was devoted to the students in the group and made himself available for anyone who might want to speak with him, including holding open office hours in the afternoons after school where students could freely visit. He encouraged students to pursue their musical gifts and engaged in many practices that were designed to help the youth, particularly the young men, grow in their Christian faith.

Interviews with numerous students and staff/volunteers also painted a picture of Taylor’s ministry embodying the following characteristics as it grew and experienced success:

- A strong focus on personal discipleship, particularly one-on-one discipleship (conducted while taking boys out on “Coke dates”);
- A robust segregation of male students and female students;
- A fervent emphasis in communications with the male students on themes of purity and lust (including masturbation);

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<sup>13</sup> Washington Post Article, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1991/08/10/youth-groups-journey-of-faith-among-the-sioux/5b8ec2d2-91ea-4725-b2b8-9d87f372e259/>.

- A tendency to try to induce male students to share aspects of their life that they had not shared with any others;
- A persistent pattern of physicality between Taylor and some male students, including wrestling, “nut-smacking”, “oil-checks”, “credit card swipes”, and wedgies (all described below); and
- A tendency to comment on the physical attributes of various boys in the youth group.

All these characteristics are discussed in greater detail below.

#### One-on-One Time with Male Students

Taylor emphasized the importance of individual discipleship and frequently encouraged his various youth leaders to spend one-on-one time with the youth in their discipleship groups. This included meeting up with students after school and sometimes in the mornings. It is notable (and somewhat ironic) that Taylor stressed repeatedly to the various youth group volunteers and staff that it was important that any one-on-one time be spent in a public place or public setting to avoid the appearance of any impropriety. (As described below, Taylor did not apply this rule to himself.)

Staff 15 recalled Taylor frequently speaking to them about “sexual appropriateness,” which included not having extended one-on-one time with students. Taylor gave staff members directives such as, “Don’t have extended time in the car. Take them to public places.” Staff 13 remembered Taylor being “particular” about them spending time with students in public places where people would see them. According to one of the youth leaders, he told them to “always be above reproach.”

Taylor emphasized repeatedly and persistently that staff members should never allow themselves to be alone with students of the opposite sex. One of the leaders commented that Taylor had these conversations so frequently that it got to a point where it “all seemed like a bit much.” This leader now looks back at how odd it was that Taylor would talk about sexual appropriateness in just about every leadership meeting.

One of the female youth leaders observed that “the one-on-one ministry was a slightly different model for me, but I didn’t question it. To be honest, it was so successful; no one questioned Jeff.”

Numerous witnesses, both students and staff, made reference to Taylor’s use of the phrase, “Coke date.” A “Coke date” was where Taylor would take individual students out for a soda so they could spend time together and talk. Of those interviewed, 15 male students (Students 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 16, 19, 20, 26, 27, 28, 30) recalled going on at least one 1-on-1 Coke date with Taylor when they were minors.



While many of these Coke dates took place in public settings, such as the Burger King in Falls Church, nine male students (Students 1, 2, 3, 7, 12, 16, 19, 20, 27) remembered Taylor driving them to a secluded location to talk during a Coke date. It was often in these settings that Taylor would engage in detailed conversations with male students about sex or lust related topics, such as the following:

- Student 19 indicated that on one occasion, when they were alone in the car, Taylor brought up the topic of masturbation, as he often did. In this particular conversation, he asked what Student 19 would do if Taylor offered him \$15 to masturbate in front of him. Student 19 immediately responded that he would say “no” and get out of the car. Taylor replied with words such as, “well then why would you do it for free in front of God?”
- Student 1 recalled that Taylor would drive him home from Coke dates and, rather than pulling up in front of the student’s house, he would park a few hundred yards from the house so they could talk. Student 1 remembered those interactions this way: “We would be talking, and then it would be time to pray. And he [Taylor] would put his hand on my leg, then while we were praying he would begin to move his hand up towards my nuts. And I remember hitting his hand away. And I would look up at him and he had this sort of hurt look on his face.”
- Student 27 recalled Taylor parking on a street where he did not live to talk, near Madison Park in Falls Church. Taylor would often turn the conversation to issues of masturbation or lust. He recalled, “Jeff would just talk about like do you understand about penis erections and how they’re meant to be up to fit into the woman to have sex. All this stuff about penises that was bizarre.”
- Student 2 testified that Taylor would take him on Coke dates and park the car in a “secluded place” to talk to him about masturbation and sex. He recalled one conversation where Taylor explained to him how to masturbate. (Student 2 was about 13 years old at the time.) He also recalled Taylor talking to him about “how to have sex with a woman, that you have to put your hands down into her area to stimulate moisture so that you could have sex with her.”
- Student 16 recalled parking near a lake in Reston in a “pretty secluded” area to talk with Taylor during a Coke date. He testified that this was “kind of a normal thing.” They would go to a restaurant to get a Coke, and then go somewhere to park and talk. During these conversations, they would discuss masturbation, how the male anatomy worked, and sex. According to Student 16, “the struggles of lust were always a topic.”
- Student 3 remembered Taylor driving him to Gravelly Point<sup>14</sup> during a Coke date to talk. On one occasion when they were in the car alone, Taylor told Student 3 about a

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<sup>14</sup> Gravelly Point is an area within the National Park Service’s George Washington Memorial Parkway in Arlington County, Virginia.

time he had hitchhiked when he was younger and gotten picked up by a trucker. Taylor indicated that the trucker had put his hand on his (Taylor's) upper thigh. Taylor then proceeded to put his hand on Student 3's thigh to demonstrate. Student 3 could not recall how long Taylor left his hand on his thigh but recalled that it was long enough that it bothered him.

- Student 1 also recalled Taylor telling him the story about being picked up by a trucker when he was hitchhiking and the trucker putting his hand on Taylor's thigh. He also had some memory of Taylor demonstrating on his thigh what the trucker did to him.
- Student 12 recalled picking up food from Burger King with Taylor during a Coke date and then driving to the parking lot of the Falls Church Community Center where the main topic of conversation was lust and masturbation. Taylor invited Student 12 to pray with him to end the student's struggles with lust and masturbation. Student 12 remembered feeling uncomfortable because it was a "dramatic" and "intimate moment."
- Student 20 remembered being "pulled over on the side of the road talking about masturbation and [Taylor] sharing weird experiences and wanting you to share experiences. It was really sketchy and really commonplace." At the time, however, Student 20 assumed these conversations were normal because Taylor "was a power figure, and there was trust there."

#### Preference for Male Students

Although Taylor was in charge of all of Cornerstone, he focused primarily on the male students to the exclusion of female students. This frequently left female students feeling like they had a lesser status in his eyes.

- Student 29 recalled Taylor "showing preference and favoritism for the boys" and remembered feeling there was "an imbalance" in Taylor's treatment of the genders. She eventually withdrew from the group because she felt disenfranchised.
- Students 25<sup>15</sup> commented that Taylor did not pay attention to female students. They opined that "girls were just second-class citizens in that world." They also had a "very specific recollection" of physical horseplay between Taylor and male students, and it was "almost always instigated by Jeff. It was strange."
- Student 21 remembered feeling frustrated because "it seemed like a select few 'chosen' kids at Cornerstone – mostly boys – were always on the 'inside.'"
- Student 31 could "not really remember him even engaging with the girls." She testified that there was a noticeable delineation between the boys and girls, with the boys being

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<sup>15</sup> "Students 25" refers to multiple students who consented to be interviewed in a group setting via Zoom. Rather than trying to separate out the various comments, all the comments gleaned from that interview will be attributed to Students 25.



Taylor's focus. She chalked it up to a "lack of interest" on Taylor's part and commented that she never saw him making an effort to engage with the girls or trying to form relationships with them.

- Student 10 recalled that Taylor worked with the male students, and the female leaders were responsible for working with the female students.

#### Discussions About Masturbation With Male Students

Eighteen male students (Students 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 27, 28, 30, 33) recalled Taylor frequently discussing masturbation. A number of the students recalled these conversations taking place before they were at a pre-puberty age and even understood what masturbation was. Multiple students and staff said it was common knowledge that Taylor regularly referred to masturbation as "The Big M."

- Student 16 recalled that Taylor was "fixated" on masturbation and noted that masturbation and lust were "always a topic of conversation" with Taylor. He indicated that Taylor would raise the issues of lust and masturbation and their struggles with them in the context of Bible study, but he got the sense that Taylor "loved" talking about those topics. He commented that "it was sort of a constant thing" with Taylor.
- Student 2 testified that Taylor was "constantly" talking to him about masturbation. He commented that it seemed like "sex stuff" was the only thing Taylor wanted to discuss.
- Student 3 recalled that Taylor asked him about masturbation "a lot" and frequently asked how often he was masturbating. Student 3 commented that these conversations took place at a time when church culture was focused on purity, which he felt gave Taylor "cover" to ask those types of questions.
- Student 12 noted that the topics of lust and masturbation "always came up" with Taylor. He indicated that Taylor raised the topics in the context of accountability and being pure in their bodies, so he thought they were appropriate topics to discuss with a youth minister. Given Taylor's continued focus on lust and masturbation, Student 12 assumed that part of a serious devotion to Christ was accountability around this topic. He commented that he was not eager to have discussions with Taylor about masturbation but assumed it "came with the territory of being a young man trying to serve Christ." Student 12 recalled that Taylor began Bible studies by having them report on how they were doing with lust and masturbation.
- Student 12 further noted that the masturbation conversations occurred in a one-on-one setting "a majority of the time." He recalled being in Taylor's office at the church and Taylor asking whether he masturbated because it was a "physical bodily need" or "a lustful thing." Student 12 said that he told Taylor it was a physical bodily need because that response "seemed less shameful." Taylor responded that another student had told him that as well, and it was common. In having those conversations,

Student 12 recalled that Taylor frequently used the term “vulnerability” and tried to create a sense that the more Student 12 shared with him, the more Taylor could help him “escape” from the sin. He commented that Taylor had these discussions “under the auspices of wanting to help [them] grow in Christ.”

- Student 8 noted that Taylor “loved” discussing masturbation. He recalled that Taylor would “frequently” ask about masturbation, including what they masturbated to and how often they masturbated. He also remembered Taylor referring to the trail of hair from the belly button to the penis as the “happy trail” and asking them, “do you know why they call it the happy trail?” Student 8 recalled Taylor asking to see their happy trails and showing them his.
- Student 19 recalled that Taylor “had an obsession with masturbation” and commented that it was Taylor’s “favorite topic.” He opined that Taylor would use the topic of masturbation as “an entry way to gauge how far he could take it with certain people.”
- Student 14 opined that Taylor “seemed overly concerned with the masturbatory habits of teenage boys.” He recalled that, during youth group, Taylor would ask them how frequently they masturbated. Student 14 noted that Taylor’s concern with their masturbation habits and desire for them to share about it “was probably more than was necessary.”
- Student 18 testified that “there were definitely a lot of questions about masturbation” from Taylor, including how often he was doing it. He recalled that he was too young to care about masturbation at that point, but he wanted to “act more mature” so he went along with the conversations. Student 18 remembered thinking the questions about masturbation were “strange” but thought it may have made sense in the context of church “because maybe this is where you talk about this stuff.”
- Student 4 commented that Taylor talked about masturbation “literally every week.”
- Student 7 said his “most vivid memory” is Taylor asking him to describe his masturbation and what he thought about when he masturbated. Taylor told him that it was “okay” if he thought about a doorknob, but it was “lustful” if he thought about other things. Student 7 recalled that this conversation occurred when they were alone in a parked car.
- Student 27 recalled spending time with Taylor one-on-one and, during their time together, Taylor would ask what he was struggling with. He noted that the conversations started out okay but then “veered very specific.” Taylor would ask about his masturbation habits, and he remembered Taylor “trying to get a sense of how often it was occurring.” At the time, Student 27 thought Taylor was trying to hold him accountable and keep him in prayer.
- Student 28 recalled that Taylor would open their conversations by asking how he was doing with his “struggles with lust and masturbation.” Student 28 noted that, at the

time, he did not have context for whether these conversations were appropriate and assumed “this must be how discipleship works.” Looking back, he realizes Taylor had “an inordinate interest in probing sexual purity.”

- Student 30 testified that the first time he met Taylor, they went on a one-on-one Coke date and then returned to his office to talk. While they were in his office, Taylor had a list of questions that he went over with Student 30, one of which was how often Student 30 masturbated. Student 30 opined that Taylor’s discussion about masturbation with male students was “pervasive.”
- Eleven male students (Students 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 14, 18, 19, 20, 27, 30) reported that Taylor asked them how frequently they masturbated. One student stated that Taylor was “keeping track” of his masturbation habits. Another student testified that what Taylor wanted to know was “how many times did you do it this week? Then the details surrounding it.” One student said that the weekly discussion in their discipleship group was how many quiet times they had and how many times they masturbated.
- Four male students (Students 1, 7, 8, 20) recalled Taylor asking what they thought about or looked at while they masturbated. One student (Student 34) recalled:

I remember that Jeff made a distinction between sexuality and lust, and he said that sexuality is good and a gift from God, but lust was a sin. I also remember his illustration, which is that if one masturbates while thinking about a pine tree, it is not a sin.

- Taylor sent Student 13 a handwritten letter before a group trip that included a questionnaire for Student 13 to complete and return to him before the trip. The letter encouraged the student to disclose information about whether he had issues with lust and masturbation, and provided assurances that the information would not be shared with anyone else.

### Discussions About Penis Size

A number of the male students testified that Taylor initiated discussions with them about penis size and asked whether that was a concern to the student. In some instances, Taylor opened up these conversations by asserting that many young men are self-conscious about the size of their penis and stating that he himself had been self-conscious as a young man.

- Student 3 testified that Taylor assured him that a lot of young men are concerned about the size of their penis and then asked, “what would you say is the size of your penis?” Student 3 stated that he really did not know and that he just estimated a number of inches, to which Taylor responded reassuringly.
- Student 19 reported that while they were alone in Taylor’s car during a Coke date, Taylor stated, “I want to talk about dick size.” Taylor asked Student 19 if he was “okay” with the size of his penis and told him it was “normal for guys to want bigger.” Student 19 was uncomfortable with the conversation and, in an effort to end the

conversation, told Taylor he was fine with the size of his penis. Student 19 recalled that Taylor then went on to tell him that “most guys play with themselves a little before bed, and that’s okay.”

- Student 8 said that Taylor told him he was nervous about his wife seeing his penis for the first time. He then went on to tell Student 8 that when she did see it, she was “really impressed.”
- Student 14 stated that Taylor told him that he (Taylor) had worried his penis was not very big, but his wife told him it was “huge.”
- Student 27 recalled Taylor telling him that it was normal to be “obsessed” with the size of his penis and thinking about how he compared to other males. Taylor then asked whether Student 27 had “any insecurities” about the size of his penis. Student 27 commented that Taylor’s approach to the conversation about his penis was “very manipulative” because Taylor framed it in the context of the struggle with lust and masturbation “and he would sort of drill down from there.”
- Student 12 testified that Taylor encouraged him to be open about any concerns he had with regard to the size of his penis and stated that Taylor “cultivated such trust” in Student 12 that he felt comfortable talking to Taylor about his own penis. Student 12 asked Taylor if his penis would get longer when he got older. Taylor told him he had never thought about it. Taylor then followed up later and told Student 12 he had measured and “got another two inches” since getting older.

#### Discussions About Sex

Taylor’s discussions with male students also involved conversations about sex with women, including sharing some of his own experiences.

- Two male students (Students 12, 14) recalled Taylor talking to them about his wedding night with his wife.
- Student 12 stated that Taylor told him during a one-on-one session that, after he (Taylor) “finished inside” his wife on his wedding night, he was “still hard when he came out.”
- Student 27 testified that Taylor occasionally spoke to him about his sex life with his wife. He also recalled more generally that Taylor would talk to him about “the mechanics of sex.”
- Student 27 also testified that Taylor explained erections to him and told him that penises had to “be up” in order to “fit into the woman” during sex.
- Student 20 stated that Taylor engaged in “kind of braggadocious locker room chat” about sex and recalled him talking about when he was in college and “having sex with a bunch of girls and doing drugs.”

- Student 2 stated that Taylor explained to him (when the student was 14 or 15) that in order to have sex with a woman, you had to “put your hand down into her area” to stimulate moisture.
- Student 7 testified that Taylor asked him whether he liked “blow jobs” and asked whether the girls in his middle school gave them to guys.
- Student 16 recalled a conversation with Taylor where Taylor talked about the shape of the penis and how it would work with a woman.
- Student 23 recalled Taylor asking if he had had any sexual experiences.

Comments About the Physical Appearance of Male Students

A number of male students and one staff member recalled Taylor making comments about the physical appearance of either the student themselves or other male students.

- Student 3 testified that Taylor asked him “on many occasions” whether he “still had a six pack.” Taylor would also instruct Student 3 to remove his shirt to show off his six pack to some of the younger guys in Cornerstone.
- Student 5 remembered that there were “always comments” about the physical appearance of male students. He recalled Taylor asking students to lift up their shirts to show off their ab muscles or saying, “show me your guns.”<sup>16</sup>
- One student recalled being in a pool with Taylor and Taylor saying something to him about how wide the student’s hips were, and the student found it “so weird and surprising” that Taylor was looking at his body in that way and judging it.
- Student 27 remembered Taylor telling him he was “ripped” and had “really great abs.”
- Staff 4 recalled Taylor talking about another male student and commenting, “Have you seen the chest on that kid? He is so built.”

Attempts to Induce Male Students to Share Private Information

Several students reported that Taylor had a tendency to try to induce male students to share aspects of their life that they had not shared with others.

- Student 2 reported that on one occasion when they were alone in the car, Taylor said, “tell me something you have never told another person.” Student 2 mentioned that he remembered being very small when something happened with his grandparents (which did not reflect any type of abuse). According to the student, Taylor contorted the story and said that as a youth minister, he had to report certain behaviors and that he might have to report the student’s grandparents. This was very upsetting to the student and led him to weep, until eventually Taylor said words to the effect of, “just

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<sup>16</sup> “Guns” is a slang term for biceps.

this once I could let it go.” This made the student feel like Taylor was always holding something over him.

- Student 19 remembered being in a small group setting when Taylor coaxed one of the other male students to disclose an “extremely personal” story about himself. Taylor assured the student he would never repeat it to anyone, but Student 19 recalled feeling like Taylor was using the story “to take advantage of” the other student.
- Student 30 recalled that Taylor routinely spoke to male students individually and said, “I know what you’ve done” in the hope that they would reveal a secret to him.
- Student 3 recalled Taylor frequently asking him what his biggest sin was.
- Student 12 commented that Taylor worked to cultivate a “confessional relationship” with him.

#### Other Sexualized Conversations or Conduct

There were other conversations reported by students that were sexualized in nature. For example, one student remembered being on a mission trip to Syracuse and recalled that after the female students and the male students were separated into two different groups, Taylor had a conversation with the young men about maintaining separation from the girls (“boys are blue and girls are red, and we don’t want any purple”). But he also remembered that Taylor came up with a hand signal that one boy could give to another if he was sitting in such a way that his genitals were exposed. Looking back, the student felt like that was a very strange thing for Taylor to focus on.

Another student remembered Taylor telling a group of them that when he (Taylor) was in 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade, he would wear loose fitting pants to hide his erections because he was so horny all the time.

There were other points of testimony that suggested that Taylor’s ministry was overly focused on male sexuality. For example, Taylor gave one male student a pair of silk boxer shorts and instructed the student not to tell his parents.

One of the female students interviewed recalled participating in a leadership retreat at a family home where the male and female students were segregated in different parts of the large house for activities. After the female students had finished their activities, she went looking for the male students and found them (approximately 12 male students and Taylor) sitting in a circle in their underwear.

#### Acts of Physical Contact By Taylor With Male Students

Taylor was described as being “very physical” with students. Student 5 noted that Taylor had a “very handsy sort of approach to things.” Student 4 recalled “a lot of heavy touching and grabbing under the guise of wrestling” and commented that Taylor had a “fascination and fixation with men’s genitalia.” Student 20 stated that while he was not touched in a



sexual way, there was a “breaching of the physical touch boundaries” by Taylor. Student 3 remembered Taylor touching him “many, many, many times.” He indicated that he “basically had to fight him off” and pushed Taylor’s hands away on numerous occasions. A couple of students and one male staff member remembered Taylor putting his hand on their thigh while they were praying. Student 3 also recalled briefly sitting on Taylor’s lap on one occasion when Taylor motioned for him to do so.

The following summarizes some of the categories of physical contact between Taylor and some of the Cornerstone participants:

*Wrestling.* At least five of the male students reported wrestling with Taylor, and four other individuals witnessed Taylor wrestling with male students. A number of students noted that it was not unusual for teenage boys to wrestle with each other and get physical, but what seemed unusual to them was that Taylor would put himself in the middle of it, sometimes even being the initiator. None of the witnesses indicated that they thought the wrestling was sexual in nature, but it seemed peculiar that the youth leader was right in the middle of it.

*Massages.* Some male students recalled Taylor regularly talking about and giving massages. One student testified that while Taylor was giving him a shoulder massage, Taylor said, “you know, 70% to 90% of massages lead to sex.”

*Nut-Smacking.* A number of the male students (and a few of the staff) testified that Taylor was often involved with the students trying to hit each other’s testicles with the back of their hand (which several referred to as “nut-smacking”). As with some of the other physical activities, some of the students noted that this particular activity was not necessarily just something that Taylor did, but rather that the boys were doing to each other. But what was unusual was that Taylor would sometimes initiate or be in the middle of it. Several of the students testified that nut-smacking seemed to be happening all the time and you had to protect yourself. In a group setting, someone might yell out “nut check,” and then guys would try to smack each other’s nuts. Again, this was not exclusive to Taylor by any means, but he was a regular participant according to multiple students.

*Grab-Ass.* One student testified that Taylor would sometimes engage in “grab ass,” that is coming up behind guys and just grabbing one of their butt cheeks.

*Credit Card Swipes.* Two of the male students observed Taylor giving male students “credit card swipes,” which involved swiping his hand between the students’ buttocks over their clothes.

*Oil Checks.* One of the staff recalled Taylor giving male students “oil checks,” which involved sticking his finger in the students’ buttocks over their clothes.

*Pink Bellies.* Student 20 reporting receiving “pink bellies” from Taylor. He described being tackled to the ground by Taylor and smacked in the bare stomach.

*Wedgies.*<sup>17</sup> Student 22 recalled trying to evade Taylor in the Church hallway “to avoid wedgies or nipple twisting.” Two other students (Students 2 and 5) remember Taylor participating in giving male students wedgies.

### C. Allegations of Overt Sexual Abuse at the Church

In addition to the conduct above, the investigation revealed three episodes of overt sexual abuse<sup>18</sup>/sexual assault while Taylor was employed by the Church.

#### Student 4

Student 4 has provided compelling testimony that, when he was 13 years old, he traveled with Taylor to an out of state location where Taylor was serving as the speaker for a youth retreat. Taylor had suggested to Student 4’s parents that this would be a good opportunity for Student 4 to see a vibrant youth ministry and to connect with some older students. No other student or staff traveled with them, contrary to what Taylor had represented to Student 4’s parents. On the Sunday after the retreat was over, they stayed another night at the home of a local family until they could fly out the next morning. Although the residential home appeared to have several unoccupied bedrooms, Taylor and Student 4 stayed in one room, which only contained one bed that they shared.

While staying in the guestroom of that house, Taylor engaged in overt sexual abuse of Student 4, which included the touching of private areas. At the express request of Student 4, further details regarding this interaction are not being shared in this Report.

Student 4 stated that, the next morning, Taylor said something to him to the effect of, “that was some really crazy spiritual warfare last night.” Student 4 did not report the abuse to his parents when he returned home partly because of what Taylor had said regarding spiritual warfare and partly “due to shame.” Taylor continued to check in with Student 4 from time to time regarding that night, in each instance ascribing “significant spiritual warfare” as part of those events.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For those who have never suffered the extreme indignity of the wedgie, a wedgie is when one or more boys grab the rear waistband of another boy’s underpants and pull them up as far as they can so that the underwear squeezes the boy’s genitals. It is generally viewed less as a sexual act and more as an act of bullying or intimidation intended to humiliate the recipient.

<sup>18</sup> As noted, this term, as it is being used in this Report, is defined in Section IV, above.

<sup>19</sup> Student 4 believes that Taylor’s invocation of “spiritual warfare” as being at the root of the overt sexual abuse Student 4 suffered at the hands of Taylor was a form of “gaslighting” – trying to manipulate Student 4 into thinking that the severe harm he suffered was somehow not Taylor’s fault but rather simply the effects of an external force such as demonic activity.



Student 6

Shortly before his unexpected and tragic death in 2021, Student 6 described to his parents previously undisclosed information about his interactions with Taylor.

For a number of years prior to his passing, Student 6 had wrestled with an alcohol addiction that directly contributed to his death, and in the year before his death he said to his mother, “Why do you think I started drinking in the first place? It’s all because of Jeff Taylor.” He also angrily asked his mother, “Why did you put me in the car with that man?” He recounted to her how during several of his one-on-one Coke dates, Taylor talked constantly about masturbation and grilled Student 6 on the subject.

Further, according to statements Student 6 made in late 2020 or early 2021 to his parents, when Student 6 was 12 or 13 (in 1998 or 1999), he accompanied Taylor on a solo overnight trip for a speaking engagement that Taylor was doing for college students. Student 6 said that he shared a room with Taylor on this trip. He told his parents that he remembered awakening in the middle of the night, and Taylor was lying on top of him. When Taylor saw that Student 6 was awake, Taylor put his finger over his lips and said, “shhh.” Student 6 did not recall anything beyond this, leaving him to believe that he had been drugged since he was unable to respond to Taylor being on top of him and because he was not usually a solid sleeper and typically woke up easily. Student 6 told his parents that he was certain he had been abused, but it bothered him deeply that he could not remember the details of the abuse.

Student 6 also recounted an incident that occurred sometime after this trip when he accompanied one of his parents to Taylor’s house. On that occasion, while his mother was speaking to Taylor’s wife, Taylor took Student 6 around to the side of his house. According to Student 6’s description of the event to his parents, Taylor pressed him against a brick wall and “was basically grinding on him.” At that time, Taylor said something to the effect of, “this is a sin against God, not just me but for you too.” Student 6 described the incident to his parents as being a combination of sexual and intimidating.

Student 6 also shared with his parents that these interactions with Taylor had caused him to lose interest in attending Cornerstone. He further shared that after these events, he would have an adverse physical reaction as the family approached the Church facility.

Tragically, because of his untimely passing, Student 6 was not able to participate in this investigation directly.

Student 1

Student 1 reported that Taylor focused a lot of attention on him and took him on many Coke dates. As noted above, Student 1 recalled: “We would be talking, and then it would be time to pray. And he [Taylor] would put his hand on my leg, then while we were praying he would begin to move his hand up towards my nuts. And I remember hitting

his hand away. And I would look up at him and he had this sort of hurt look on his face.” According to Student 1, Taylor grabbed the inside of his thigh on multiple occasions while they were praying. He also indicated that Taylor grabbed his testicles over his clothing in a purportedly “playful” way.

In the summer of 2000, Student 1 traveled out of the country with Taylor and three other students on a mission trip to help build houses. The last day of the trip was designed to be one of leisure, and the team went to an island and caught and cooked fish. Student 1 subsequently became sick and was “in very bad shape” by the time he got back to the hotel in which they were staying. Student 1 had been bunking with the other students, but purportedly due to his illness, he was moved into Taylor’s room.

He recalled Taylor taking him down to the lobby of the hotel and asking around for medication. He has a memory of Taylor accepting medication from some person and Taylor subsequently giving some medicine to him, although, looking back, he does not know for sure if it was the medicine that Taylor had procured in the lobby. Student 1 did not know what the medication was but took it because he trusted Taylor. He does not remember anything after taking the medication but indicated that he woke up alone with Taylor in his room. He has only vague memories of the trip home.

Student 1 does not know definitively whether he was subjected to any form of physical or sexual abuse by Taylor on that trip while he was rendered incapacitated by the medication. However, in light of Taylor’s physical touching of him when they were alone in a car on various Coke dates and Taylor’s focus on Student 1’s masturbation habits (to the point of encouraging Student 1 to keep a journal on those issues in which Taylor would write notes), Student 1 believes that he was subjected to some type of sexual abuse by Taylor while he was incapacitated on that mission trip.

#### **D. What Other Youth Staff/Volunteers Perceived About Taylor and His Approach to Ministry**

Twelve former youth staff and volunteers participated in the investigation. Overall, many of the staff and volunteers who worked closely with Taylor have been able, with the benefit of maturity and hindsight, to question and express concern with some of Taylor’s methodologies in assisting adolescent men in becoming more Christ-like.

A number of youth staff and volunteers interviewed felt that Taylor was given a significant amount of autonomy in his role as Minister of Youth. One youth staff member commented that there was a sense that “Jeff can do no wrong. Jeff is awesome. Let’s fund him.” This staff member observed that Taylor “was very, very, very well regarded,” and there was “a tremendous amount of trust that people put in him.”

Some of the other Cornerstone leaders, either staff or volunteers, recalled Taylor's focus on sensitive topics such as lust or masturbation with the male students, but others had no recollection of these topics being discussed. Those who recalled these topics being a subject of discussion remembered as follows:

- Staff 11 thought the frequent conversations about masturbation were “weird” but noted that it was during “the height of purity talk, so it was not unusual to have conversations with kids about those types of things.”
- Staff 14 recalled that Taylor talked about masturbation with students more than Staff 14 was comfortable with but didn't think much of it at the time. Staff 14 testified that Taylor would raise the topic in the context of “we all struggle with this, and we need Jesus's help to stop.” Staff 14 also remembered Taylor telling students that if they could masturbate and think about a doorknob, not something sexual, that was okay. (Several students recalled this illustration as well.)
- Staff 16 remembered a significant “emphasis on sexuality” by Taylor but at the time thought, “I guess this is what teenage boys need help with.” Staff 16 indicated there was a “sense of trusting” Taylor to handle these topics.
- Staff 13 heard “rumors” that Taylor was talking to students about sex and other intimate things but thought, “well, he's the youth leader and maybe that's a topic he wanted to handle because it's more sensitive.”

Leaders also observed that Taylor had a tendency to focus on certain boys within Cornerstone. One leader noted that it was well known that Taylor would typically have a favored group of boys, often boys that were involved in leading worship, and that there was a sort of a pecking order amongst the boys, *i.e.*, that he had his favorites. Another leader mentioned that it was not unusual for Taylor to take one of the boys with him when he spoke out of town or had to drive somewhere long distance because Taylor emphasized how valuable one-on-one car time with the students was. But none of them had any suspicion that Taylor could be engaging in any type of overt sexual abuse.

Several of the leaders testified that not only did they have no idea that anything resembling sexual abuse had taken place in Cornerstone, but to this day they affirm the positive impact that Taylor had on their lives and the lives of so many Cornerstone students.

One former male leader said that Taylor “played a big role in [his] life.” Another former female leader stated, “It was really all of that experience that was positive and made me feel like I wanted to offer more to kids. It was all positive at the time. . . . I led a number of small groups with girls. All of that resonated with my relationship with Christ. I learned a lot, and a lot of how I live today started from the season of being there.”

E. What Senior Staff and Vestry Perceived About Taylor and His Approach to Ministry

A couple of vestry members interviewed commented that Taylor seemed to have very little oversight, largely because the ministry was having so much success. One vestry member who served during the mid-1990's opined that Taylor was "difficult to oversee" and seemed to be essentially "unmanaged."

In addition, when it came to the allocation of resources within the Church, such as meeting space, some staff felt that Taylor and Cornerstone generally were given priority. For example, from the perspective of one staff member not involved directly with the youth program, when it came to the use of the church on Sunday evenings, Taylor was successful in blocking other ministries from using the facility:

Jeff didn't want stuff scheduled on Sunday nights because that's when Cornerstone met and that would feel like a competing program. That happened a few times. Any sort of adult programming that was suggested for Sunday night, Jeff was very resistant.

Taylor was also seen by other staff and vestry members as having a very close relationship with Rev. Yates and, through that relationship, having a significant amount of influence within the Church. Another staff member noted as follows:

It was very clear that Cornerstone was a darling ministry of the Church and was seen as critical to both the success and health of the Church. John had the mentality that if you had a good youth program, you would pick up the parents too. Jeff had a lot of influence.

Another staff member referred to Taylor as Rev. Yates' "protégé." This staff member opined, "Jeff was clearly John's guy." One vestry member noted that Rev. Yates "loved Jeff" and provided him with "opportunities to develop." This vestry member further opined that Rev. Yates did not manage Taylor closely because he was "happy to see a growing, vibrant youth program."

F. What Parents Perceived About Taylor and His Approach to Ministry

The success of Cornerstone also played an important role in the success of the Church during that decade. Several of the parents interviewed acknowledged that they started attending the Church initially because they had heard about its excellent youth program and wanted to go to a church where their teens would be interested in participating. Other parents noted that they began attending the Church because their son or daughter had already become involved in Cornerstone. One parent stated:

Jeff was great. He started out with seriously great discipleship and maintained that. He got the kids reading Scripture and taking it seriously. Would talk about anything that needed to be talked about. Kids came in droves. He's the one who started the Cornerstone name and the Crossroads name. Was just a really good leader and was funny and dynamic and biblical. We thought he was amazing.

A number of parents interviewed acknowledged, even while recognizing the severity of the allegations being investigated, that they had been huge supporters of Taylor while he was running the youth program. Several served on a Parent Committee that Taylor had formed for the youth group, and for some period of time, Taylor was also in a Bible study with a number of men in the Church who had kids in Cornerstone.

In summary, there were numerous parents who strongly supported and had affection for Taylor and his family. Some parents invited the Taylor family to join them on vacation, and others had them over for holiday meals. Two different sets of parents invited Taylor to visit their homes to speak to their neighbors about raising teenagers, as part of a neighborhood outreach event.

And the support of a number of parents continued even after Taylor and his family had moved to Atlanta. One parent recalled traveling to Atlanta to be present for Taylor's ordination. Another parent remembered that when Taylor was trying to raise money for a youth ministry he was establishing called Kairos, the parent told Taylor that he would "double" the amount of money that Taylor was requesting.<sup>20</sup>

As regards Taylor's focus with young men on lust and masturbation, a number of parents had a general awareness that there were conversations going on with their sons but were not particularly concerned. (Whether they also were aware that those conversations included persistent questioning about masturbation is considerably less clear.) One parent, who became aware that Taylor was having these kinds of conversations with their son, "quite liked the idea" that Taylor was talking to him "about sexual issues with girls and masturbation."

According to one parent, their son told them that Taylor was having conversations with him that made him "feel kind of gross." This parent assumed this meant the son was "getting the masturbation conversation" from Taylor and "thought it was a good idea from a conservative youth director."

Indeed, Rev. Yates, who had sons in Cornerstone, approached Taylor and reported that he heard from his sons that Taylor was asking a lot of questions about masturbation. Taylor's

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<sup>20</sup> Notably, these events took place prior to the 2007 disclosure discussed below.

response to Rev. Yates was words to the effect of, “the parents are not talking to these guys about these issues, so someone has to.”

One of the other leaders in Cornerstone, when talking about the relationship between Taylor and parents, said:

He was definitely beloved. Now, looking back, this was part of his plan. He found families who idolized him and would love that he would take the boys for the weekend and talk about sex and do the sex talk. I was looking at that thinking it was weird because it was the parent’s job, not the youth leader’s job. It was almost a little weird how trusting the parents were with him.

One of the male students who had participated in Cornerstone offered the following observation by email:

One of the things that I’m sure has come up in your conversations was that Jeff often had sex-ed talks with young men. This was widely known, so much so that the first person who told me about these conversations was a friend’s older sister who asked if I’d had the “Big M” talk with Jeff (masturbation).

It’s worth noting that many of us at the Falls Church had parents who opted us out of the “Family Life Education” at George Mason High School, where these things and many others would have been discussed openly and in detail. While it was awkward for any young teenage boy to have this conversation with an adult, it made sense that our parents would have preferred us to receive this teaching from a Church leader rather than from the school. Frankly, I was glad to have this conversation with someone like Jeff than to have it with my parents.

In short, the testimony of a number of witnesses supports the finding that while not every parent of a male Cornerstone participant was aware that Taylor was having these types of conversations, it also was not a secret amongst those who were more closely involved with the ministry, as many parents were.

Some parents were aware that these conversations were going on but were concerned about the age at which Taylor was choosing to bring up these topics. For example, one parent learned from their child that Taylor had a conversation with the student about masturbation and lust when the student was approximately 11 years old. That parent confronted Taylor and told him the child was too young to be having those conversations, and directed him to not have that conversation again. Notably, although that parent felt the conversation was “inappropriate age wise,” they did not otherwise think the conversation was problematic (had the student been older) given that it was during the height of purity culture.



Another parent became aware that Taylor would sometimes initiate giving a boy a wedgie, and he reached out and expressly told Taylor that the conduct needed to cease immediately, although more because it represented bullying behavior than sexually inappropriate behavior.

**G. Taylor's Transition to Director of Discipleship in September 1999**

According to Rev. Yates, by the mid to late 1990's when Cornerstone was flourishing, Taylor was deeply involved with families, not just their kids, and Rev. Yates thought it was a positive thing. In fact, Rev. Yates recalled that he probably encouraged Taylor to be more involved with the parents whenever he could.

As noted above, in a memo dated August 8, 1997, Taylor proposed to the Personnel Committee that the Church establish and fill a Senior High Director position. In laying out the justification for such a role, Taylor wrote:

John Yates and I have discussed this in depth. John sees me doing much more in ministering to the whole family, not just the student, and in training and equipping of other Youth Ministers.

Exhibit 11. One of the vestry members remembered that, at some point, Taylor told Rev. Yates that he was ready to "graduate beyond" youth work and apply his talents in a greater and broader way.

In or around August 1998, Taylor sent a memorandum to Rev. Yates and the Associate Rector entitled "Re: Job Description and Career." He indicated that he wanted meet with them to discuss where he should be focusing his energies in the upcoming year. See Exhibit 12 (names redacted) ("I truly cannot proceed into the fall without support and advise [sic] from you on what I should be doing this year and where I should be putting my energy."). In outlining his thoughts regarding his future role, Taylor noted:

I have found a passion and love for teaching and preaching over the past year, and I am seeking the Lord, and you, as well as [my wife], as to what this means. I fell in love with the college-cornerstone ministry this summer, and a core group of 8 have asked me to continue year-round. This will become another nightly time commitment that I embrace, but must also compensate some where [sic] else.

. . . .

Further, I have found that I have more excitement than I have had in a long time to teach at the adult level. I am also very aware that I need to put a ton of time into training the Cornerstone staff, volunteer and paid. All of this is not to mention the number of churches that want my guidance on youth ministry, or have asked me to consult with them.

*Id.* In or around Spring 1999, Taylor sent a memorandum to Rev. Yates and the Associate Rector proposing a new role, stating:

I have been giving further thought to the possibility of a new role within The Falls Church, and I believe that I may be closer than I thought to a possible plan.

There are some assumptions that need to be made in order for us to move on, and I would like to highlight them at this time.

**Assumptions:**

1. The Taylor family would like to remain at The Falls Church
2. The Rector and Vestry would like the same
3. A change in job descriptions is inevitable and necessary
4. A transition period of a year, minimum, is prudent
5. An immediate change in roles is desired
6. Addition to the Cornerstone staff is necessary
7. A change of location for Taylor's office is wise

Further, I believe that a discussion regarding compensation would be nice, but not entirely germane to this current discussion.

**Proposal**

*Director of Adult Education and Family Ministries*

In this position I would work to grow the *Adult Education* ministries and options at The Falls Church. Working to ensure their success, depth and expansion, as well as developing a sense among the adult population that involvement in adult education options is wise and necessary.

Further, we need to develop a *Ministry to Parents* whereby we can help them understand to [sic] today's teen and become more effective in their parenting responsibility.

Based on the success of seminars and parenting sessions, it would appear that this is an area where supply and demand can be better met. There is no doubt that our church and community desire more input and assistance. My experience within youth ministry for over 15 years would provide a certain credibility that could be useful.

*Cornerstone* oversight would continue during this year plus transition. However, it would be necessary for a change in current responsibilities to take place so that these new roles could be developed. I would work with the current team to prepare them for this change, as well as to assist in the search for and training of my successor.

**Plan:**

Upon my return from a sabbatical leave the transition will have begun and the new roles set in motion. I would continue to meet with the Cornerstone Team, but would be very proactive in their development as THE leaders of



this ministry. My current responsibilities would be abbreviated and I would grow in the capacity as Supervisor.

While maintaining that role I would then grow in these new areas of ministry which will need to be hammered out for specifics. A new office space will facilitate this transition and further empower the Cornerstone Team.

Exhibit 13 (name redacted). Also in or around Spring 1999, Taylor sent a memorandum to Rev. Yates confirming his upcoming sabbatical. He stated:

Once again I want to thank you for the upcoming opportunity to rest, study and mature in professional ministry. I am looking forward to it. I want to make sure that I have the right understanding of when, what and how long.

As I understand it, I will be taking a leave on or around May 1, 1999 for a period of 4 months.

My plan is to be here in town between May 1 to June 20. I will participate in a few selected Cornerstone and Fellows' activities, and anything else that you feel I should be present at, ie., staff retreat.

From June 20 until August 13 I have been invited to be a resort chaplain in Ludington, Michigan. Minimal responsibilities, maximum rest and vacation for the family. This is still being negotiated, but it seemed like a "once in a life-time" gift dropped on my lap.

Please let me know how this sounds, and if I am out-of-line in any of my presumptions.

Exhibit 14 (names redacted). While on sabbatical, Taylor continued to interact with Rev. Yates regarding his job description. In a memo to Rev. Yates, Taylor noted the following:

As stated in the hall on Tuesday, May 30, several things need to fall into place in order for us to communicate well, and for me to have a sense that I have marching orders.

1. We need to have clear expectations of the position, of me, and of those working with me. Currently, the expectations are very unclear. If you line up Wardens and executives and ask everyone what the mission of the position is and what I should be doing, you will find as many opinions as the number present. Further, because we don't have clarity and consensus, we don't have an effective system of accountability and measures of success.

....

3. I am a pastor by design and therefore pastor as naturally as I breathe. My spiritual gifts, my tenure at the church, my relationships with families, and the nature of the program staff all contribute to my being asked to counsel with people. I could serve the church better if this were

recognized, enhanced and encouraged. It is not listed specifically in my job description, but is implicit in my position within Discipleship, by my calling and as clearly delineated in the Program Staff Expectations of the TFC Employee Manual on page 6.

Exhibit 15 (names redacted). Attached to the memo was a marked-up draft of a job description dated June 7, 1999 for the position of Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries. *Id.* Subsequently, another draft of the job description was produced dated June 16, 1999, in which the title of the position appears to have been changed to Director of Discipleship. Exhibit 16 (names redacted).

Taylor took the scheduled sabbatical as planned, although witnesses recall that, rather than attending the resort in Michigan he referenced in his communication to Rev. Yates, he spent some time at Summer's Best Two Weeks in Pennsylvania and then took his family on a trip out west.

On July 22, 1999, while Taylor was on sabbatical, Rev. Yates sent a memorandum to Church staff confirming an earlier announcement in a staff meeting that Taylor's title was changing to Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries effective September 1, 1999:

As I mentioned in the staff meeting, as of September 1 Jeff Taylor is assuming some exciting new responsibilities here at the church. Jeff's title has been changed to Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries. The changes in his job description will mean that he will continue to oversee the student ministry team and give his careful attention to the Cornerstone Youth Ministry while, at the same time, he's going to begin spending more of his time with adults seeking to bring to adult ministries here in the church much of the same kind of strength and vigor that he has brought to our youth ministry.

I've asked Jeff to devote significant energies to helping us develop effective means for mobilizing all of our parishioners in finding and getting actively involved in ministries to which they feel they are being called. Jeff will also be taking over responsibility for our adult education program and teaching in a variety of settings. He'll be working carefully with [REDACTED] and me in thinking through how to strengthen our leadership training program here in the parish. Jeff will continue to chair our Adult Discipleship Ministries Team, but he will now be able to give a good deal more of his time and energy to this important working group made up of a number of staff members and parishioners. His office will be moved to the corridor just outside the main church office – [REDACTED]'s old office.

We grateful for our exceptional Cornerstone staff and expect that our ministries to teenagers will grow stronger and stronger under this new arrangement.

Exhibit 17 (Memo dated 07/22/99) (names redacted).

A number of parents and staff members, including some working with him in the youth program, recalled feeling that the announcement that Taylor was taking another role within the Church seemed very abrupt. As one of the youth leaders noted, Taylor's departure from leading the youth program led to some "confusion and surprise," and the team of youth leaders who had been supporting Taylor felt as if they had been "thrown in the deep end."

One adult small group leader also remembered finding out very suddenly that Jeff had been moved into an advisory role and had been "kicked upstairs." This leader talked to a number of vestry members to try to find out what was behind the change, but no one would tell him, which the leader found very frustrating.

However, others testified that Taylor had been moving in this direction for some time. Rev. Yates shared that he and Taylor had talked for some time about Taylor being more involved with parents and families.

Staff 13 recalled having conversations with Taylor leading up to his transition to adult ministry. Staff 13 stated that Taylor "was exhausted" and ready to transition "but was proud of what he built and uncertain what he was going to do next."

Taylor transitioned to his new role as planned on September 1, 1999.

#### H. Taylor's Performance in His Role as Director of Adult Discipleship

From September 1, 1999 to January 2002, Taylor served as Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries.<sup>21</sup> As described more fully below, this was a challenging time for Taylor and for those in the Church staff who were interacting with him.

As announced in the July 22 memorandum, in his new role as Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries, it was anticipated that Taylor would retain some oversight of (and provide some guidance and direction to) the leaders of Cornerstone and Crossroads. ("The changes in his job description will mean that he will continue to oversee the student ministry team and give his careful attention to the Cornerstone Youth Ministry...")

However, the youth leaders who were present during the time of the transition did not recall Taylor providing much guidance or oversight with respect to Cornerstone and Crossroads; rather, they felt that they had to work their "butts off" to make sure that everything in the youth ministry "went off without a hitch." One of the leaders

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<sup>21</sup> Although this was the title given to Taylor in September 1999, it is unclear if it remained his title during the next 2+ years, as several documents reflect variations such as "Director of Discipleship" or "Director of Adult Education."

remembered seeking guidance directly from Rev. Yates, rather than Taylor, when a situation arose in the youth ministry.

The one exception to Taylor's perceived abdication of his role with the youth ministry was his insistence that he would continue to maintain a relationship with a discipleship group of boys. The leaders who were present during the transition remembered it being "frustrating" that Taylor was still meeting with some kids in a group and one-on-one when he clearly was no longer part of the Cornerstone leadership. One staff member recalled spending time with a male student in that group at some point during the 1999-2000 school year and being "laid into" by Taylor for doing so.

In the summer of 2000, Taylor planned and executed a mission trip out of the country for the small group of male students with whom he was continuing to meet. There have been no records of this trip located in the Church's files, and although three of the male students who participated have been interviewed as part of this investigation, it is unclear how this trip came together or whether it was sanctioned by the Church. Ultimately, the team for this trip consisted of Taylor and four boys aged 15 or 16. It does not appear that there were any other adult chaperones on the trip. Thus, this arrangement violated the policy the Church had in place at that time, the *Policy on Clergy Sexual Misconduct in Pastoral Care* for The Diocese of Virginia from November 1998.<sup>22</sup> Among other things, that Policy stated as follows:

One-on-one interactions are a fundamental part of the practice with the ordained and are often necessary and appropriate for other staff members, but care should be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults.

**In no circumstance should one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing.**

Exhibit 18 (emphasis added). Other Cornerstone staff at the time had no memory of that trip being promoted or coordinated as a Cornerstone event. It was on this trip that Student 1 became ill, as described above.

Taylor's involvement with this small group continued even after the Church hired a new youth director who started at the beginning of the 2000-2001 school year. The new youth director remembered Taylor explaining that certain students were "his guys" and were "off limits." One of the other youth leaders at the time likened Taylor's conduct to a dog marking his territory.

It quickly became clear that, while Taylor had appeared to thrive in youth ministry, he struggled in his new role, partly because the role was not well-defined and partly because

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<sup>22</sup> Policies pertaining to the protection of children and the prevention of abuse that the Church had in place at various times are explored more thoroughly below.

he missed the independence and adoration he had enjoyed in his prior role. Taylor's struggle was apparent to those around him.

Vestry 5 opined that when Taylor was working with students, he "felt heard and recognized and loved. With the adults, not so much. He had to do the give and take." But, according to this vestry member, Taylor was not "really competent with [the give and take], and he didn't like feeling incompetent." Vestry 6 commented on Taylor's need for "adulation" and "applause," which he received from students, noting that "it became clear immediately" after the transition that Taylor's approach "was just not going to cut it with adults."

By mid-2000, it appeared there was a disconnect between the Church's needs and what Taylor envisioned for his role. The Assistant Rector at the time emphasized the need to develop a job description for the role so it was better defined. In an email to Taylor and Rev. Yates dated June 19, 2000, the Assistant Rector noted that they seemed to be "caught again between the needs of the church and designing a job description for an individual." He discussed the critical functions of the role and highlighted Taylor's "passions," which he noted included, "discipling young people especially younger men and boys." Exhibit 19 (Email dated 06/19/00) (names redacted).

In November 2000, Taylor received his first performance evaluation in his new role. In the evaluation, the Assistant Rector noted:

This has been a rocky, bumpy, year. You have managed it well and there were times when it could have been managed even better.

The evaluation also encouraged Taylor to "grow deeper rather than wider" and noted Taylor's tendency to focus on himself. Among the comments in the evaluation:

Sometimes [you are] overconfident + still self-focused/my program oriented. Makes you appear impatient.

You still lean toward strong leader with followers vs. sacrificing servant for leaders.

Keep up the learning curve for separating comments about job as comments about self.

In areas of improvement, the review noted:

- 1) Speak the absolute truth during critical issues, even if it is unfavorable toward self.
- 2) Downplay emotional appeals to laity.
- 3) Work hard to minimize the use of personal pronouns when describing an event.

Overall, the review gave Taylor ratings of Very Good and Outstanding.

Notwithstanding the constructive criticism that he had received in his evaluation, Taylor continued to struggle in working well with other members of the ministry team. A member of the vestry (Vestry 6) testified in their interview that they voiced concerns to Rev. Yates on multiple occasions about Taylor’s inconsistency, lack of follow-through, and “untruthfulness.”

Some of these struggles came to a head as a result of a meeting in March 2001. Rev. Yates had announced to the Church staff and vestry that a member of the congregation had volunteered to assist the Church in “communicating with our church family more consistently about all the ways we are seeing God’s blessing in our midst in terms of changed lives and answered prayers.”

This announcement was followed by a meeting that was held with certain stakeholders on the staff, including Taylor, to begin working out the details of the manner in which the communications would take place.<sup>23</sup> Taylor objected to the plan, and the meeting did not go well. Even Taylor acknowledged in a note to Rev. Yates (who had not been present) that “the atmosphere became tense and frustrating.”

In an email dated March 21, 2001 (which is not being provided as an exhibit due to the number of individuals involved and named in the email), Vestry 6 expressed anger and frustration that Taylor had derailed the meeting by questioning “the integrity of talking about our blessings in any way that might be motivated or related to money.” According to Vestry 6, Taylor also made several statements during the meeting that were either critical of Rev. Yates or contradicted statements that Rev. Yates had made. This prompted Vestry 6 to write in the email:

Bottom line is that we cannot move forward until you decide the direction and who is in charge at TFC.

The email goes on to state:

WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?”

. . . .

Tell the staff that jeff does not speak for you? Or by your silence affirm that jeff represents your view on these matters, that the staff ought NOT to let its light so shine before parishioners so they may see their good works and glorify their father who is in heaven, and that it’s OK to be abusive to folks you send to meet with staff?

. . . .

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<sup>23</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that 2001 was still in the early days of the Internet, and many churches either did not have websites or were not using websites in the way they are used today.



Tell Jeff that his behavior is NOT acceptable, that he is being placed on administrative leave for six months and directed to get psychological [sic] counselling under supervision of [REDACTED] and that he is being removed from all ministries until his Dr. confirms that he is healed? or let Jeff continue his abuse,<sup>24</sup> continue to deteriorate and diminish God's ministry at TFC by his dissension and divisiveness?

During the past two years I have watched Jeff drive away [REDACTED] (it took Jeff 1 meeting), turn off [REDACTED] whose heart for stewardship Jeff pierced, disarm [REDACTED] notwithstanding your exhortation to the staff, and repeatedly deceive and dissemble in front of me (and you).

....

Now we have a program staff member – who calls himself reverend and who speaks for you and is believed by your staff to speak for you – who is abusing the truth and parishioners whom you have called the service. He is abusing your staff with his bullying.

It is not clear how Rev. Yates responded to this email, but he did recall the tension around the meeting and being concerned by Taylor's difficulties with other staff.

Shortly thereafter, on March 4, 2001, Taylor preached a sermon during the Sunday services on truthfulness with Matthew 5:33-37 as the Scripture text. In the weeks after the sermon, Rev. Yates provided Taylor with constructive feedback about the sermon, which Rev. Yates felt had been more focused on Taylor personally than it should have been, despite Taylor preaching "I do not want this to be a sermon about Jeff Taylor..." In notes that Rev. Yates wrote to Taylor, he stated, "this is mostly a sermon about you Jeff." (Emphasis in original.)

Following the sermon, Rev. Yates wrote out some notes that reflected concerns he had about Taylor's performance in the Director of Discipleship role:

*The sermon about Jeff  
 Going from coach to player very tough  
 Was happily independent within our church  
 Not happy since gave up [Cornerstone]  
 Don't keep us posted on travel  
 Don't run invitations by [Supervisor]  
 A need to be fully informed about leadership issues, decisions  
 Honesty problem  
 Approval problem*

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<sup>24</sup> Vestry 6 testified in their interview that the use of the word "abuse" was in reference to what Vestry 6 viewed as Taylor's mistreatment of fellow staff members. Vestry 6 stated explicitly that there was "no hint" at that time that Taylor "had become inappropriate" with students during his tenure and expressly affirmed that the use of the word abuse here was not a reference to sexual abuse.

*One way with staff/another with me  
 How are you with the discipleship team?  
 What is discipleship team doing?  
 The "I" problem - I am at the center of things - need to mention your role in the handling  
 Teach team but want to hold decision-making reins/use discipleship for divisiveness  
 Inconsistency of person  
 We don't know if we can believe you  
 Feel you manipulate facts  
 Leadership classes - love the theory but not really living out among us  
Why Cornerstone worked  
 Sole responsibility  
 Got what he wanted  
 Worked hard  
 Immediate pastor availability  
 Kids follow inspirational leadership  
 Good at addressing kids issues*

It should be noted that the purpose of this section of the Report is not to “dump” on Taylor or cast his performance in a negative light, but rather, as discussed more fully below, to provide context for Taylor’s decision to leave the Church to return to youth ministry.

In the summer of 2001, a member of the Church staff, who had been overseeing the formation and coordination of small group Bible studies, announced that he was leaving to take on another ministry role outside of the Church. Rev. Yates sent a letter to the congregation on July 5, 2001, in which he announced that Taylor was taking over the small group ministry:

Now the good news – I have asked Jeff Taylor to take on the Small Groups Ministry in the same way [REDACTED] has provided leadership these last few years. I am happy to say that Jeff is so excited for this opportunity. If you haven't had a chance to know him personally, you will find him energetic, empathetic and the opposite of enigmatic. Jeff wears his heart on his sleeve and it bleeds for those he leads and shepherds. He has developed vast resources and solid experiences as a leadership trainer. He loves small groups. He began the Cornerstone discipleship ministry to achieve the goal for every teen to be spiritually fed and grown in a small group. He currently leads a young men's group, belongs to a morning men's group and mentors several other guys. Last Spring he trained and led the Alpha small group leaders – maybe you were one of them. Jeff will surely find creative ways to be in touch with you personally. Don't be surprised if he calls you soon for a “coke” date, an old Cornerstone habit.

Exhibit 20 (other names redacted).

## I. Taylor's Departure from the Church

In the fall of 2001, a former Cornerstone participant and leader invited Taylor to speak at a middle school youth retreat for a church in Atlanta, Georgia, known as Church of the Apostles. According to one of the students who spoke with Taylor after he returned from that trip, Taylor felt the trip had reinvigorated his passion for youth ministry, and he told the student that speaking on the retreat helped him realize he was made for youth ministry. Apparently, Taylor then continued communicating with Church of the Apostles regarding a full-time position there, and in December 2001, he notified Rev. Yates that he had accepted a youth ministry position at Church of the Apostles.

On January 3, 2002, Rev. Yates sent a letter to the congregation notifying them of Taylor's impending departure:

It is with mixed emotions that I inform you of Jeff Taylor's decision to accept a position as Director of Ministry to Students and Parents at the Church of the Apostles in Atlanta, Georgia, as of February 1, 2002.

The Taylors have been a vital part of our church family for a dozen years. Under Jeff's leadership, our Cornerstone ministry to young people has become one of the most dynamic in the country. Two years ago Jeff decided that he wanted to move away from youth ministry into adult discipleship, but since then he has realized that he still has a calling to young people. In Atlanta he will oversee a huge ministry to youth and their families, and provide them with his own dynamic energy and leadership.

We will miss Jeff and [REDACTED] and the boys greatly, yet we do sense, along with them, the rightness and goodness of this call. God has been good to give us the Taylors for so many years.

Jeff will preach his final message on January 20<sup>th</sup> at the 9:00 and 10:45 services and we will be honoring him that day. If you would like to make a financial give please make a check payable to the Taylor Fund and mail it to [REDACTED]. This gift is not tax deductible.

The Church held a final staff farewell luncheon for Taylor on January 22, 2002, and paid him his regular salary until the end of February to give him some time to transition his family to Atlanta.

## J. Taylor's Ministry in Atlanta

*Church of the Apostles.* Taylor worked at Church of the Apostles from February 2002 until sometime in 2004. The details regarding his departure from Church of the Apostles were closely guarded at the time, although one of the witnesses interviewed asserted that they heard Taylor was asked to leave due to having "inappropriate conversations with kids."

Another witness testified that Taylor had been exited from Church of the Apostles as result of finding pornography on his computer.

During the course of the investigation, contact was made with current legal counsel for Church of the Apostles (regrettably, counsel at the time Taylor was employed is now deceased). Through counsel, Church of the Apostles would only state that certain allegations regarding Taylor's conduct resulted in his departure, but further stated that the allegations that led to his departure did not include any allegations of overt sexual abuse (physical touching of a sexual nature).

A witness who had previously been employed with Church of the Apostles had heard that when Church of the Apostles confronted Taylor with accusations of inappropriate conduct and informed him of their intent to separate his employment, he threatened the church with a defamation lawsuit. In order to resolve matters surrounding his departure, Church of the Apostles entered into an agreement in connection with Taylor's separation that contained a mutual nondisparagement clause.

*Christ Church of Atlanta.* Around the time of his departure from Church of the Apostles, Taylor connected with another local church, Christ Church of Atlanta ("Christ Church"). At that time, as part of his work with Church of the Apostles, Taylor had begun Bible studies at two area Christian schools, and he suggested to the leadership of Christ Church that he would be able to help them develop a more robust youth ministry with all of the contacts he had already made. One of the leaders of Christ Church recalled being excited at the prospect of hiring someone who had been the youth leader of one of Atlanta's larger churches.

As part of the hiring process, Christ Church performed a standard criminal background check and received a positive recommendation from Rev. Yates. Also, a representative of Christ Church called Church of the Apostles on April 29, 2004 to check Taylor's references. According to a contemporaneous email, that representative reported that Church of the Apostles did not disclose any negative information about Taylor, but instead stated that Taylor had hired good people to work under him and had turned over the ministry to them, and as a result no longer had a role at Church of the Apostles. The person with whom the Christ Church representative spoke at Church of the Apostles expressly disclaimed that Taylor had been involuntarily discharged or that there had been any issues with Taylor. As one representative of Christ Church stated, Christ Church later felt misled by this lack of disclosure.

For Christ Church, part of Taylor's appeal was that he had formed and maintained a separate youth ministry for local boys, which came to be known as "Kairos."<sup>25</sup> Taylor had

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<sup>25</sup> It is unclear if Taylor formed the Kairos ministry while he was employed at Church of the Apostles, while he was in between jobs, or after he arrived at Christ Church. Those interviewed at Christ

organized Bible studies and other events at two Atlanta area Christian private schools, and had represented to Christ Church that he had recruited a group of approximately 200 boys to participate in Kairos. Taylor assured Christ Church that his work with Kairos would help them jump start their youth ministry.

Sometime in late 2004 or early 2005, Taylor was ordained to the priesthood at Christ Church. Taylor reached out to Rev. Yates and asked him if he would preach at the ordination ceremony. Rev. Yates agreed to do so, even though someone whom Rev. Yates knew who had interacted with Taylor at Church of the Apostles strongly urged him not to do so.

#### K. Allegations Regarding Taylor's Conduct Post-TFCA

The scope of this investigation was intended to focus on the conduct of Taylor while he was employed at the Falls Church, and the extent to which the leadership of the Falls Church knew, if at all, about such conduct while he was employed with the Church. Towards that end, the investigation did not focus on seeking to interview former students who may have interacted with Taylor while he was employed at either of the churches in Atlanta. Nonetheless, as some witnesses reached out from the Atlanta area, they were interviewed and their testimony is briefly summarized here.

*Parent 9.* In the course of the investigation, the investigative team was contacted by the mother (Parent 9) of a former student in Atlanta who had been involved in Kairos in 2005 as a middle schooler. At the time, she and her husband were “delighted” with Taylor’s ministry and, according to Parent 9, went “all in” on Kairos because they thought Taylor was “fabulous.” (The family had known Taylor when he was at Church of the Apostles, although they were entirely unaware of why he had left).<sup>26</sup> She recalled that their son went on camping trips and a sailing trip with Kairos.

Parent 9 reported that when her son was 30 years old, he disclosed to her that he had been sexually abused by Taylor from the ages of 14 to 18 years old. According to Parent 9, her son was subjected to overt sexual abuse by Taylor on multiple occasions. Parent 9 indicated that, because of the trauma caused by these events, her son was not available to speak as part of the investigation due to the effect that discussing these issues has on him.

*Student 24.* Student 24, who had attended Christ Church of Atlanta, provided a written statement regarding Taylor, which states, in part:

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Church remembered that Taylor already had a thriving Kairos ministry when he arrived. Another witness, however, said that the Kairos group was formed *after* Taylor had begun his employment with Christ Church.

<sup>26</sup> Parent 9 and her son were not members or regular attenders of Christ Church, but occasionally her son and some of his friends went to Christ Church on Sunday mornings to hear Taylor preach.

We met weekly during that time for “discipleship”—usually going out for lunch—and he was obsessed with the subject of masturbation. Every time we met, he would ask me about it and I consistently told him I’d never done it before because I felt extremely uncomfortable with his interest in the subject. It wasn’t a couple of times. He brought it up and dwelled on the subject every time I saw him. He seemed to enjoy the innocence. I still remember the expression on his face...he looked like he was fantasizing every time I told him I didn’t masturbate.

He would also “confess” to HIS masturbating. I don’t recall him going into graphic detail, but he told me he did it (I believe to disarm me) so that I would then tell him when/if I did it too.

He would also comment on my body on a regular basis, one time in particular in front of a group of other boys (we all talked about how weird it was after) he started talking about how “good I looked with my shirt off” at a pool party. It wasn’t a one-off comment passing comment...he went on and on about it how “good” my abs were and even brought it up after the subject had changed.

He made physical contact with me twice that I remember. The first was in his car, as he was telling me a story about a hitchhiker who’d touched him inappropriately, he put his hand on my thigh and was about to slide his hand up my leg toward my groin, but he quickly switched to his own leg, I guess because he saw it on my face that I wasn’t ok with it.

The second time, we were playing putt-putt and he placed his putter on my crotch and started wiggling it around.

He would also tell extremely inappropriate sexual jokes, and once told me specifically “not to tell my parents” about one of his jokes, which I went straight home and told my parents about. My father then called him, enraged, and told him never to tell me to keep a secret from them again. I believe he was testing me to see if I would talk about things he did.

As detailed below, in 2007, Rev. Yates reached out to the Rector of Christ Church to share a report that he had received of Taylor engaging in overt sexual abuse with a participant of Cornerstone. Based on this report of a single incident that was alleged to have occurred while Taylor was working for the Church in the early 1990s, Christ Church immediately removed Taylor from youth ministry and reassigned him to other duties. When additional information came to light in 2009, the Personal Committee of Christ Church of Atlanta initiated a formal internal investigation of Taylor’s conduct with students involved in their church’s youth ministry. While the Personnel Committee did not discover any evidence of overt sexual abuse, Christ Church’s leadership nonetheless required Taylor to resign and surrender his ordination.



## L. The 2007 Disclosure to Rev. Yates of Taylor's Abuse

The evidence collected in this investigation established that the first time the leadership of the Church became aware that Taylor had engaged in overt sexual abuse was in 2007.

On or about July 18, 2007, Student 4, who at that time was in his mid-to-late 20's, met with Rev. Yates and disclosed that he had been sexually abused by Taylor when he was a minor in the Cornerstone program. Student 4 shared specific details of the abuse and the timing and location. Rev. Yates found Student 4's disclosure to be completely credible. He testified that, "to say I was shocked was an understatement. It was the last thing in the world I would have expected to hear [about Taylor]. But here was [Student 4] who I trusted, . . . so I believed him."

In his interviews, Rev. Yates stated that, at the time, he believed Student 4 was not interested in taking any formal action against Taylor and was "trying to get as much distance as he could from the whole thing." Rev. Yates testified that it was his understanding, at the time, that Student 4 did not want him to talk to anyone about the disclosure or take any action on his behalf.

In the course of this investigation, Student 4 stated that he went to Rev. Yates for help but could not recall specifically asking Rev. Yates to do anything with the information. Student 4 testified that the fact he sought out Rev. Yates directly was "evidence that I wanted him to do something."

Rev. Yates testified that, following his meeting with Student 4, his "first priority was to make sure [Student 4] was getting the counseling he needed and make sure he wasn't paying for it [and his] second priority was to confront Jeff Taylor."

Rev. Yates noted that, ordinarily, his first step would have been to inform the Bishop; however, because the Church left the Episcopal church nine months prior, he recalled that he had no Bishop to contact. Because of that, he "was pretty much on [his] own" to handle the situation.

According to Rev. Yates, the report absolutely devastated him. In his interview, Rev. Yates stated, "To say I was shocked was an understatement, it was the last thing in the world I would have ever expected to hear." In his personal journal,<sup>27</sup> Rev. Yates wrote:

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<sup>27</sup> Rev. Yates maintained a personal journal at his home where he captured his thoughts of what was on his mind and his meditations on Scripture, and he also maintained a journal on his desk at the church, where he captured certain events or thoughts that occurred during the day. Rev. Yates allowed both his personal journal and his office journal from 2007 to be reviewed and pages copied as part of this investigation.

*wed July 18 - farm  
A dark morning  
Sad mtg w/ [Student 4]*

Nine days later he wrote:

*Friday, July 27  
Things weighing on me: Jeff T*

One or two days after the meeting with Student 4, Rev. Yates spoke with Student 4's therapist and sought counsel on how to best assist Student 4. Rev. Yates spoke with Student 4's therapist on at least three occasions between July and September 2007 seeking guidance on how to support Student 4.

The Church also paid for Student 4 to spend a week in an immersive counseling program outside of the area with a noted abuse counselor.

In his office journal, Rev. Yates recorded the following notes days after meeting with Student 4:

*Have a Plan  
what does law require  
thorough evaluation by discerning therapist  
face-to-face w/ guys group  
w/ [Student 4's] family  
step away from youth min.*

Rev. Yates called a special meeting of the Church's Executive Committee ("ExCom"), which is made up of the Rector, Executive Director, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, and the Chancellor, to notify them of Student 4's disclosure. During that meeting, the ExCom agreed that Rev. Yates should contact Taylor and ask him to return to Northern Virginia so he could confront him with the information in person.

The ExCom also discussed whether there was any mandatory reporting obligation on the part of the Church given that the events had occurred many years earlier, and the disclosing party was now in his mid-to-late 20's. After reviewing the mandatory reporting requirements under the Code of Virginia, they concluded that there was no legal obligation to report, both because clergy were exempted from mandatory reporting at that time, and because the reporting victim was in his mid-to-late 20's and no longer a child at the time of the report.

There is uncertainty as to whether the entire vestry was informed. Although Vestry I believes the full vestry likely would have been notified, Rev. Yates could not be certain that was the case, nor could the other Church leaders interviewed in this investigation.

There is no reference to or mention of Student 4's disclosure in the minutes of the vestry from that time period.

On September 5, 2007, Taylor flew up from Atlanta. Rev. Yates and Staff 8 then met with Taylor in Rev. Yates' office at the church. During the meeting, Rev. Yates told Taylor that a young man had come forward with allegations that Taylor had touched him inappropriately when they were on a trip together. Staff 8 recalled that Taylor got "tearful" and "became undone" when Rev. Yates shared the information but, as Staff 8 recalled, Taylor "never denied it." Staff 8's impression was that Taylor "was guilty as sin." Staff 8 recalled Taylor rocking back and forth on the couch in Rev. Yates' office clutching a pillow to his stomach.

Rev. Yates did recall Taylor denying the allegations but testified that Taylor "then admitted that his judgment had not been good with" Student 4. Rev. Yates told Taylor that he would be contacting the Rector of Christ Church in Atlanta to notify him of the disclosure. He remembered Taylor being defensive and telling Rev. Yates that if he shared this information, it would ruin his reputation.

Following their meeting, Taylor returned to Atlanta on September 6, 2007, and notified the Rector of Christ Church about his meeting with Rev. Yates. According to Atlanta Church Leader 1, Taylor denied the allegations but told Atlanta Church Leader 1 that he had exercised bad judgment in giving the boy a backrub while they slept in the same bed. He claimed nothing else happened.

According to Atlanta Church Leader 1, within 24 hours of the conversation between Atlanta Church Leader 1 and Taylor, Rev. Yates contacted Atlanta Church Leader 1 to notify him of the disclosure. Rev. Yates told Atlanta Church Leader 1 that Taylor had denied the allegations, but Rev. Yates felt Taylor was guilty. Atlanta Church Leader 1 assured Rev. Yates that the church "would get on it right away." Rev. Yates spoke with Atlanta Church Leader 1 on several additional occasions.

Rev. Yates recalled that throughout September 2007, he contacted several former students, parents, and staff members in an attempt to determine whether there were additional victims.

In his office journal, Rev. Yates made a list of seven male students whom he knew to have been in the same general Cornerstone group as Student 4, and a list of two female Cornerstone leaders who had been on staff at various times with Taylor. He recalled speaking with some of the students and at least one of the female staff members, along with another staff member who previously had been involved with Cornerstone.

The students with whom he spoke shared general information about Taylor's interest in lust and masturbation issues, but none said that they had experienced the type of overt

sexual abuse to which Student 4 had been subjected. With regard to the staff, he recalled asking generally whether they were aware of any allegations of sexual abuse by Taylor in Cornerstone, and both said they were not aware of any such allegations or abuse.

Rev. Yates also spoke at length with Student 4's parents and followed up with Student 4 on multiple occasions to update him on his conversations.

On September 20, 2007, Rev. Yates notified the ExCom that he wanted to include a statement about sexual abuse in his sermon that coming Sunday. He sent them the text of his proposed statement, which contained a reference to sexual abuse generally and encouraged any victims of sexual abuse to contact the Church.

One member of the ExCom responded and suggested that Rev. Yates be more specific in notifying the congregation that an allegation of sexual abuse had recently been made regarding a former staff member. However, others on the ExCom disagreed with making such an announcement for several reasons, including that the full vestry had not been informed and that once an announcement had been made, it would be difficult to protect the privacy of Student 4.

Ultimately, Rev. Yates included the following comments in his sermon on September 23, 2007:

These sexual sins are tricky. They cause difficult problems in God's family. Helping people work through marital unfaithfulness, or out-of-wedlock pregnancy, or helping folks who have same sex attractions, or their children who do. These are extremely difficult but at the same time they are wonderful opportunities for us to go deeper in our experience of loving accountability, grace, mercy. And we've seen God doing deep, kind, loving things over and over in our church family.

Some people have experienced sexual abuse over the years, sexual misconduct, even violence. And these things can cause deep scars, painful. And you know for a long time the Christian church was often blind to such things. And sometimes we learn of wrong things committed long ago, but never brought to light. As the Catholic Church has recently recognized, sometimes even ministers have been perpetrators. I'd just say if you or someone you love has ever been involved in anything like that or experienced anything like that, please come and talk to me or one of the clergy about it. I know these are private and personal things but bringing them into the light of Christ can bring about healing, deep healing. We have prayed and counseled many, many people who have experienced wounds like this in the past, and who have received healing and freedom from the effects of such experiences.

Rev. Yates has a note in his personal journal from September 27, 2007, which appears to be from a follow-up conversation he had with Atlanta Church Leader 1. The note stated, "conversation with [Atlanta Church Leader 1] – JT's stepping down." Rev. Yates took this

to mean that Taylor was resigning his employment with Christ Church. Only later did Rev. Yates learn that while Taylor was removed from youth ministry at Christ Church in 2007, his employment was not terminated until September 2009.

One former staff member recalled hearing that Taylor had been defrocked, and believes that he sent a message to Rev. Yates in November 2009, wondering whether they had done enough following the 2007 disclosure to see if there were other victims. The staff member believed that he and Rev. Yates had a follow-up conversation but could not recall specifically what was discussed.

#### M. The 2021 Disclosure of Taylor's Abuse

In April 2021, Rev. Yates received a letter from the parents of Student 6 (Parents 1&2) dated April 21, 2021, setting forth the information that Student 6 had shared with them prior to his death regarding Taylor, which is recited in detail above. Among the contents of their letter to Rev. Yates was the following exhortation:

John, you beautifully told your parishioners so many times, "It is never too late to do the right thing." We believe that statement holds even more true today. We believe there are other kids and parents out there who need to know and seek help. We believe it is never too late to lead those conversations of healing and help years later.

According to Rev. Yates, when he got the letter, he was "heartsick." He remembered either calling or texting and asking if he could visit them, and he ultimately traveled to their home. Rev. Yates remembered being brokenhearted and crying over this.

#### Meeting with Parents 1&2

Parents 1&2 asked Rev. Yates what he had known in 2007 and what steps he had taken in response. They also wanted to know whether TFCA was going to conduct an investigation, if it had not done so already.

Rev. Yates told Parents 1&2 that he had believed the victim who came forward in 2007 and had confronted Taylor and reached out to the church where Taylor was working at the time. He also told them that he had made some reference to abuse in a sermon in which he encouraged anyone who felt like they had been abused by the church to come forward. Parents 1&2 asked Rev. Yates if he could provide them with a copy of the sermon, and Rev. Yates suggested that they contact the Chancellor of the Church, who would likely be able to obtain a copy of the sermon.

Rev. Yates also recalls that he discussed with Parents 1&2 reaching out to Dan Allender, a noted Christian abuse specialist, to get advice from Dr. Allender on what would make sense for the Church to do next.

May 5, 2021 ExCom Meeting

Following his meeting with Parents 1&2, Rev. Yates reached out to Rev. Ferguson. Rev. Ferguson remembered feeling that this was something he should not attempt to handle on his own, and he reached out to the ExCom. A meeting of the ExCom took place on May 5, 2021.

Rev. Yates virtually attended a portion of the meeting to discuss the letter he had received from Parents 1&2 and his meeting with them. He shared that the parents had explained to him that, in the months before his death, their son had disclosed to them that he had been “sexually molested” by Taylor.

During the ExCom meeting, Rev. Yates also discussed the disclosure he had received from Student 4 in 2007. Rev. Yates informed the ExCom that when he had received the news in 2007, he had been “absolutely floored,” as he had previously held the “highest regard for Taylor.” He also shared that he had confronted Taylor in 2007, and stated that although Taylor denied the accusations, he did not believe Taylor’s denial. Rev. Yates further informed the ExCom that he had contacted Christ Church of Atlanta in 2007 to notify them of the allegations, and that it was his understanding that Taylor had been fired or resigned and defrocked as a result.

In that May 5, 2021 meeting, Rev. Yates also shared that he had assisted Student 4 in obtaining counseling following the 2007 disclosure. He stated that while he did not notify the congregation of the 2007 disclosure, he reached out to some students and had given a sermon encouraging people to come forward if they had been the victims of sexual abuse.

Rev. Yates also said that in his conversations with Parents 1&2, they felt there were some things TFCA could do to follow up on what they had learned from their son before he passed. In particular, they asked whether the Church could (1) try to connect with those who had been in youth ministry when Taylor was present; and (2) send some sort of mass mailing.

Rev. Yates noted that he had agreed, in his conversations with Parents 1&2, to reach out to Dan Allender to get his opinion on what the Church should do. Rev. Yates reported to the ExCom that he had spoken with Dr. Allender the previous day and that Dr. Allender did not think that a mass communication would be effective given the passage of time. According to contemporaneous notes taken by one of the ExCom members, Rev. Yates related the following:

I had a conversation with Dan Allender yesterday. Dan said it is not unusual if a child has an experience like this to wait 20 years or so before he can talk about it. Kids don’t normally talk about this sort of thing until they are in their 30s or older. So in answer to my question about what could we do to contact people, he said it would not be effective to make a mass announcement or to send a mass mailing. He was not encouraging that



anything would be helpful. But he said the one thing that would be helpful is if [Parents 1&2] could tell their story to a few people who might have had children involved in youth ministry back again. Or they might make a 7-10 minute video telling what had happened and we could try to share that video with any young people or their parents who were involved in the ministry at that time. But he was not encouraging that there was much that we can do.

Another ExCom member who was taking notes at the May 5, 2021 meeting captured it as follows:

[Parents 1&2] – “could church do anything?”

[Parent 1] – “would John talk to Dan [Allender] re what we should do as a church?”

Dan – “not supportive to do mass communication”

[Parents 1&2] could tell their story to people who had kids in youth then  
He was not encouraging that we could do much.

A third member of the ExCom, who was also taking notes, recorded as follows:

Dan – not unusual for a child to wait 20 years after abuse to talk about it; it would not be effective to make a mass announcement/mass mailing – most effective/could be helpful if [Parents 1&2] could tell their story to a few people that had kids in youth ministry at that time; 7 to 10 minute video that we could share with people that were involved in youth ministry at that time.

None of the notes from that meeting reflect any decision being made about what to do next, *i.e.*, whether to do any type of announcement, investigation, or outreach.

The Chancellor for TFCA was present at the meeting. He shared that he had also been contacted by Parents 1&2 at Rev. Yates’ suggestion so they could request a copy of Rev. Yates’ sermon from 2007. The Chancellor indicated that he would locate a copy of the sermon and provide it to Parents 1&2.

One of the other ExCom members present recalled that there was a discussion about how the Church had upgraded its training with regard to potential sexual abuse of children, but testified that there was no active determination in that moment as to whether to do an investigation.

Another ExCom member recalled that there was some discussion about how they might find out if other people had been impacted, but that member did not remember them drawing any conclusions as regards next steps, other than that Rev. Yates would circle back and talk with Parents 1&2, and then would report back to the ExCom. That leader also remembered that Rev. Yates was very upset and troubled by what he had learned.

There were no clear action items identified at the conclusion of the meeting, although there was a sense on the part of the ExCom that Rev. Yates would continue to be in conversation with and minister to Parents 1&2. Rev. Ferguson recalled feeling that Rev. Yates was going to walk with Parents 1&2 through this and would report back to the ExCom.

#### July 21, 2021 ExCom Meeting

On July 21, 2021, Rev. Yates attended another ExCom meeting to further discuss the situation with Parents 1&2. During that meeting, he referenced a sexual abuse situation that had occurred at another area church, and noted that the church in question had set up a fund to provide counseling for anyone who had experienced abuse. He wondered if TFCA should do the same thing. Rev. Yates commented that he wanted the congregation of TFCA to know this was a serious problem and that the Church had done everything they could to prevent it.

One member of the ExCom recalled that there was some discussion about whether it would help people get the healing and assistance they needed if events that occurred 30 years ago were dredged up, but this ExCom member did not recall that any conclusions were reached. This ExCom member felt that there was no attempt to bury the allegations, but there was a struggle to know the “right thing to do,” and the “best, healthiest thing to do” in terms of helping people.

Another member of the ExCom in attendance recalled that there was no definitive decision made as to whether to conduct an investigation. Rather, there was a sense by the ExCom that Rev. Yates was in a relationship with this couple and would continue to minister to them, and that the Church, for its part, would focus on undertaking additional training for staff and workers to prevent any future abuse.

There were no clear action items identified at the conclusion of the meeting, and there is no record of the matter being discussed further in 2021, nor did any of the ExCom members recall it being brought up again in any further ExCom meetings in that year or the following year. Rev. Yates recalled meeting with Parents 1&2 one or two more times, but otherwise there was no further follow-up from the Church.

#### August 16, 2021 Meeting with Parent 3

In August 2021, several weeks after the second ExCom meeting where the matter had been discussed, Rev. Yates met with another parent (Parent 3) whose children had also been involved in Cornerstone and who had been in touch with Parents 1&2.

Parent 3 urged Rev. Yates to encourage the Church to bring this situation into the light, so that the Church could reach out to any other victims and to any whose faith had suffered as a consequence of the Church not having been more open following the 2007 disclosure. Parent 3 recalled Rev. Yates reaching back out a few months later to tell her

that if she knew of any victims, the victims could reach out to him and he would be glad to meet with them. Parent 3 did not recall any other interactions with Rev. Yates following that conversation.

Parent 1's Efforts to Obtain the Sermon Text

On June 8, 2021, Parent 1 sent an email to the Chancellor of TFCA which stated, in relevant part:

We spoke several weeks ago about my son [REDACTED], who passed away in April. You told me at that time that you would send me notes on or a transcript of what John Yates said to the congregation of TFC back in 2007 after learning that Jeff Taylor had sexually abused a young Cornerstone kid years earlier. I have not heard from you since. Could you please fulfill that promise?

The Chancellor did not respond to that email.

The following year, on October 12, 2022, Parent 1 once again reached out to the TFCA Chancellor by email to reiterate the request for the notes of the 2007 sermon that Rev. Yates had preached following the 2007 disclosure. That email included the following:

We spoke many months ago about the abuse our late son [REDACTED] suffered at the hands-off [sic] Jeff Taylor while Jeff was youth pastor and leader of Cornerstone at TFC. During our phone conversation, you told me that you would go back and find, and then send to me, the contemporaneous notes you made of what John Yates said to the TFC congregation about this matter after first learning of another young man's abuse. My wife [REDACTED] and I were still members of TFC in that time frame, and regular attendees at Sunday services, but neither of us remembers hearing any such remarks from John. We've asked other parishioners if *they* remember such remarks, and no one we've spoken to does.

I never received those notes from you. Could you please provide them to me now, including the date on which John made them? An actual transcript or recording of his remarks would be preferable, of course, but I believe you told me that no such transcript or recording exists. Do I remember that correctly?

I will appreciate it if you can get your notes to me promptly.

The Chancellor also never responded to this email. When asked during the course of this investigation about the failure to respond to the two e-mail requests, the Chancellor acknowledged apologetically that it had simply "fallen off of [his] radar."

## N. The 2023 Involvement of the Bishop

Upset by the Church's failure to undertake a more public investigation and understandably dissatisfied with the lack of response to their request for the sermon notes, Parent 1 was introduced by Parent 3 to the newly installed Bishop of the Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic of the Anglican Church in North America. Parent 1, Parent 3, and another individual met with the Bishop on September 14, 2023 to share Student 6's story and again report allegations of misconduct by Taylor. The Bishop subsequently brought the allegations to the attention of Rev. Ferguson, as well as the Senior Warden and Junior Warden, with the direction that the Church undertake an investigation of the allegations.

Following the involvement of the Bishop, Church leadership met with Parents 1&2, and finally provided them with the excerpts from the sermon that they had been seeking.

On October 2, 2023, a Special Committee of the Vestry was formed to oversee the process of investigating the allegations.

## O. Other Prior Sexual Abuse Allegations at the Church

A number of witnesses interviewed during this process made mention of other incidents of sexual abuse that had arisen at the Church either prior to Taylor coming on staff (Newell) or during the time that Taylor was on staff (Nielsen). Given the close durational proximity (1986-88) of the Newell incident, and the fact that the Nielsen incident (1992-93) occurred while Taylor was leading Cornerstone and involved a youth volunteer, a brief discussion of those incidents is warranted, particularly the Nielsen incident.

### Bruce Newell.

The first incident involved an Associate Rector of the Church named Rev. Byron Bruce Newell, a retired admiral.

Briefly, in 1988, several female parishioners accused Newell of assaulting them, fondling them, and initiating sexual relations during pastoral counseling sessions. A total of six women made allegations regarding Newell, although some of the women alleged that the contact from Newell was limited to comments that were sexual in nature.

After speaking with the women and Newell, Rev. Yates determined Newell had acted inappropriately, and notified the Bishop. At Rev. Yates' recommendation, the Bishop removed Newell from his duties at the Church in 1988, but the Church was not informed of the reasons for Newell's departure. Newell was subsequently sent to counseling and was reassigned by the Diocese to another church after a counselor opined that he was unlikely to repeat his abuse.

One of Newell's alleged victims later filed a lawsuit in civil court against Newell, the

Church, the Bishop, and the Diocese of Virginia. The suit alleged that church officials attempted to cover up Newell's conduct by telling the victim she was responsible for the abuse and later offering to fund part of her counseling only if she would release the Church from liability. The lawsuit was dismissed on the grounds that it would violate the constitutional separation between church and state.

On March 1, 1993, Reverend Yates sent a letter to the entire congregation regarding the Newell situation. Among other things, the letter stated:

These experiences have weighed heavily on the persons who were affected. Last year, one individual, who no longer worships with us, requested that official action being instituted with reference to Mr. Newell's status as a priest. Others who were affected by Mr. Newell have supported this proposal.

Last fall, the Bishop appointed a Board of Presentment in compliance with the canon law the Church. The purpose of the Board of Presentment is to report whether an ecclesiastical trial of Mr. Newell should be conducted. Under the canon law, all proceedings before the Board of Presentment are private.

This has been one of the most difficult things I've ever faced in all my years of ministry. I also want to say how deeply sorry I am that members of this congregation suffered so profoundly from the loss of trust that results from such an experience.

Exhibit 21 (Ltr. dated 03/1/93). Rev. Yates concluded the letter by writing: "Please pray also that as a Church, we will learn all that God has to teach us through this painful experience." *Id.*

In 1993, Newell was found guilty in an ecclesiastical trial and was removed from the priesthood.

Reflecting on the Newell situation during this investigation, Rev. Yates stated that the Church made an error in not informing the congregation of the reasons for Newell's dismissal in 1988. At the time, Rev. Yates believed that by not making the matter public, he was protecting the privacy of the women who had come forward, but several years later he realized that those actions had been in error. In the course of being interviewed, Rev. Yates reflected: "In that situation, I really thought I was protecting the women by not getting into the details of why he was going on leave, but I now know I was wrong."

#### Jeff Nielsen

In or around 1992 or 1993, a young congressional staffer named Jeff Nielsen joined Cornerstone as a volunteer youth leader. He led a discipleship group of five male students, including three students who were interviewed as part of the investigation (Student 16, Student 20, Student 32).

At some point in late 1992 or early 1993, Nielsen moved in with the family of Student 20 and resided in the family's basement. According to the parents of Student 20, who were interviewed as part of this investigation, Nielsen had been living on Capitol Hill, where he worked. So that he would not have to commute back and forth to Capitol Hill in between the Sunday morning church services and the Sunday evening Cornerstone activities, they invited Nielsen to spend Sundays at their home. Eventually, this became a full-time living situation, although neither parent could remember precisely how that had come about.

Student 20 has stated that he was subjected to overt sexual abuse by Nielsen on a daily basis during almost the entire time Nielsen lived with his family. Student 20 indicated that he was under "intense manipulation" from Nielsen who threatened that if Student 20 told anyone what was happening, Nielsen would kill himself in a gruesome manner, and Student 20 would be forced to live with the consequences of that. As a result, Student 20 remained quiet about the abuse that was taking place on a nightly basis in his own home. At some point during this time, Student 20, Student 16, and Student 32 were riding in a car with Nielsen when Student 16 and Student 32 observed Nielsen touching Student 20's genitals over his pants. Concerned, they reported this to their parents and to Taylor.

Taylor contacted the Fairfax County Police and Child Protective Services ("CPS"), and an investigation was opened. When he was interviewed by the police, Student 20 denied being sexually abused by Nielsen. The authorities also went to the homes of Student 16 and Student 32 and interviewed them each separately and outside the presence of their parents. The primary investigator conducting these interviews was Detective Thomas Polhemus of the Fairfax County Police Department.<sup>28</sup> After taking the statements of the two boys, Detective Polhemus disclosed that, because Student 20 had denied the abuse and the police lacked any evidence to the contrary, the Fairfax County Police Department would have to close the investigation.

After becoming aware that the police were not going to further investigate the matter, the parents of Student 16 and Student 32 reached out to the parents of Student 20 and arranged a meeting at the home of the parents of Student 16. According to the parents of Student 16, the purpose of the meeting was to inform the parents of Student 20 what their sons had observed. The parents of Student 20, understanding that the discussion involved Nielsen, felt that Nielsen should be present for the allegations to defend himself if necessary. The meeting did not go well, as Nielsen steadfastly denied the allegations and was supported by the parents of Student 20 (based upon Student 20's assertion to them that nothing inappropriate had happened). This greatly upset the parents of Student 16 and Student 32, who had informed Rev. Yates of the allegations.

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<sup>28</sup> Notably, Detective Polhemus was involved in 1995 and 1996 as the lead investigator in other cases involving sexual abuse of minors. *See, e.g., Smith v. Commonwealth*, Rec. No. 1546-97-4 (Ct. App. Va. 1998). (WARNING! The depictions of child abuse in the *Smith* case are highly disturbing.)



Despite the denials of Student 20, the Church removed Nielsen from his role as a discipleship group leader, and he was no longer permitted to work with youth at the Church. (One student described Taylor as “peacocking around” after he got Nielsen removed from his role at the Church.)

Rev. Yates also met with Student 20 and his parents, but they continued to hold to their view that there was nothing inappropriate taking place. For several months thereafter, Nielsen continued to live with the family of Student 20 and continued to attend church with them, although the Church prohibited him from affiliating with Cornerstone in any way. A family member of Student 20 felt like Rev. Yates would give the family “dirty looks” when he saw them with Nielsen. Eventually there was a falling out between the family and Nielsen (seemingly unrelated to the abuse allegations), and he moved out of their house and into the home of one of their neighbors with whom he had become acquainted. Nielsen eventually moved to California to attend law school.

In or around 2007, Nielsen was accused of abusing another minor in California. In December 2007, Nielsen pled guilty to lewd contact with a minor in exchange for a three-year prison sentence. He was formally sentenced on March 25, 2008. Student 20 flew to California and spoke at Nielsen’s sentencing hearing.

During the interview with Student 20, he indicated that he lied about the abuse in the 1990’s because he was being manipulated by Nielsen and was afraid Nielsen would kill himself. He also indicated that he was “13 and scared and embarrassed.”

## VII. INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

As noted, a key objective of this investigation was to uncover and present the truth, neither understating nor overstating facts, and drawing conclusions as fairly as can be drawn from the facts gathered. This section seeks to address key questions that inevitably arise from the factual narrative set forth above, and to discern answers based upon the facts gathered as well as the perceptions and testimony of those involved. Although there may be conclusions drawn below to which reasonable persons might disagree, the determinations and judgments reflected in this section of the Report are based on a careful reading and weighing of the testimony of more than 80 witnesses and the review of numerous historical documents.

### A. Did the Church Have Any Policies in Place to Prevent Abuse?

During the relevant time frame, the Church had several pertinent policies and procedures in place to address the possibility of, and to seek to prevent, the sexual abuse of minors. Although not all of the policies and procedures that would have been in place during that

period have been located given the passage of time, the investigation did produce a number of relevant documents.

*Policy on Clergy Sexual Misconduct in Pastoral Care*

Among documents produced by the Church was a draft *Policy on Clergy Sexual Misconduct in Pastoral Care* for The Diocese of Virginia dated March 31, 1993. The proposed policy distinguished between three types of sexual misconduct – sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation. With regard to sexual abuse, the draft policy stated:

For the purpose of this policy, sexual abuse is sexual involvement or contact by a cleric with a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent. Sexual abuse is a criminal offense and must be reported to law enforcement officials. It is a diocesan policy to make such reports immediately and to cooperate fully with law enforcement officials in investigating any allegations of sexual abuse.

Exhibit 22, p. 3. The draft policy noted that while the stated policies referred to misconduct by clergy, the standards also applied “to all lay employees and volunteers of Episcopal parishes and other bodies within the diocese.”

A November 1998 version of the *Policy on Clergy Sexual Misconduct in Pastoral Care* for The Diocese of Virginia also defined sexual abuse as “any sexual involvement or sexual contact with a person who is a minor or who is legally incompetent.” Exhibit 18, p. 4.

The policy delineated several warning signs and precautions, including the following:

Leaders are to be aware of the danger signs of sexual boundary breakdown: excessive self-disclosure by the pastor; excessive availability, including giving or receiving inappropriate gifts; excessive touch, however innocent; undue anticipation of future visits, including rearrangement of one’s schedule; fretting about clothing or appearance; meeting at an unusual location; continual fantasy about the person; and keeping secrets which go beyond the requirements of professional confidentiality.

*Id.* at App’x C. The policy required that all complaints of sexual misconduct be reported immediately to the Bishop. If the Bishop determined that the complaint involved a violation of federal or state law, the Bishop was required to immediately notify law enforcement.

The policy also included a section dedicated to Child Sexual Abuse, which set forth, among other things, the following policies and practices:

One-on-one interactions are a fundamental part of the practice with the ordained and are often necessary and appropriate for other staff members, but care should be taken that they be conducted in an environment that provides visibility by other adults.

In no circumstance should one adult be allowed to take children or youth on an overnight outing.

*Id.* at App'x D. While the policy noted that “[a]t this time in Virginia, clergy are not required by law to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect,” the Child Sexual Abuse portion of the policy contained a reporting procedure, which required clergy to call the Diocesan office and ask to speak directly to one of the Bishops.

#### Training

The *Policy on Clergy Sexual Misconduct in Pastoral Care* for The Diocese of Virginia required that all clergy, volunteers who regularly supervised youth activities, and employees received a minimum of four hours of training on child sexual abuse.

Although many records from that period have been lost, the investigation did uncover records reflecting that Taylor completed the “Child Sexual Abuse in Church Settings Workshop for the Diocese of Virginia” on November 16, 1994, *see Exhibit 23*, and again on September 25, 1996. *See Exhibit 24*. It seems likely that Taylor participated in additional training during the remaining years of his tenure at the Church; however, the investigation was only able to locate records from these two training sessions.

#### Employee Policy Manual

Also found in the Church records was the July 2004 edition of the *Employee Policy Manual of The Falls Church*. *See Exhibit 25*. The policy included expectations regarding employee behavior and specifically referenced sexual misconduct, stating:

The church strictly prohibits any sexual misconduct judged to be inappropriate or illegal. Complaints of any such behavior should be brought to the immediate attention of the Office Manager or the Parish Administrator. Any and all allegations of such inappropriate or illegal behavior will be promptly investigated, and allowing for a fair investigation, will be carried out in as confidential a manner as possible.

All employees will be required to attend, as a condition of employment, a minimum of four hours of training on the issues of child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or sexual exploitation in church settings. Such training will be provided at the expense of the church.

*Id.*

#### CANA Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment

The investigation also identified a draft *Policy Prohibiting Sexual Exploitation and Harassment* dated July 26, 2007 for the Convocation of Anglicans in North America (CANA). The proposed policy contained a specific Child and Youth Protection Policy, which stated:

CANA is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment in which young people can learn about and experience God's love. CANA expects that the local congregation will adequately screen, train, and supervise employees and volunteers who work with minors. All complaints must be investigated promptly and with care for the privacy of the alleged victim as well as the individual against whom an allegation has been made. A complaint investigation procedure is outlined in Section II.

The complaint investigation procedure provided, in pertinent part:

- Whenever there is an allegation of sexual misconduct or abuse, the allegation must be taken seriously.
- Each situation must be handled straightforwardly and with respect for privacy and confidentiality.

If the allegation seems credible:

- Notify the CANA administrative office.
- Contact the insurance carrier for the parish. Follow the advice given by your insurance carrier.
- Give total cooperation to civil authorities under guidance of your attorney.
- Direct care and loving concern toward the victim and his/her family.
- Direct care and loving concern toward the accused and his/her family.
- Do not make any statements which would indicate that you hold the victim responsible in any way.

*Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Policy Manual for the Protection of Children*

The current policy in place for the Church is the *Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic Policy Manual for the Protection of Children*. See Exhibit 26 (Policy dated November 2019). It is unclear when the initial version of this policy was created. The diocese was originally organized in 2006 as the Anglican District of Virginia and achieved diocesan status in 2011. With regard to reporting, the policy stated:

Every church in the Diocese should be familiar with, and every person responsible for the care of children in the church should be made aware of, the applicable child abuse reporting requirements and procedures in that jurisdiction.

*Id.* The policy provided that the Rector should notify the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic, and the Bishop would notify the diocesan Chancellor. See *id.*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The DOMA policy also be accessed through The Falls Church Anglican website: <https://www.tfcanglican.org/children> and <https://www.tfcanglican.org/youth>.

**B. Did the Church Know, While Taylor Was Employed, That Taylor Had Engaged in Overt or Covert Sexual Abuse of Cornerstone Youth?**

Some of Taylor's conduct in Section VI.C above, as depicted by Student 4, Student 1, and Student 6 (through the testimony of his parents), fits the definition in this Report of overt sexual abuse. The touching of genitalia, either under or over clothing, and the pressing of his genitalia upon a victim in an aggressive manner, fall squarely within the definition of overt sexual abuse as used in this Report.

Taylor's other conduct, as recounted through the testimony of witnesses in Section VI.B above, can reasonably be seen as falling within the definition of covert sexual abuse, as used in this Report, although a definitive conclusion is not possible given the inability to conclusively ascertain Taylor's intent.

In the process of conducting this investigation, a few witnesses speculated that the leadership of the Church "must have known" that Taylor had engaged in the sexual abuse of Cornerstone students while he was employed.

To answer this question directly, after receiving the testimony of more than 80 witnesses and reviewing numerous documents, including personal journals, there is no evidence to support that contention.

As noted, numerous individuals beyond students (parents, other youth leaders) knew that Taylor routinely spoke with some of the male youth about sexual issues such as lust and masturbation. Taylor made it clear that he considered it the biggest sin issue facing young men and that his approach was to compel boys to talk about it regularly. Consequently, he conducted these discussions in the context of accountability and purportedly trying to help these young men navigate the challenges of lust.

Some of the male leaders who worked under his direction felt uncomfortable with the amount of focus that Taylor gave to masturbation and sexual sin. However, because Taylor was so experienced as a youth leader and had been so successful, they assumed that his approach to youth ministry was valid.<sup>30</sup>

Perhaps not surprisingly, this investigation has elicited a wide range of emotions from those men and women who served under and alongside Taylor in leading the Cornerstone ministry. Several of them expressed great surprise at the allegations that Taylor had engaged in sexual abuse, and some have wrestled with feelings of "guilt and complicity" –

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<sup>30</sup> One of the male leaders even mentioned that in doing one-on-one discipleship with one of the male students, he attempted to emulate Taylor by asking the student about masturbation, but, even as he was asking the question, he felt a high level of discomfort. After the male student reacted negatively to the question, he vowed not to ever ask that question again.

wondering how, if there was sexual abuse happening while they were involved in leading Cornerstone, they were not more aware and/or had not done more to prevent such abuse.

At the same time, the overall consensus of the Cornerstone youth volunteers and staff was that, prior to becoming aware of these allegations, they generally remembered the season in which they were involved with Cornerstone as being a positive time in their life. Although some stated that they are now able to look back and see how “weird” or even “creepy” some of Taylor’s focus on lust or masturbation was, they had no knowledge at the time, nor would they ever have perceived, that Taylor was engaging in any form of sexual abuse.

In the end, none of the persons in leadership at the Church from 1990 to 2002 who were interviewed, and none of the other Cornerstone staff and volunteers who were interviewed, testified that they were aware of any of the following which, depending on the motivations of Taylor, could be viewed as covert sexual abuse:

- the frequency with which Taylor spoke with some of the male students about masturbation, including asking some to record their occurrences in a journal, or asking them what they were thinking about while engaging in the act;
- the locations where he chose to have some of these conversations, which often were secluded or remote;
- the graphic conversations about sex and female genitalia that Taylor had with some of the male students;
- the sharing of his own sexual history;
- the discussions with male students about potential insecurities about penis size, and asking one student about the length of his penis; and
- asking at least one student if he would masturbate in front of Taylor for money (which Taylor then tried to pass off as a theological lesson).

Moreover, none of the almost three dozen Cornerstone students interviewed suggested that they had ever communicated or conveyed to anyone in the Church leadership some of these more extreme actions on the part of Taylor.

This conclusion – that the Church had no knowledge of overt or covert sexual abuse on the part of Taylor while he was employed – is buttressed by some of the Church’s actions after receiving the 2007 disclosure from Student 4. As described above, after receiving Student 4’s disclosure, Rev. Yates reached out to Taylor, flew him up, confronted him face-to-face, and followed up the day after that meeting by notifying his church in Atlanta of the allegations.



In summary, based on the testimony of the 82 witnesses interviewed, and a review of all available documentation, there is no evidence that the leadership of the Church knew that Taylor had engaged in sexual abuse of Cornerstone youth prior to 2007.

This is also *not* to say that there weren't other warning signs that Church leadership should have observed and heeded while Taylor was serving in ministry at the Church. In seeking to understand these warning signs, TFCAs (and perhaps other churches who read this Report) can learn and grow; however, the presence of what could be interpreted as warning signs alone cannot be imputed as knowledge of the sexual abuse reflected in this Report.<sup>31</sup>

C. Was Taylor's Job Change in September 1999 the Result of Some Knowledge By the Church of Taylor's Sexual Misconduct?

A few interview subjects speculated that what was perceived as the fairly abrupt transition of Taylor from youth director to another position within the Church in September 1999 could be seen as evidence that Church leadership was aware of Taylor's sexual abuse and chose to address it simply by moving him away from youth work.

As one parent put it:

Around the year 2000, Jeff Taylor's job was changed to family minister from youth minister. No reason was ever explained publicly. I have looked back and wondered whether someone in authority noticed some inappropriate behavior on Jeff's part but it could not be proven. Did the Church change Jeff's job to get him further away from the children?

As shown in the factual findings provided above, there is no evidence to support this speculation. Rather, while the transition may have felt sudden from an outside perspective, the evidence obtained in the investigation establishes that the transition had long been under consideration. First, one of the other Cornerstone leaders who worked

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<sup>31</sup> One of the witnesses interviewed in this investigation wondered whether, when Taylor left the Church, any type of agreement was put in place that would have kept the Church from talking about Taylor to prospective employers or others (suggesting that such a document would reflect some knowledge of sexual abuse by the Church prior to Taylor's departure and an agreement to "keep things quiet" in exchange for Taylor leaving quietly). The simple answer is that there was no separation agreement. Taylor and the Church did not enter into any type of confidentiality or nondisclosure/nondisparagement agreement relating to his employment or his departure, or in any way limiting the ability of the Church to speak about Taylor with prospective employers or others. Although he had experienced a couple of rocky years in the role of Director of Adult Discipleship, at the time of his departure, Taylor continued to be held in high regard by many in Church leadership, and he left the Church of his own volition as an employee in good standing.

closely with Taylor felt that he sensed he was about to turn 40<sup>32</sup> and was “tired” from more than a decade of leading youth ministry. Second, as set forth in detail in above:

- Rev. Yates recalled that Taylor always wanted a bigger role and more compensation;<sup>33</sup>
- In August 1997, as Taylor was trying to grow the staff of Cornerstone, he informed the personnel committee that he and Rev. Yates had been discussing his future role and that Rev. Yates saw him as ministering to the entire family, not just students;
- In August 1998, Taylor proposed a revised job description that would allow him to expand his role within the Church and pursue teaching at “the adult level”;
- In early 1999, Taylor delivered a memo to Church leadership proposing that he be placed into a new position entitled Director of Adult Education and Family Ministries;
- Throughout the spring of 1999, Taylor and Church leadership exchanged several iterations of a job description for a position initially entitled Director of Adult Discipleship and Student Ministries; and
- The change in Taylor’s position was announced in July 1999 in a memo to the entire staff.

Thus, a job change that may have seemed sudden to some had, in fact, been in process for at least two years.

There was some testimony that Rev. Yates was concerned about the impact on Cornerstone if parents and students had become aware that Taylor was thinking of changing roles. Thus, it is likely that the potential change was kept quiet so as to not potentially disrupt the success of the Cornerstone ministry.

Further, a stated part of Taylor’s job description in his new role was the continuation of his oversight of the Cornerstone ministry team, and he continued to meet regularly with a small group of boys. Both of these things would be completely inconsistent with the notion that his job changed in order to move him away from youth.

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<sup>32</sup> Taylor turned 40 in the spring of 2000.

<sup>33</sup> There was ample documentation and testimony that Taylor was struggling financially to care for his family of six on the salary he was receiving from the Church. Whether this was the result of trying to raise a large family in an expensive area or reflected his personal difficulty in managing finances cannot be said, but the Church extended many resources to support him as he sought to manage his finances. Indeed, several of the parents interviewed acknowledged looking for ways to provide for the Taylor family given how tight finances always seemed to be.

D. If Taylor's Job Change in 1999 Was Motivated By His Being Tired of Youth Work, Why Would He Take a Youth Ministry Job in Atlanta in 2002?

A related question that arose in the context of a few interviews was along the lines of the following: *"If Taylor moved into adult ministry because he was worn out and tired from more than a decade of youth ministry, then why would he have left the Church about two years later to go back into youth ministry work?"* This question is a follow-on to the question of whether the Church moved Taylor into adult discipleship because it had discovered that he engaged in overt sexual abuse, and it suggests that his movement into adult ministry could not have been the result of "burn-out" on youth ministry because he went right back into youth ministry in Atlanta. The factual record provides a logical explanation for Taylor's move back into youth ministry.

As shown in the factual findings, Taylor's transition into an adult-focused, non-youth ministry role was rather bumpy. As the leader of Cornerstone, Taylor was essentially given free rein to run the ministry as he wished, and there was very little oversight or pushback. Once he transitioned into adult ministry, he found himself having to work with numerous other stakeholders and to balance his own ministry objectives with the ministry priorities and visions of others. A number of specific difficult interactions between Taylor and others involved in adult ministry and the leadership of the Church are described above.

Rev. Yates captured in some handwritten notes in the spring of 2001 some of the challenges that Taylor was having in his interactions with other staff members ("one way with staff/another with me") and noted that Taylor had been successful in Cornerstone in part because he had "Sole responsibility...Got what he wanted...Worked hard."

Despite the challenges that Taylor was encountering, the Church continued trying to find a good fit for him once he was no longer leading Cornerstone, as reflected by the July 5, 2001 memo in which it was announced that Taylor would be taking over the Church's small group ministry.

In the fall of 2001, Taylor was invited to speak at a middle school retreat for a church in Atlanta. When he returned, one student recalls him being extremely excited and expressing that he felt his passion for youth ministry been reinvigorated. Within a few months, Taylor had departed to take the youth director job at that same church, and he and his family moved to Atlanta in February 2002.

This narrative establishes that Taylor's decision to return to youth ministry was, more likely than not, a reflection of the dissatisfaction that he found in trying to repeat the success he had had in Cornerstone within the adult community of the Church, and an effort to replicate the Cornerstone success at another church.

E. **How Was the Response of the Church to the 2007 Disclosure Appropriate, and How Was the Response Flawed?**

A critical focus of the investigation was the adequacy of the Church's response to Student 4's disclosure in 2007. The conclusion of this investigation, based upon the testimony of those who were involved in the events of 2007, is that the response of the Church in 2007 to the disclosure by Student 4 was a mixture of several positive steps and a number of missteps.

I. **What Positive Steps Did the Church Take in Response to the 2007 Disclosure?**

Rev. Yates Believed the Victim.

It might appear to an outsider that this is hardly a laudable response, but in many situations, the initial response of the receiving institution is a stated disbelief, particularly when, as was the case here, the accused was someone well-known to the institution and highly regarded by the leadership of the institution. Regrettably, this often leads institutions to immediately doubt and question the victim, holding resolutely to the innocence of the accused until proven otherwise. That did not happen here.

Rev. Yates stated that he immediately and unequivocally believed Student 4, even as he was completely shocked and blindsided that this individual (Taylor), who had been so close to his family, had engaged in the abhorrent conduct that Student 4 disclosed.

Other Church Leaders Were Notified.

Rev. Yates did not attempt to bury the 2007 disclosure by keeping it to himself. Again, perhaps common sense would dictate that the representative of an institution, having learned of some form of abuse, would inform others in leadership, but this also does not always happen. In this case, Rev. Yates informed the ExCom – the two highest elected lay officials of the Church (the Senior Warden and the Junior Warden), as well as the Senior Associate Rector and the Chancellor of the Church. As discussed below, in the opinion of this investigator, this dissemination of information should have gone further, but it is worth noting that Rev. Yates did bring others into the decision-making process.

Rev. Yates Reached Out to Student 4's Parents.

With the consent of Student 4, Rev. Yates reached out to his parents to express his sorrow and met with them at least twice to minister to them.

The Church Confronted the Accused.

The Church also acted appropriately in reaching out fairly quickly to Taylor to confront him with the 2007 disclosure. After meeting with the ExCom, Rev. Yates contacted Taylor and arranged for him to fly up to the area. Rev. Yates and the Senior Associate Rector met with him in person and presented him with the allegations of the 2007 disclosure.

Although Taylor refused to acknowledge the truth of the allegations, both Rev. Yates and Staff 8, in their interviews, said they were convinced that Taylor was lying.

*The Church Contacted the Accused's Current Employer.*

Whether due to fear of legal exposure, fear of confrontation, or fear of embarrassment, many organizations refuse to provide information about former employees, even in situations where such a disclosure could prevent harm to others. Indeed, in both the secular business world and amongst religious institutions, employees who engage in misconduct often are permitted to move on and engage in the same conduct at a subsequent place of work because of these fears.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Rev. Yates, within a day of confronting Taylor, reached out to Christ Church of Atlanta and shared the details of Student 4's story with the Rector of Christ Church. When Christ Church confronted Taylor, he denied the allegations and claimed he had merely given Student 4 a backrub in bed. In light of Taylor's denial and Christ Church's inability to interview the victim (as Rev. Yates had kept private the identity of Student 4), Christ Church did not terminate Taylor at that time. However, Christ Church and the Bishop of that diocese directed Taylor to cease having any further ministry interactions with youth.

Ultimately, after Christ Church learned that Taylor had not honored the directive of the Bishop to stay away from ministering to youth (Taylor's actions occurred outside of Christ Church), its Personnel Committee opened an investigation, which ultimately culminated in the termination of Taylor's employment and the surrendering of his ordination in September 2009.

A representative of Christ Church communicated this result to a representative of the Church in an email dated September 11, 2009, in which he stated, among other things:

In the course of closing my files, I was reminded of the difficult and courageous role that The Rev. John Yates played in this matter. Please convey my sincere thanks to him for providing information that was absolutely crucial to the Personnel Committee's investigation. So many other priests and ministers have chosen the easy road, passing problems on to other churches and leaving families at risk. The Rev. Yates' action no doubt bears witness to his faith in a higher authority to whom he will some day give an account.

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<sup>34</sup> Ironically, it has been reported that when Taylor was first accused of misconduct at Church of the Apostles, he retained legal counsel and threatened individuals with defamation claims, which apparently resulted in Church of the Apostles entering into a confidentiality agreement with Taylor pertaining to his departure. Sadly, this "gag order" (as one witness referred to it) led to Christ Church being completely unaware of Taylor's past when it hired him in 2004.

As reflected in the statement, it was Rev. Yates' willingness to reach out that caused Christ Church to remove Taylor from youth ministry, and ultimately led to Taylor being removed from ministry altogether.

*The Church Reviewed its Legal Reporting Obligations.*

The Church carefully reviewed the applicable law to ensure that it was meeting any legal reporting obligations it might have. At that time, the Virginia Code did not include clergy as mandatory reporters.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the applicable section of the Code stated that “[t]he following persons who, in their professional or official capacity, have reason to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, shall report the matter immediately....” Va. Code § 63.2-1509 (emphasis added). At the time of the 2007 disclosure, Student 4 was in his mid-to-late 20’s, and therefore did not fall within the definition of a “child” under the mandatory reporting requirements.

Some may argue that, regardless of any legal obligation to report, the “right” thing for the Church to have done would have been to lodge a report with law enforcement. However, Student 4 was an adult at that point, and his stated desire was that he did not wish for law enforcement to be involved.

*The Church Made Some Effort to Address the Issue From the Pulpit.*

As noted, the Church did make some effort to shed some light on the situation, albeit without expressly mentioning that there had been a disclosure of sexual abuse by a past employee. Included in Rev. Yates' sermon was the following statement:

As the Catholic Church has recently recognized, sometimes even ministers have been perpetrators. I'd just say if you or someone you love has ever been involved in anything like that or experienced anything like that, please come and talk to me or one of the clergy about it. I know these are private and personal things but bringing them into the light of Christ can bring about healing, deep healing. We have prayed and counseled many, many people who have experienced wounds like this in the past, and who have received healing and freedom from the effects of such experiences.

This sermon may be viewed as a step in the right direction, but, as discussed below, it did not go far enough.

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<sup>35</sup> Religious institutions and clergy members did not become “mandatory reporters” in the Commonwealth of Virginia until July 1, 2019, when the General Assembly amended Virginia Code § 63.2-1509 by adding a new subsection (19) to include as mandatory reporters “[a]ny minister, priest, rabbi, imam, or duly accredited practitioner of any religious organization or denomination usually referred to as a church, unless the information supporting the suspicion of child abuse or neglect (i) is required by the doctrine of the religious organization or denomination to be kept in a confidential manner or (ii) would be subject to § 8.01-400 or 19.2-271.3 if offered as evidence in court.”



*The Church Made a Modest Effort to Ascertain Whether Others Had Experienced Abuse.*

While insufficient, as discussed below, the Church did make some effort to determine whether there had been any other victims of Taylor's sexual abuse. Rev. Yates prepared a list of seven young men who had been associated with Student 4 and reached out to as many of them as he could to determine whether any of them had experienced similar abuse. He also spoke with two individuals who had been involved with the Cornerstone youth program as leaders, and neither recalled being aware of any sexual abuse. Finally, when one of those individuals (who was still on staff at the Church) suggested working with one of the parents to put together a list of students from Cornerstone so they might be contacted, Rev. Yates agreed that was a good idea. Regrettably, while this effort was initially undertaken in good faith and a list of students was prepared, there was no formal effort made on the part of the Church to reach out and follow up on the list.

**2. What Mistakes Did the Church Make In Response to the 2007 Disclosure?**

*The Church Did Not Conduct an Investigation and Proactively Reach Out to Cornerstone Participants.*

Although the Church made some efforts, as outlined above, to reach out to a handful of Cornerstone members, it appears that this effort was limited mostly to a close circle of friends of Student 4. A staff member and an involved parent made an effort to develop a contact list of former Cornerstone participants; however, without the formal undertaking of an investigation by the Church, the effort eventually lagged and fell by the wayside. Having received, and having fully believed, the type of serious allegations brought forth by Student 4, the Church should have initiated some type of formal investigation to determine whether there were any other victims.

*The Church Did Not Provide Sufficient Information to the Congregation.*

Along with the failure of the Church to conduct a more formal investigation into the conduct of Taylor, it also failed to apprise the congregation of the allegations that had been disclosed. Although Rev. Yates made some effort to open the door for those who may have been harmed to come forward, the effort fell far short of acknowledging that a specific and credible allegation had been made against a former staff member.

The ExCom had debated providing a more detailed statement acknowledging that the Church had received a credible report of sexual misconduct by a former staff member, but it ultimately chose not to do so. Among the reasons for not being more specific were a desire to protect the identity of Student 4 (as it was viewed as inevitable that Church members would want to know more details), the fact that the entire vestry had not been informed, and the concern that the Church had not undertaken a full investigation. Whatever the reason, all of the ExCom members interviewed for this investigation acknowledged that more information should have been provided to the congregation at the time.

*The ExCom Did Not Tell the Entire Vestry.*

It does not appear that the ExCom informed the vestry of the disclosure by Student 4. One of the ExCom members interviewed thought that the vestry had been informed, but the others could not recall the vestry being told. Minutes of vestry meetings from September 2007 were reviewed, and there is no evidence to suggest that the vestry was informed. Rather, as noted above, there was some evidence to the contrary in messages debating whether a fuller disclosure should be made to the congregation (with one reason for not doing so being that the vestry had not been notified). This investigator is not an expert in Anglican church governance but notes that on the TFCA website, the role of the vestry is described as follows:

The vestry members are the elected, lay leaders of our church. We view church leadership as the joint responsibility of the rector, the vestry, and the staff, and the partnership between all these leaders is quite remarkable. The rector exercises final oversight of the spiritual life of the congregation while the vestry oversees the temporal. We strive for a sharing of responsibility - the vestry is as concerned about spiritual formation and worship and outreach as it is about finances.

In light of this definition, and the possibility that having more decisionmakers involved could have led to some different outcomes, it appears that the actions of the ExCom in failing to inform the entire vestry were erroneous.

*The Church Failed to Ensure Ongoing Financial Support for Counseling Costs for Student 4.*

Although, as noted, the Church arranged and covered the cost for Student 4 to spend a week attending sessions with a noted abuse counselor, the Church did not establish a fund or make financial arrangements to support Student 4 in his therapy needs. While the basis for this failure to provide for the financial counseling needs of Student 4 is not known, it may have been the result of a desire not to raise awareness of the situation in the midst of the Church's ongoing dispute with the Episcopal diocese over the building (as, for example, establishing a trust fund would do).

### 3. The Impact of the Property Battle with the Episcopal Church

A few of the parents and students interviewed suggested or speculated that the Church was faced, in the fall 2007, with making a conscious decision about protecting the building (over which the Church was in litigation with the Episcopal Church) or caring for Student 4 and others affected by Taylor. One parent asserted that Rev. Yates had been advised that the Church "could not fight wars on two fronts," so the Church had to choose which battle to take on and chose to try to protect the building at the expense of former Cornerstone participants.

This assertion, while understandable, obscures the nuances of the reaction of the ExCom to Student 4's revelation and the overall situation. This is not to say that such an assertion is entirely incorrect. When asked to reflect upon the situation the Church was facing in its conflict with the Episcopal Church and the impact that an investigation into the Taylor matter might have had upon that conflict, Rev. Yates stated that he could not remember anyone teeing that up as a decision; however, he also acknowledged that it must have been on their minds as the litigation over the property was present all the time.

Rev. Yates stated that the ExCom wanted to protect the Church in a very difficult time, but they also felt they should try to discern whether anyone else had been hurt. He acknowledged that they were reluctant to engage in a more formal investigation out of a fear that it would blow up, but he also suggested that they were not trying to cover it up. Rather, they were trying to be careful about with whom they talked regarding the disclosure.

Rev. Yates also suggested that while he completely believed Student 4, at that point, it was hard for him to imagine that there could be anyone else out there who had also been victimized by Taylor in the same way. This reflected the difficulty that Rev. Yates was having in coming to grips with the notion that someone with whom he had been so close and in whom he had placed so much trust (Taylor) could have engaged in such deeds.

As noted, Rev. Yates maintains a personal journal and shared relevant pages. The entries relating to this matter reflect the sadness he experienced in learning of this abuse, but also reveal both his determination to take action and uncertainty as to what steps the Church should take.

In his entry on Monday, September 10, 2007, just a few days after meeting with Taylor and contacting the Rector of Christ Church Atlanta, Rev. Yates recorded the following in his personal journal:

*JT - there must be no secrets*

*the full truth*

- 1 - Full disclosure/ [Student 4] & the boys*
- 2 - contacting any others who also may have been mistreated*
- 3 no cover-up, no self-justif.*
- 4 min[istry] to youth [for Taylor] come to an end*
- 5 counseling [for Taylor] on  
sexual deviancy  
cover-up  
need for being essential  
exaggeration*

He also recorded on Monday, September 17, 2007:

- what would Jesus do [Student 4]*  
*1 - minister healing to [Student 4]*  
*2 - speak the word of truth to J.T.*  
*all things will be revealed*  
*3 - attempt to discern if any others may have been harmed*  
*4 - be utterly honest*  
*5 - be utterly fearless*  
*6 - make wise effort to ensure no others are harmed*

These notes appear to reflect Rev. Yates' sincere desire to ascertain whether there were other victims and to minister to those victims. However, whether due to the toll that the dispute over the property was having, his concern about protecting the privacy of Student 4, his desire to protect the reputation of the Church, or other factors, the bottom line is that, in the end, the response of the Church to the 2007 disclosure was sufficient in several respects and seriously flawed in other respects.<sup>36</sup>

#### F. How Should the Response of the Church to the 2021 Disclosure Be Viewed?

As described in the narrative above, after the unexpected loss of their son, Student 6, in April 2021, Parents 1&2 sent a letter to Rev. Yates, who was retired but had been the Rector when they had attended the Church. They had actually started drafting the letter months before Student 6 passed away, in the hopes that their efforts to encourage the Church to uncover and address Taylor's conduct would serve as a point of encouragement to Student 6, who was struggling. Tragically, before the letter could be sent, Student 6 unexpectedly died.

The primary request of Parents 1&2 was that Rev. Yates encourage the Church to reach out to other families who had participants in Cornerstone to inform them of Taylor's abuse, whether by sending out a letter or by engaging in some other organized effort to track down Cornerstone families.

Prior to meeting with the ExCom on May 5, 2021, Rev. Yates reached out to Dr. Allender, and that conversation, as related by Rev. Yates, is reflected in the notes of three of the ExCom members quoted above. In short, according to Rev. Yates, Dr. Allender told him that a mass communication (such as a letter or blast email) would not be effective.

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<sup>36</sup> Another question raised by several individuals, either in the course of the interviews or in emails, is whether the failure to act by the Church allowed students in Atlanta to be subjected to sexual abuse by Taylor. (One unnamed blogger asserted: "They aren't acting with integrity because they knew about it when it happened and sent him to another parish. The same leadership was in charge then as they are now. They are only looking into it because victims have come forward."). As outlined in significant detail above, there is no evidence to support the contention that the Church, prior to Taylor leaving its staff to take a job in Atlanta, had received any allegations of sexual abuse by Taylor.

Dr. Allender suggested instead that the Church could arrange for Parents 1&2 to tell their story to some other parents who had youth in Cornerstone, or the Church could record a 7-10 minute video of Parents 1&2 telling their story and then share it with parents of former Cornerstone participants.

It is undisputed that neither of these things happened. Rather, Rev. Ferguson and the ExCom perceived that there was not much that could be done with the information that had been disclosed by Parents 1&2, other than having Rev. Yates continue to minister to this couple with whom he had a long friendship.

In light of these facts, what, if anything, did the Church fail to do that should have been done in 2021?

In reviewing the events of 2007, the conclusion of this Report is that the Church failed by not, at that time, conducting a thorough investigation of Taylor's conduct based upon the disclosure of Student 4. At that point, Taylor had been gone from the Church for only five years, and there likely were many families still present at the Church whose children had been involved in Cornerstone during the time that Taylor was employed.

The events of 2021 do not mandate the same conclusion given the substantial passage of time. In other words, it is the opinion of this investigator that the same imperative that should have driven an investigation in 2007 was not as clearly present in 2021. The Church certainly could have opted to initiate an investigation in 2021 (as it did in 2023), but whether an investigation of this nature should have been conducted in 2021 is a point open to reasonable debate and discussion.

That said, there were failings on the part of TFCA in the way in which Rev. Ferguson and the ExCom addressed the concerns of Parents 1&2. The primary failure was the failure to engage directly with Parents 1&2 (and Parent 3, who had been walking alongside Parents 1&2 in their grief and desire to see Taylor's conduct brought to light).

It is worth noting that, while he had served faithfully as the Rector of the congregation for some 40 years, Rev. Yates had no official role with the Church in 2021. Although he was invited to preach one or two times a year, he had no title, duties, or responsibilities. Thus, when Parents 1&2 reached out to him, as their former Rector, and when he shared their grief and their requests with the leadership of the Church, the Church's response was flawed in that Rev. Ferguson and the ExCom failed to see that the burden and suffering of Parents 1&2 needed to be addressed and borne by the Church. Instead, perceiving that these events that happened many years before, during a different time and in a different building, Rev. Ferguson and the ExCom allowed the matter to pass from their minds with the thought that the Church's former Rector, now retired, would minister to these former parishioners. This thinking was in error.

The primary failure of the Church in 2021 was the failure to care for and interact with Parents 1&2, to dialogue with them directly and not through an intermediary, to hear their concerns, and to engage in a thoughtful and interactive process as to what would make the most sense in terms of trying to reach out to Cornerstone families. That dialogue, had it taken place, could have led to the conclusion that an investigation such as this one should be conducted. Or it could have led to the conclusion that some process along the lines as that suggested by Dr. Allender – coordinated and supported by the Church – should have been pursued. Or perhaps that interactive process would have led to the decision to make an announcement from the pulpit about what had taken place. There were a number of possibilities available to be discussed between the leadership of the Church and those parents. The failure to reach out directly to those parents, to see them as former faithful parishioners of the Church who needed to be brought in and cared for and listened to, was the most significant failure of 2021.

As noted, there was also the failure on the part of the Chancellor to follow up with Parents 1&2, to ensure they had received the sermon they had requested from 2007. But the primary error here, in the opinion of the investigator, was a failure to engage, to ensure that Parents 1&2 and Parent 3 were heard and were invited into a process in which the Church reckoned with its own past and considered thoughtfully and prayerfully how to best proceed. Instead, those parents were left to fend on their own, no doubt wondering why the church they had once called home was not taking a more proactive approach to address an issue that not only affected their son, but likely affected others as well.

Another error on the part of Rev. Ferguson and the ExCom was to not solicit the guidance and input of others, namely, the full vestry of the Church and the Bishop. These are extraordinarily complex and difficult issues, these issues that involve matters of potential abuse engaged in by former staff members and imposed upon parishioners or their children who have long ago left the congregation. Discerning God's wisdom on how to best address and deal with these types of disclosures is not easy, and seeking the wisdom and guidance of the full vestry and of the Bishop (and his counselors) in this particular instance would have been highly advisable and might have led to a better outcome for all involved.

It should be noted that, unlike the events of 2007, which are too far in the past to be fully remediated, the events of 2021 are not so distant. While there has been understandable hurt and pain and frustration emanating out of the 2021 events, there is certainly room for the grace of God to allow the healing of those who have been wounded by the Church's more recent inaction.

Hopefully this investigation has been part of the process in addressing those wounds, but more will be required, and, as Parents 1&2 wrote to Rev. Yates in their April 2021 letter, it is never too late to do the right thing. In this case, that will require humility on the part of all who were involved in the events of 2021, to acknowledge shortcomings and failures, to seek forgiveness. And it will require the Church to look for ways in which those who have



been wounded – not just by the conduct of Taylor while he was employed, but by the inaction of the Church in those moments since then – can be supported in the healing process. Some of this has already begun by financially bearing counseling expenses for several students who were affected by the conduct described in this Report. But more may be needed, and the Church should continue to engage in the process of seeking to bring light into darkness.

## VIII. FINAL THOUGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As we reach the end of this investigation (subject to any new information being brought forth), I would like to share my unvarnished and transparent perspective on what took place in the past and to outline recommendations that hopefully will reduce the likelihood that such events will ever take place again at The Falls Church Anglican.

### *Policies, Procedures, and Training.*

Certainly, having effective policies and procedures in place is the starting point for protecting the vulnerable and preventing abuse from taking place. As noted in the Report, the Church appears to have had sound policies and procedures in place throughout the time that these events occurred, and the current abuse prevention policy under which the Church operates, The Diocese of the Mid-Atlantic *Policy Manual for the Protection of Children* (“DOMA Policy”), can be found through links on both the *Youth Ministry* and *Children and Family Ministry* pages of The Falls Church Anglican website ([www.tfcanglican.com](http://www.tfcanglican.com)).

One recommendation of this Report is that these links be more prominently featured on each of these pages of the Church’s website, with a discussion acknowledging the issues and reality of potential abuse of children and youth, as well as the Church’s commitment to ensuring the safety of all who walk through its doors.

This also should include a very clear reporting mechanism or avenue for anyone who suspects that abuse has occurred within the Church or within the context of Church-sponsored activities. The DOMA Policy includes the following:

In addition to complying with any applicable legal requirements, churches should also have in place appropriate procedures for internal reporting to appropriate church leaders of any suspected mistreatment of or injury to a child and any suspicious or unusual information about a child.

TFCA should ensure that on its website (the first place that someone would likely go to find out how to report a concern of abuse), the reporting mechanism is easy to find and access, and that it gives any person who wishes to make a report of suspected abuse the option of sending in a confidential email or calling a designated representative of the Church who has been trained to receive allegations of potential abuse.

The Church currently maintains online training for all of its staff, lay leadership, and volunteers through Ministry Safe (<https://ministrysafes.com/learnmore/>). The Church should continue to ensure that all those who require training are undertaking the training on a regular basis. In addition, pursuant to the DOMA Policy, the Church should continue to ensure that all staff and volunteers who work with children or youth are subject to appropriate background checks. In the course of conducting this investigation, the Church confirmed that all current youth staff and volunteers have received background checks (renewed every two years), have completed the Ministry Safe training referenced above, and have completed Church in-house Safeguarding training.

All of these aforementioned items – the policies and procedures, the reporting mechanism, the training, and the background checks – form an important baseline for preventing abuse within the Church. However, even with all of these baseline measures in place, abuse can occur, and it is worth considering any preventative lessons that can be discerned from the information gathered through this investigation process.

As reflected in the Report above, in the midst of the good work that was being done through the ministry of the Cornerstone youth program, there was a darkness and evil that was occurring. And all who have borne witness to these events, who have seen their friends or families or fellow parishioners affected by this darkness, must be asking the question: how does abuse happen in the church? And were there particular circumstances that allowed abuse to take place in this situation that should serve as a cautionary tale for generations to come?

*Abuse Can Happen Anywhere.*

While I will address shortly some specific settings which may have been present in the Church and in Cornerstone during the 1990's and which may have contributed to allowing the abuse to take place, the Church must first recognize that its parish is made up of broken, sinful beings.

Dr. Langberg, noted Christian trauma specialist and counselor, in observing repeatedly that “sexual abuse can happen anywhere,” states as follows:

*The first lesson for preventing abuse is a recognition that sexual abuse is not a problem out there; it is in here. It sits in our pews, it happens in our homes and schools. It occurs in churches, on mission fields, and within our organizations. We need to know how to speak about it, teach truth about it, and protect the vulnerable and care for those whose lives have been shattered by it.<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.dianelangberg.com/2017/10/when-the-church-becomes-complicit-in-sin-lessons-on-preventing-and-combatting-sexual-abuse/>.

I doubt that Dr. Langberg means we should never trust anyone in the church, but she appears to be saying that church leaders and staff need to be humble enough to recognize that they do not know everything, and wise enough to know that no organization, including the church, can ever view itself as being above the possibility of abuse happening in its midst.

This is not to assert that the Church, in the 1990's, was naïve and unaware of the possibility of abuse within its midst. In fact, the policies that the Church had in place during that time period reflect the growing awareness that churches throughout the country had in that decade of the need to ensure adequate protections for children and youth. Rather, the point here is that when we read of the type of events described in this report, we should be heartbroken, saddened, and shocked, but not completely surprised. The moment that any church or institution says, "but that could never happen to us" (and this is not an assertion that anyone at the Church in that decade was necessarily thinking that way), they already have cracked the door open a bit further for abuse.

Moving forward, the Church must continue to take Dr. Langberg's caution to heart, and must continue to be thoughtfully vigilant to ensure that all of its parishioners, especially the most vulnerable ones, are safeguarded to the extent reasonably possible.

As regards other factors that may have contributed to allowing the events depicted in this report to take place, here I am offering my own insight and discernment based upon my extensive six-month dive into the world of Cornerstone and the Church during the time period that these events took place. My sincere hope is that these observations can be seen as arising fairly from the testimonial and documentary evidence gathered in this process.

#### *Success Blurs Our Vision.*

A common theme in stories of widespread abuse by leaders, whether occurring in corporate America, the entertainment industry, governmental agencies, or religious institutions, is that an individual's success in whatever setting in which they operate can blur the vision of those around them. There are so many examples of this in the past two decades that to list them is not even necessary.

One of the conclusions that I believe arises from the detailed findings of the Report is that the tremendous success that Taylor had in growing and overseeing the Cornerstone youth ministry allowed the community of the Church to be blurred in their vision of Taylor. The testimony of so many who were involved in Cornerstone (participants, other leaders, and parents) as to the high esteem with which that Taylor was viewed within the Church community is rather telling. Indeed, in our interviews, numerous witnesses testified that even to this day, 25-30 years later, they attribute to Taylor much of the substantial growth that they experienced in their Christian walk.

Given that reality, it is no easy thing to hold together the tension of recognizing the positive impact that Taylor had on so many Cornerstone leaders and young people while also coming to grips with the terrible acts that he perpetrated.

I believe that this success also bred a level of trust in Taylor that, based on the events depicted herein, was misplaced. The fact that so many in the Church and Cornerstone community knew and condoned Taylor taking young men with him on trips without any other adults present speaks to this blurred vision.

The recommendation here is simple. Even the Church's most successful leaders need to be asked hard questions, for the benefit of the leader's own sanctification, as well as for the benefit and protection of those to whom they seek to minister.

*Spiritual Context Blurs Our Vision.*

I believe this blurred vision also arises from the fact that Taylor's activities were taking place in the spiritual context of discipling young men to walk with Christ. Many witnesses outside of the Cornerstone student population were aware that Taylor was having conversations about certain topics (although it did not appear from the interviews that this awareness encompassed the frequency, intensity, or settings of these conversations). Taylor was permitted to have these types of conversations, which would never be allowed by a baseball coach or choir director.

At the heart of the mission and ministry of any church is to see its own young people grow up with a sound and humble faith and belief that God redeemed the world through Jesus Christ. The recommendation here is simply that the Church must ensure that the pursuit of this objective is balanced with the need to protect and care for the youth of the Church.

*Critical Policies Need to Be Followed.*

The importance of policies and other baseline measures to prevent abuse are addressed above. But these policies and other measures are of no consequence if they are not followed. Although there were sound policies in place, as outlined in the Report above, Taylor was allowed to take actions that were squarely inconsistent with the policies that had been adopted. If this had occurred only once, it could be viewed as an oversight, but the testimony from a number of witnesses was that Taylor traveled with one or more youths out of the area on multiple occasions.

The religious institutions of today are far wiser and far more committed to ensuring that these policies are followed, and I trust that this exercise will only further inspire the Church to ensure that it continues on this path.

Leaders Need to Receive Care and Accountability.

As we were going through this process, one of the thoughts that arose was whether there was anyone who was really close enough to Jeff Taylor to know how he was doing, what was really in his heart, what his struggles were. In all, we interviewed more than 70 former Cornerstone participants, Cornerstone leaders who worked under him, and parents who supported Taylor and his family, even by including them in family vacations and family holidays. It was evident from many of these interviews that a substantial number of these persons cared deeply for Taylor and his family.

But what did not arise out of these interviews was the sense that Taylor really had any peers with whom he was close. His life seemed filled with relationships with Cornerstone students, Cornerstone parents, and other Cornerstone leaders who reported up to him. Seemingly absent from the narrative of Taylor's life during this busy decade of the 1990's, however, was the sense that he had the type of friends who really know you, who know your struggles, who can sit with you in your failures, who can rejoice with you in your successes, and in whose presence you can be fully transparent. It seemed rather curious that in all of the interviews we conducted, no one ever said, "You should really talk to so-and-so, he was Jeff's best friend."

In Rev. Yates' performance evaluation of Taylor for the year 1995, under the category Personal Relationships, Rev. Yates inquired of Taylor: "a close friend?"

The following year, in Rev. Yates' performance evaluation of Taylor for the year 1996, Rev. Yates again inquired, under the same performance category: "is there a close friend yet?" (Emphasis in original.)<sup>38</sup>

This seems to have been a recognition by Rev. Yates that, as successful as Taylor was, and as many relationships as he had, he did not have anyone in his life outside of his spouse with whom he was able to be truly transparent. The general point here is that it is worth asking the question of our leaders, "is this person really known?" And the recommendation is that the lay leadership ensure that its clergy and other paid staff are encouraged to develop those types of relationships where they can be truly known.

Do Not Protect the Reputation of the Church at the Expense of Its People.

One of the critical findings of this Report is that the Church, in 2007, failed to do all that it should have done. While there were varying reasons that led to this outcome, there was a sense among those in leadership at the time, even if only implicitly acknowledged, that the concern for the reputation of the Church may have played some role in the decision to not broadcast more fully to the congregation the abuse allegations that had been made

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<sup>38</sup> If there was a performance evaluation for 1997 or 1998, it was not located; therefore, is not known whether Rev. Yates raised the same point again in the years following.

known. A critical lesson of this investigation is that the Church needs to do the right thing when it comes across these types of allegations and not live in fear.

To once again quote Dr. Langberg:

*As Christians, we often fail to report the crime of abuse because we think we are protecting a family or some part of the Body of Christ. Family and church are God-ordained institutions worthy of our protection. However, there is nothing sacred about an institution full of hidden sin.*<sup>39</sup>

For a church to be healthy, to challenge the ability of abuse to take root, the church needs not be afraid to bring darkness into the light. Further, to quote Dr. Langberg from a January 2023 article in Christianity Today:

*“We have utterly failed God,” she said. “We protected our own institutions and status more than his name or his people. What we have taught people is that the institution is what God loves, not the sheep.”*<sup>40</sup>

The recommendation here is again straightforward: when it comes to allegations of abuse, there are many factors that go into the manner in which they are handled, but an overriding concern for the reputation of the church can never carry the day. May it be that The Falls Church Anglican never finds itself dealing with these types of abuse allegations ever again; however, should future allegations of abuse arise, it is incumbent upon the leadership of the Church, both clergy and lay leadership, to ensure that the reputation of the Church is not elevated above the need to care for the parishioners who call the Church home.

#### Closing Comments.

In closing, I am grateful to my IslerDare colleagues who assisted in this process, for the full cooperation and support of the leadership of TFCA, and for the invaluable assistance of Dr. William Clark.

But, I am perhaps most grateful to the many witnesses who reached out, who made themselves available to talk, in some cases, about painful memories, so that the truth could be made known. Without the willingness of those who have been harmed to speak freely and transparently about their experiences, much of this would have lingered in darkness still. But your stories have now been brought forth into the light, and my sincere prayer is that in bringing those stories into the light, the healing process may begin for any whose wounds have persisted from years past.

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<sup>39</sup> <https://www.dianelangberg.com/2017/10/when-the-church-becomes-complicit-in-sin-lessons-on-preventing-and-combatting-sexual-abuse/>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/january-web-only/diane-langberg-interview-church-abuse-trauma-sbc.html>.



And, for any whose experiences have led you to conclude that there is no God, or that, if there is a God, He does not care enough to prevent this kind of harm, may you begin to seek Him again, may you know His peace, and may you find the power of His healing.

We began this process with a mission to find and narrate the truth, neither understating facts nor overstating facts. I pray that those who have read this Report will find that we have been true to our mission.

*Edward Lee Isler*  
*April 18, 2024*