

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)

The Guidelines Team prepared this document to provide insight into the formation of our guidelines and to address questions that arose over the past year and during the feedback-gathering process. While we do not claim that our answers are the only correct responses, we hope they will be helpful.

Q1: How were these guidelines created?

The Guidelines Team convened to write guidelines for our region. We meticulously reviewed policies from other regions in our fellowship, as well as policies for handling CSA and SA in other religious and non-religious organizations, and engaged in extensive consultations with a wide variety of professionals both inside and outside of our fellowship to develop a comprehensive set of guidelines that would ensure safety within our fellowship. We also incorporated suggestions based on communications with a company called GRACE (Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), as well as the FBI; both these organizations have extensive experience in dealing with abuse. The Guidelines are based on best practices in how sexual abuse should be handled in organizations in order to meet current legal thresholds and to minimize risk of harm for everyone.

Q2: It seems strange within our spiritual family to have written guidelines. Won't having rules and policy lead to bureaucracy and hinder discretion and guidance of the Spirit? What are the benefits of guidelines?

We understand this concern. In the past, allegations of sexual abuse were often inadequately handled due to ignorance or misunderstanding of laws and ethical standards, or because of unethical or immoral decisions due to respecter of persons or ingrained biases. Written guidelines provide clarity on the procedures that must be followed to address these issues appropriately and adequately. The nature of abuse within our fellowship is no different from the nature of abuse in the world; human nature is universal. Guidelines ensure standards are applied consistently and without bias. Adhering to guidelines will help to create a safe environment for all in the fellowship, but does not prevent the Holy Spirit from working in our lives.

Q3: I've never had a problem with CSA/SA, nor has anyone that I know. My experience with meetings and our fellowship has only been positive, and I don't see a reason to have guidelines or do things differently.

This has been the experience of many, but each of us has unique experiences, and the absence of personal experience does not negate the existence of certain realities. Many within our fellowship have experienced sexual abuse perpetrated by friends, elders, or workers, resulting in profound suffering, enduring heartache, and lifelong pain. Victims often don't speak about it or share their pain for a variety of reasons. It is hard, can feel shameful, and can be re-traumatizing to relive those abuses. When they have talked, they are often disbelieved, shamed, or are told to keep quiet to avoid stirring up trouble or hindering the faith of others. We often haven't heard or listened, instead shutting them down because it didn't feel comfortable to talk about. The result is that victims most often suffered in silence. In order to truly help each other, we need to be mature enough to listen without feeling threatened and without fearing to hear bad news, even about people that we love and respect.

Q4: This seems like we're changing the fellowship, and I'm not comfortable with it.

The Guidelines are not changing the fellowship each of us can have with God and each other, and nothing about God is changing. Our fellowship is a spiritual family where we feed on spiritual things. People can

continue to receive the spiritual help and benefits of this kingdom, and our focus on salvation through Jesus remains unwavering.

Q5: We are all more aware of the problem now, and some of us have received education. Isn't that enough?

Awareness is a huge step forward. However, awareness often fades with time, and it's also not sufficient by itself - action must follow. As highly recommended in the MinistrySafe Training, policy is needed to prevent abuse from happening and to help ensure safety in our fellowship. Human nature still exists, and we need to be equipped to appropriately protect the vulnerable.

Q6: Why is it so hard to do the right thing when abuse is disclosed?

As much as we all would like to respond in a godly, loving, and right manner, sometimes we are afraid, uneducated, uninformed, or misled. When abuse is committed by someone we know, someone we trust, respect, and even love, someone that appears to have a good testimony, encourages others, and is helpful to us in many ways - it often clouds our vision and it's hard to see the act or behavior for the crime that it is. We might move quickly to defend the perpetrator because of the good side that we see and will often disbelieve and disparage the victim because the behavior they're describing doesn't fit into what we know of the perpetrator. Or, if we do believe what happened, we tend to minimize the crime and thereby the impact it has on the victims. People will often say "it wasn't that bad" or "it was years ago." If you catch yourself thinking those thoughts, stop and think: "I wonder how the victim feels? Was it a small thing to them? How has it impacted their life, even still today, many years later?"

We must acknowledge that all humans are capable of deception and leading a double life, and that we are all capable of being deceived. If you ever feel conflicted about whether or not to report, PLEASE remember the souls of the little ones who might get hurt next if the behavior isn't appropriately addressed.

Q7: Isn't the gospel message to forgive those who trespass against us? I'm a victim, and I've forgiven my abuser. Why can't people just learn to forgive and forget?

Even when forgiveness has been reached, it does not mean forgetting or excusing the actions of the abuser. It does not negate the need for accountability and justice. And it's absolutely necessary to take steps to prevent abuse from happening again in the future. Also, when we pressure others to offer forgiveness, which oftentimes occurs without acknowledging the harm done or addressing the abuse, it is damaging and dismissive to victims. Forgiveness is a complex and deeply personal process that can be a part of healing, but everyone moves on their own journey in their own time. Pressuring victims to provide forgiveness can be harmful.

Q8: Most of these allegations are in the distant past. Shouldn't we be more concerned with the future?

It's true that because of the fear, shame, guilt, and self-doubt involved in disclosing abuse, victims often wait decades before telling anyone. Even if it seems like it's all in the past, it's important to remember that abuse is happening right now all over, including in our region. We may not even receive information about these current abuses until many years from now. It happens in secrecy and remains in secrecy until it's brought to light. We cannot afford to cover or hide even one crime because it could be our only clue that there are many more victims. It's also true that past perpetrators will often continue their pattern of abuse into the present if given the opportunity. They can even appear remorseful and "reformed" while still abusing other victims,

often children. We know and are learning that time alone does not resolve issues and our unresolved past comes along with us into our future.

Q9: What if someone only offended once, a long time ago, and seems to have genuinely repented and changed? Why can't they attend regular meetings, potlucks, or funerals?

The victim in an old case is just as important as the victim in any of the other cases. Remember, the victim is serving a life sentence. If the offender had been convicted in a criminal court, they would continue to have restrictions for the rest of their lives for the safety of everyone.

True repentance for offenders will manifest itself in a willingness and desire to stay away from those places of temptation or where it will cause others to be emotionally re-harmed. While some offenders may reach repentance, it does not mean their underlying urges have vanished. Unfortunately it's very common for offenders to reoffend, and the risk actually increases over time. Repentance and expressing a desire for fellowship can be a powerful tool in the hands of an offender and effectively used as a means to gain access. It is impossible for us to figure out who is using it as a tool and who is honest. Grooming is very real, very calculated, and very powerful. Paul said he wouldn't even eat meat if it caused his brother to stumble... how much more would a truly repentant offender want to walk in a way that will cause no more harm?

Q10: What does repentance look like in the life of a sexual offender?

In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist admonished the multitude, "Bring forth, therefore, fruits meet for repentance." Repentance is an inward act with clear outward signals. If an offender has truly repented inwardly, then they have felt the depth and severity of the wounds they have inflicted, which produces the following outward actions. Offenders would:

- Realize that they must not be in any gathering with children. They would completely remove themselves from meetings and would avoid, to the utmost degree, environments where children are present. Even if encouraged or invited to return to meetings, they would insist that they must not be present with children.
- Understand the great harm they have done, and would fully acknowledge the harm, both to the primary victim (as appropriate with assistance from a therapist or victim advocate, NOT reaching out to victims on their own), and to all others they have groomed or lied to in order to conceal the abuse.
- Fully understand, and acknowledge the divisive effect of their presence in meetings, and would never seek to cause division in the fellowship.
- Confess and present themselves to law enforcement officials for any and all punishment that would be required under state and federal law.
- Cooperate fully with all investigations and would fully disclose all victims to appropriate, responsible individuals trained to safeguard such sensitive information.
- Completely understand that pedophilia is not curable and their condition will require them to seek lifelong therapy.
- Invite accountability regarding their criminal actions and sexual desires for the rest of their life.

Tears and words do not, by themselves, show repentance. In Hebrews, Paul mentioned Esau, who was "rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears". It is also important to understand a few things that do not constitute repentance and that would clearly show that the place of repentance has not yet been found:

- "I'll change" or "I'll never do it again."
- Any sort of minimization, deflection, or absolutely ANY type of victim blaming.
- Attempting to maintain place or position as worker, elder, etc., with promises of changes to behavior or actions.
- Pressuring the ministry or friends to be allowed back in meetings.

- By Todd Price (Retired FBI agent)

Q11: These guidelines don't seem to account for God's redemptive power. He has changed me through the power of the gospel, so I know He has the power to change a perpetrator too. Where is there room for miracles and for the working of the Holy Spirit to lead in all of this?

We would never discount the miracles that God can do in each of our lives. However, we also know that we'll have our human nature with us for the rest of our lives. We must not be naive or dismissive about the power of our flesh. There might be some hurt feelings for people who have restrictions placed on them. But it is important to remember that restrictions are the natural and moral consequence for these actions - consequences that are only brought on by the perpetrator themselves. Unfortunately, many in our fellowship have not been held accountable; instead they have often continued in sin, hurting others, and harming victims, over and over again. We fully believe in the redemptive power of God for everyone, but we have a responsibility to ensure accountability and safety even while allowing God to work in our lives.

Q12: Why are we imposing restrictions from meeting for people who haven't even been convicted in the court of law? Aren't people innocent until proven guilty?

In our court system, people are presumed innocent until proven guilty, but it doesn't mean they actually are innocent, or that the abuse didn't occur. That presumed innocence will protect alleged perpetrators from consequences of the law unless and until guilt is determined and proven beyond a reasonable doubt to the court. Unfortunately, these crimes typically happen in secret and are often difficult to prove. Many of them never even make it to court for a variety of reasons. It's important to understand that the percentage of false allegations is very low. The percentage of sexual abuse crimes that actually results in conviction is around 3%, meaning about 97% of credible allegations don't result in any conviction. We must take all allegations seriously while recognizing that a lack of conviction is not equivalent to an alleged offender's innocence. In fact, agencies (like CPS), do not wait for legal convictions before taking action based on a lower standard of proof due to the necessity of ensuring the safety of children or vulnerable adults.

On a personal level, if we heard someone was a child abuser, we wouldn't allow that person to spend time with our children. We wouldn't wait until the allegation was proven in the court of law; rather, out of an abundance of caution, we'd keep them away from our children. Similarly, we have a responsibility to use caution in making our fellowship a safe place. If a full investigation clears the person of any wrongdoing, then full fellowship privileges will be restored at that time. Restricting people from meetings is not a prison sentence, it's a safety measure. And as is mentioned in the guidelines, there are ways that perpetrators can still have fellowship (closed, all-volunteer meetings).

Q13: What about false reports? Even if only 1-3% of reports are false, that opens up the very real possibility that someone could be excluded from meeting without cause.

The reality of false reports is that there is usually a clear motive, for example a custody battle or money to be made in a lawsuit. The vast majority of our cases will not have any gain for the reporter. Also, using a professional investigation process that is thorough and impartial is meant to drastically minimize this risk.

Vindictive false reports usually fall apart easily. Often when a credible allegation is made, other allegations follow and a pattern of behavior becomes evident.

Q14: It seems harsh to ban offenders from regular meetings for life. We want to all be in heaven together, as forgiven sinners. So if we can't forgive and be together on earth, how will we all be together in heaven someday?

In heaven we won't have a human nature, but here on earth we do. One way to care for someone's soul is removing them from their temptation. Much like helping a person with an alcohol addiction stay away from alcohol, it is appropriate for pedophiles and other sexual predators to be kept from their temptation. It is not safe or wise to keep offenders in regular meetings and expose them to temptations that will cause them to re-offend. What is safe and healthy for victims is also safe and healthy for perpetrators. Offenders can still listen to the gospel over the phone, and they can still read and pray and work out their salvation with God. Once offenders have completed therapy, they may also be able to enjoy fellowship in a closed meeting. Fellowship meetings are a wonderful privilege and help to our soul, but there are many ways to connect and encourage our brethren. A repentant perpetrator would not want to cause division, unease, or distress for victims by insisting on normal fellowship privileges, much less ever want to be around children or others who could be a temptation to them.

Q15: Why can't an offender be in all-volunteer meetings right away? Why do they have to wait until their therapy is done first?

A pause is healthy. It communicates to everyone, including the offender, that this is really serious. It gives us time and space to focus on the victim and their needs. Note, the confidentiality of victims will be respected, but sometimes those closest to them will know and have the opportunity to offer care and support. Offenders also need time for self-reflection, and time to focus on their therapy. It removes them from the temptation to defend themselves or discredit/blame the victim in front of others. Adherence to therapy also demonstrates a measure of repentance on the part of the offender and an acceptance to receive professional help in managing their own risks and behaviors.

Q16: Sin is sin, it's all an abomination to God. I need to focus on my own sin. Are we casting stones?

All sin separates us from God. Thankfully, sin is covered by Jesus' blood with repentance. His provision is sufficient for your sin and mine, no matter how horrible. We don't want to bear the burden of our sin (it is freely lifted by our Lord and Savior), but that doesn't remove the *impact* of our sin. Our sin has an impact on others, and it also carries consequences. Consequences help us take our actions seriously, and help us truly repent. The response and consequences to all sin may not be equal, particularly because some sins are also considered crimes in our country. Our current crisis is not only regarding sinful behavior but also criminal behavior as sexual abuse is immoral and illegal. Jesus clearly provided for the thief's eternal salvation while they were enduring the cross together. But he did not remove the natural consequence of that man's crimes. He did not take him off the cross or give him a second chance to live out his life as though he had never stolen from anyone. The thief died along with Jesus that day. The thief fully acknowledged that he deserved to be where he was, suffering as he was. He made no excuse for himself and did not beg Jesus to save his natural life. This is a fruit of true repentance.

Q17: Isn't the goal of the justice system to protect communities from criminals, but also to rehabilitate offenders and re-integrate them back into society? Shouldn't we be trying to rehabilitate offenders to the point where they can eventually be back in fellowship with us?

Individuals convicted of sexual offenses almost always leave prison with restrictions applied. One such restriction is that they must register as a sex offender and be placed on a public registry; depending on the crime they committed, this requirement to register may last their lifetime. Offenders have restrictions placed upon their lives, including where they are allowed to live or be (e.g., offenders with child sexual abuse histories are not allowed to be within 500 feet of schools). The sex offender registry and these restrictions became law because research of outcomes over time proved that sex offenders are highly likely to reoffend, given time and opportunity. Research has shown that the penalty of incarceration and completion of treatment programs were not effective in preventing recidivism and further restriction was needed to provide safety to society. Thus, while part of the goal is to reintegrate them into society in some aspects (e.g., residing in communities or holding jobs), there is an acknowledgement that certain restrictions help keep others, and the offenders themselves, safe. We're doing the same thing here with the steps that are being taken, and one of our goals in showing care for the offender is allowing a pathway into fellowship that remains safe for all involved.

Q18: Why do we need to outline expectations for all adults to follow? All of God's expectations for our conduct are found in the Bible, and we shouldn't add or take away from that.

The Bible has so much spiritual and even practical help for our everyday living; yet, there are also areas of modern-day living that are not included in the bible, such as fire codes or food handler safety standards. But we still follow current standards in these areas both in and out of our fellowship. When we first had to adopt some of these standards at convention, it seemed intrusive to many, and there was a lot of concern, but now we're used to it and even recognize that those rules have benefits. Most in our fellowship have rules that they follow in their daily lives. It is good to remember that people in the workforce are required to abide by a code of conduct.

Elements of the appropriate conduct expressed in the outlined expectations were violated by every single worker, elder, and friend who has ever abused a child. In addition, in all cases, red flags were witnessed by someone, somewhere, at some point, yet went largely unreported. We must be more aware of red flag behavior, more willing to report it, and more willing to confront it. Clearly articulating expectations for all adults in the fellowship will serve as a tool to bring attention to unhealthy, grooming behaviors that we may observe, and it gives us a clear way to communicate expectations with others (friends and co-workers) about healthy boundaries and behaviors.

Elders and workers have special responsibilities for those in the fellowship, and are considered in some areas of our region to be 'clergy,' which imposes further legal requirements upon them. Workers specifically live 100% of the time in other peoples' homes and it is important to be aware of safe practices and above-reproach standards. It is good, and even necessary, to define some of the details of what is and isn't appropriate for workers while they live with and move amongst people, families, and children. Thus, clear expectations ensure workers are upholding the highest standards as they interact with the friends in their homes and in meetings.

Q19: Why do the expectations say that workers in the home respect the friends' convictions regarding cultural matters (i.e. dress, alcohol, media, etc)? What does that have to do with sexual abuse?

We've learned that abusers thrive on power imbalances. Abuses of power and control are often intertwined with sexual abuse. If we have an unhealthy balance in our relationships with workers where workers make requirements and demands over matters that are cultural rather than spiritual, then this can feed the wrong thing in some workers. Once one boundary has been crossed, or power exerted in one area, it makes it easier for continued boundary violations. For example, a worker using authority to discipline on cultural matters may continue to exert improper authority while the individual feels helpless to say no, and this type of environment often feeds into abuse. As Jesus emphasized, the primary responsibility of the ministry is to point people to Christ and provide spiritual guidance. They are not tasked with addressing cultural matters; instead they can lead by example and demonstrate how to live a Christ-centered life.

Q20: Are we ostracizing sex offenders?

No. We're protecting the vulnerable among us, addressing the needs of victim survivors, and at the same time, finding ways to minister to people who have committed these types of crimes. Without guidelines to keep our decisions both safe and legal, our only option would be to make all offenders forgo all fellowship in order to preserve safety. These guidelines allow a pathway for offenders to practice safe fellowship while prioritizing the safety of survivors and other vulnerable individuals.

Q21: My abuser has truly repented, and I've forgiven them. I feel like they've been cured of their temptation, so why are we treating them like they haven't been?

Research establishes that these deviant urges/attractions/tendencies never really go away. It's also proven that the longer someone is out of therapy, the more likely they are to reoffend. It is professional best practice to protect them from their temptation as best as we can, and in so doing, protect other potential victims. Even if the person does well 99% of the time, that other 1% can have catastrophic consequences. We can't accept that risk. For example, if we are aware that a loved one has struggled with addiction (to a substance, such as alcohol), but has recovered and is now sober, would we invite them to a meal where we serve them alcohol? No. It would be cruel and unethical to do so. In respect for their victory over addiction, and in forgiveness for the harm they may have caused during their struggle, we would never choose to put them in a place of temptation, thus being a stumbling block to our brother.

Q22: Why can't closed meetings be at the regular Sunday or Wednesday meeting times?

This has been the subject of a lot of discussion and consideration, and we believe there are several good reasons to support this requirement. Having the closed meetings at a different time allows volunteers to continue attending their regular fellowship meeting. Grooming is very real, and we don't want volunteers to be isolated to meetings only with a perpetrator. Our main concern is for keeping a closed meeting "healthy," where everyone can be focused on spiritual things, and there isn't a leaven of loyalty to the perpetrator (e.g., supporting, excusing, or downplaying their crimes). Rather, it would be ideal for these meetings to have volunteers who are interested in helping the perpetrator take accountability for their actions. Having these meetings at different times can open the door for more individuals to attend, including elders that want to maintain their regular meetings.

Another important consideration is that there must not be pressure for people to participate in closed meetings, particularly if they feel unsafe or uncomfortable. It's important not to ask entire meetings if they are comfortable attending meetings with an offender. First, attendees may have a history of abuse, and we don't want to pressure someone to disclose their trauma. Also, many people don't feel comfortable being put on the spot and having to determine the fate of someone else's ability to attend a meeting. They may feel

pressured to say it's okay, even if they don't feel comfortable. There is a lot of room for people to feel pressure, even if the pressure is not applied by anyone directly, when regular meeting attendance is in question.

Q23: Doesn't sexual abuse happen everywhere? Why are we focusing on it now?

Sexual abuse can occur in any setting, including homes, day care centers, schools, workplaces, and churches. Many organizations have faced crises in recent years with sexual abuse being brought to light. What matters most is how we respond. Ignoring the issue allows it to persist, but by addressing it adequately, we can minimize further risk and harm.

Q24: Why is transparency important? Isn't it merciful to cover another man's sin? What about Proverbs 17:9 (He that covereth a transgression seeketh love; but he that repeateth a matter separateth very friends)?

We take no pleasure in exposing the sin and failings of our brothers and sisters. It is not gossip to speak up on behalf of what is right, especially on behalf of someone who is vulnerable (e.g. Proverbs 31:8-9). We've learned that the sin of sexual abuse especially thrives in secrecy and must be confronted. This not only helps the offender on their journey to repentance, it also helps victims. When sexual abuse is silenced or covered up it invalidates the victim, adds confusion and shame, signals a lack of care, causes victim-blaming, and discourages them and other victims from disclosing abuse. When it's clear to all that victims are heard and supported, and that abuse is not tolerated in a community, it sends a clear message to would-be abusers, and it also signals to other victims that it's safe, and even encouraged, to come forward. When people don't feel safe to disclose abuse, the abusers are protected and the problem is perpetuated.

Jesus took the blame for our sin, and He made provision by covering it with His blood, which is very precious. He never covered our sins with excuses or minimized the sin. He did not cover our sins with secrecy. Mercy can only cover a sin once it's been revealed, confessed, and forsaken. Jesus spoke openly about what is sin before God, and repentance was His very foundational message. In order for there to be true repentance, sin must be confronted.

Q25: I'm glad we are finally getting policies. However, it's been an entire year since this crisis unfolded. Why has it taken so long? It feels to me like it's too little too late.

We understand this feeling. We recognized a need for change, yet it seems that change never moves as quickly as it should. Some of us have felt that there has not been an urgency to enact change, nor a willingness to accept the necessary change. One thing that has fed into this hurt and anger is that there has been a large lack of acknowledgement, apology, and acceptance of the crisis. Having policies is a new experience for our fellowship, and one of the setbacks we have encountered is that guidelines cause us to not only examine our behavior but also our attitudes.

With regard to the creation of the guidelines, our goal and purpose was to create thorough, clear policy for our region. Reaching that goal required a substantial amount of time as explained in Q1. We feel that these policies are a start, but we also understand it will take a continued effort on everyone's part to truly and adequately address these issues in the future, and also to deal appropriately with issues from the past. We recently heard an expert say that it takes about 10 years on average for organizations to fix these problems. We certainly don't want it to take that long, but we also want to be realistic, knowing the many challenges that lie ahead. It can be simple if everyone truly has a caring heart, understands and appreciates the importance and the challenges, and moves forward with a unified approach.

Q26: What can I do to help contribute to meaningful change?

Be aware and be educated: awareness and walking circumspectly is important both spiritually and naturally, in fellowship and outside of fellowship. Even as we keep our focus on Christ as we walk through life, there are other things of which we continue to be mindful. We also need to be vigilant about the safety of our little ones and other vulnerable individuals. Please read and get familiar with the policy. Please advocate for using the Safety Team when concerns arise. We can't go back to thinking we know best when making these sorts of judgments and determinations without using professional input. Over-communication will be far better than not communicating. We want to trust others, but we also need to be realistic and understand that sexual abuse happens in all sectors of life, including within our fellowship. And we need to remember that just because we feel we know and trust someone does not mean they are not capable of sin, crime, and harm. We don't need to live in fear, but we do need to be informed and aware. And remember, this is a continuing conversation, so keep talking and discussing with others that you're close to. Be brave to challenge statements that minimize the impact of abuse to victims, be open to hard conversations, and be willing to accept correction when needed.

Another way we can contribute is by being aware of the physical, emotional, mental, and financial cost of the healing journeys that victim survivors undertake. Receiving treatment focused on helping individuals heal from trauma can often cost tens of thousands of dollars, last several years, and take a great toll on someone's life. We can support victim survivors through this process by offering support, encouragement, prayer, and financial aid by donating to therapy funds.

Q27: This seems like a very perpetrator-centric policy. When we consider how many victim survivors have suffered so much for so long, why is all of this attention and care given to figuring out how to help perpetrators be in fellowship, instead of figuring out how to care for victim survivors?

It's true that most of the policy, and many of our discussions around these issues address how to handle perpetrators. Keeping perpetrators away from regular fellowship is a very important part of helping with the healing for victim survivors and in keeping everyone safe. Safety is the first principle of trauma-informed practice. We have developed these guidelines to help make our fellowship safe for everyone, particularly survivors. The policy also includes resources for victim survivors to aid in their healing and recovery. We can all focus our thoughts and attention on creating an atmosphere that is conducive to healing, physically, emotionally and spiritually, while also realizing and respecting that victim survivors often need space away from the fellowship. If you know a victim survivor, it's always appropriate to listen to them, believe them, be friendly and kind, respect their wishes and boundaries, and pray for them.

Q28: Why aren't we simply excommunicating sex offenders? Jesus even advocates for a millstone around the neck of those who offend against children. Why are we ignoring this part of the gospel, and not at the very least using excommunication as a tool to solve this problem?

While these are egregious offenses, we don't find scriptural basis for full excommunication in all cases. In I Corinthians 5, Paul does say not to associate with a brother who is sexually immoral. Paul makes it clear in this chapter that he's talking about *unrepentant* sinners within the fellowship. It is clear that some abusers in our midst are not admitting to their crimes, and in those cases we should not associate with them, for the purpose of helping them find the place of repentance. We do read in II Corinthians 2 that this same sinner who Paul instructed them not to associate with was restored because he learned godly sorrow. In Revelations 2, Jesus talks about giving someone "space to repent." If we want to demonstrate Christ's true love and hope for sinners, we must take seriously the gravity of their sin that has consumed them and grievously harmed

others. When we associate with someone who is unrepentant it doesn't help them to be accountable for what they've done. What often happens is that abusers will be sorry they were caught and sorry they have to bear the consequences, rather than having sorrow for their actions. They may even admit to what they know they can't deny, but minimize the severity, make excuses, or blame others. In reality, true repentance must demonstrate full accountability for all of their offenses, laying them all bare and not hiding or withholding anything. Sin cannot be dealt with until it's repented of fully. We have been fooled many times before, thinking that someone has truly repented, but the offenses continued on and more people were hurt. We need to be careful of our associations and especially careful of our allegiances because an unrepentant abuser will take opportunities to harm others, and supporting that is a terrible leaven in the church. We don't want to be on the wrong side of God's judgment. For some abusers, excommunication may be an end result.

Q29: Why are revisions to this policy only after a year? I can already think of situations that I believe require further consideration and maybe even exceptions. Why can't we be flexible enough to address those as they come up?

While we strongly believe in our policy, we're also realistic enough to know that it isn't perfect. Because of this, it's important to have a process that will allow adjustments to the policy over time. However, we were advised to stick with our policy for a full year before considering changes. Having a policy is new to us, and it is very important that we establish structured, consistent responses to situations as this has not been present in the past. It's very possible that if we make knee-jerk reactions to adjust the policy every time something seems like it warrants one, we'll likely over-correct. Instead, there's value in having a full year of experience to judge it against before considering changes.

Q30: What about low-risk offenders? It seems that we're applying the same consequences and safeguards universally, regardless of the severity of the offense. Even the justice system doesn't have a one-size fits all approach.

Low risk is not equal to NO risk. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Professionals know that although they do their best to make a judgment and recommendations that are best for society and for the offender, there is no way to know or guarantee the future choices and behavior of a person. We have often heard about cases this year of "only one victim" or a story presented as "mild" abuse, only to later learn that there are other victims and much more about the story that was not initially revealed. The process of therapy and investigation is often necessary to get to the root of the problem and to flush out the whole picture. Our guidelines provide a lengthy period of time in therapy and a safe environment afterward that allows the offender to fully acknowledge the offense and harm that they have caused and an opportunity to live out their life without ever harming another person. A truly repentant person will be willing and supportive of any restriction, whether they have 1 or 100 victims.

Q31: Are we the only region taking a similar stance of all-volunteer meetings for perpetrators?

~~No. There are a few other regions around the country who have created, or are currently in the process of creating, similar guidelines, utilizing the same or similar approaches to safe meetings in that perpetrators are restricted from attending regular fellowship gatherings.~~ UPDATE: As of June 2024, only the NC/VA and TX/NM regions have taken this firm stance. WA/AK/NID and MN/IA were on this path, but have since stopped.

Q32: I know of some other churches that allow sex offenders to attend church with a trained monitor. Did we consider that approach?

This has been thoughtfully considered. Note that we're unique in the fact that we don't separate children from adults (i.e., in a Sunday School), and we also meet in homes. We feel that it's very important to continue having

our children with us in fellowship and do not want to exclude them from our gatherings. Other churches commonly have background checks for people who will be around children in Sunday Schools, field trips, etc. and never allow sex offenders around children. Separation is the standard. We considered the trained monitor approach for perpetrators, but we were strongly advised by professionals on the subject that due to the intimacy of our fellowship meetings and the way we gather in homes (which is a high-risk setting), we should not allow perpetrators into regular fellowship. This applies to other in-person gatherings as well, including gospel meetings and conventions. Specifically, it provides continued access to victims and temptations to continue offending. Indeed, in our own fellowship we have experienced thinking someone was somehow cured or changed, that they're now safe and trustworthy, only to see them re-offend, repeating the same cycles over and over. Professional standards strongly affirm separation is the approach that is absolutely necessary for both safety and to avoid re-traumatizing victim survivors. It also protects truly repentant perpetrators from their temptations and continuing down the wrong path. We don't want "the last state of the man to be worse than the first." What is best for victims is also best for offenders.

Q33: Why the requirement to not allow an adult to be alone with a child? That's a big change. We have a lot of trust for one another, and this seems to be changing our trust into suspicion of everyone.

We agree that our bonds with each other are like family, and that trust is important. Even within families, we've learned that there need to be certain boundaries. Parents need to be wise about not putting their children in certain situations with every uncle and cousin just because they're known and familiar. Even parents and grandparents are sometimes not as trustworthy as they should be. The two-adult rule is a simple rule that most organizations follow, not because they want people to be suspicious of each other, but precisely because they want to maintain safety while NOT needing to be suspicious of everyone. Without this rule, it would be up to the parent whether or not to allow a private adult-to-child interaction, and the parent may feel uncomfortable with the situation but feel hesitant to say anything for fear of making an uncomfortable assumption/assertion about the adult who is a friend to them. Instead, they might decide to "assume everything is fine," and think "there's probably nothing to worry about." With this rule, it empowers the parent to say, "We aren't supposed to be alone with children. It's nothing against you, it's just our policy." Notice they don't have to be suspicious but can simply follow the rule which increases safety in that situation. If everyone is aware and follows that simple boundary, then it removes judgment, suspicion and uncomfortable situations, and keeps children safe at the same time. Note that it's simple to always have another adult around when interacting with children. Also, this guideline doesn't apply if the adult is a designated caregiver, as designated by the child's parent or guardian (i.e., babysitting).

Q34: What does it mean to have interactions be observable, accountable, and interruptible?

When interactions are observable, it means that they are occurring in an open and visible space. Accountable interactions occur in public and are not done in secrecy such that the responsible parent/guardian is aware the interaction is happening. Interruptible interactions means that another adult could easily interrupt the interaction if they observe something questionable or concerning in the moment it's occurring. Following the Rule of Two, or having two adults present, allow these conditions to be met. If there are occasions where an adult may be alone with a minor, the situation must still meet these requirements. For example, if an adult was playing basketball with a minor in the driveway, it's an open and visible space, it's not done in secret, and another adult could easily interrupt. Here are some examples of this rule in the school setting:

- Teachers can work one-on-one with children that need extra help, but they're always required to leave their classroom door open when doing so.

- Counselors can close their door for private conversations if they have a window in their office so they can be accountable, and if the door is unlocked so that the interaction is interruptible.
- Teachers can't go into student bathrooms and aren't allowed to help a young child with toileting. If a child needs extra help, a designated school nurse can help (with prior permission from parents).

Q35: Is the Safety Team going to be policing our every move, rumor and suspicion?

No, the Safety Team will not be an intrusion into our normal, everyday life. One of the Safety Team's primary responsibilities will be to educate and counsel people in appropriate and safe behaviors. They will also track and record concerns with the intent of noticing patterns or areas of unsafe behaviors. Previously, multiple people may have had concerns, but they didn't have a singular place to report them. While the Safety Team is not an investigatory body, it will help to have one central team to track allegations and outcomes of investigations, as well as develop and implement Safety Plans.

Q36: How does abuse affect a child's mental health and overall development?

Abuse has severe and long lasting effects on a child's mental health and development. It can cause anxiety and depression as well as post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Often, children struggle with forming healthy relationships, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. They struggle with learning as abuse impairs their cognitive functioning and ability to attend and focus in the classroom. Abuse also increases the risk of substance abuse and other harmful behaviors, including suicidality and self-harm. Beyond just affecting someone's mental and cognitive functioning, a history of abuse often results in chronic, negative physical health outcomes. The impacts of abuse are often profound, with many victims describing it as having devastating and long-lasting effects that persist into adulthood.

Some people have compared it to theft (i.e., "stealing" a child's innocence), but it should more appropriately be compared to murder, since it often destroys part of that person in their most vulnerable formative development stages. The profound trauma inflicted by child sexual assault, particularly when minimized, can cause great harm both to the victims and to our fellowship. It's also important to note that it can greatly affect their spiritual well-being, and even harm or destroy a child's faith in God. We know our love, support and faithful example can positively encourage faith in others; it's important to also realize that we can be responsible for harming the faith of others.

Q37: I still don't understand how it can be unsafe to have an offender in meetings, as long as I'm made aware that there is a perpetrator and keep my children close by me. They wouldn't be able to cause harm unless they were somehow allowed to be alone with my child, which is a choice I can control.

Perpetrators are charming, likable, kind, and friendly, a pattern of behavior they engage in to gain trust, but they're watching and waiting for opportunities to have contact with the child away from an adult. When you let your guard down, even just a little, the results can be catastrophic. One convicted perpetrator in our fellowship told interviewers that he "only needed 4 - 5 minutes" out of sight of parents. An added concern in this day and age of digital communication is that a perpetrator sitting across the room from your child would have enough contact to know their name, their family dynamics, where they live, and any personal details that are shared in this setting (testimony or after meeting conversation), which would give them enough information to find your child on online media platforms and establish a relationship that adults are not aware of. Perpetrators are also often eager to establish relationships with young children or teens who are struggling with relationships within their families (i.e., normal rebellion toward parents or problems in the

family system) and will exploit that tension in order to create a connection with the child. Additionally, having separation can help decrease the re-traumatization of victim survivors.

Q38: Are we avoiding doing what Jesus commanded about trespass between brethren (Matthew 18:15-17)?

Matthew 18:15-17 talks about how to deal with *trespasses* between *brethren*. A *trespass* is violating a boundary or a law. An *offense*, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is a moral sin that causes another person to stumble or fall. Jesus asks us to tell our brother when a boundary has been crossed. This could be in reference to any number of personal boundaries that we have; for example, borrowing something without asking, visiting without giving notice, saying something insensitive, joking about a family member, not giving us enough personal space, or a non-abusive touch or look that makes us feel uncomfortable. In the Old Testament, a trespass offering referred to sin done in ignorance of God's boundaries. A trespass can also be an intentional crossing of a boundary. Whether it was done intentionally or unintentionally, God's boundaries needed to be made clear, confronted, and dealt with in order for there to be peace with Him again. This is similar to our trespasses between each other.

It's also clear in these verses that Jesus is talking about *brethren*, which would imply an equal relationship, not a relationship where one member has power or authority over the other (as an adult over a child). If a boundary is crossed between brethren (or peers), then it is advisable to tell that person for awareness, and to help avoid any misunderstandings, etc. It's not expected that a *child* would be able to comfortably and confidently confront an adult, and crossing physical/emotional boundaries with a child is not what Jesus is talking about here.

This chapter talks about the importance of holding a brother accountable, even establishing consequences up to and including excommunication for certain trespasses that have malintent and aren't just mistakes or simple misunderstandings. The chapter also does a wonderful job of talking about repentance and forgiveness. It's important to remember that forgiveness sets free the person who was trespassed against and can even establish peace in a relationship, but forgiveness does not release the offender from any necessary consequences for the trespass.

Relating our policy to the protocol outlined in Matthew 18, if an *adult* confronts a *peer* about a violation or trespass of a personal boundary and the situation is not resolved, then it is advisable for the person to involve a witness. In the case of problematic sexual behaviors, they should involve the Safety Team as the witness to the matter. If the concerned party and the Safety Team together still have concerns about the trespasser's inappropriate behavior being dangerous, then escalation/awareness may need to be called out to the entire church. And if the concern still persists, then separation/exclusion may need to be applied to the trespasser.

It is important to remember that Jesus was referring to trespasses not offenses when providing these directives. CSA and SA are criminal acts and need to be reported to the legal authorities. Victims of sexual crimes should not be asked to approach the perpetrator for any kind of reconciliation. Jesus' teachings here emphasize reconciliation in interpersonal conflicts, not situations involving criminal behaviors instigated by adults toward children.

Q39: Have we considered not allowing workers to stay in homes where children are present?

This is something the FBI has asked about, and we understand that would go the farthest for mitigating the risk of workers offending. We also recognize this would be a huge change for many people who enjoy having the workers over, and our time together with the workers can be very profitable. Our hope is that normalizing

the Rule of Two, closely following the expectations set forth for all adults and workers, and all the other elements of our policy together will prevent abuse by workers in the home setting. If there continues to be harm done by workers while visiting homes, it would be a logical next step to not allow them in homes with families. We do want to normalize that it's perfectly acceptable for families who aren't comfortable having the workers over to decline visits. We feel that scripture allows for workers to be itinerant, but there is nothing doctrinally that requires they stay in everyone's home. While we love having the workers over, the above adjustments are ones we can make to our common practice of home visits to remain both scriptural and safe.

Q40: How can a repentant perpetrator make an attempt at restoration to a victim?

Sometimes a perpetrator might wonder what they can do to make things right. The perpetrator must take full responsibility for their actions, understand the harm that they've caused, and be willing to accept any consequences or restrictions that arise from their actions. The first thing would be to turn themselves in to law enforcement, and then be willing for any requirements of the law. They should never reach out to their victim directly as this can cause a lot of emotional harm. However, through an advocate, they can tell the victim that they've turned themselves in to the law. This can help the victim to feel validated and be an important first step toward healing. Repentant offenders must also be willing to listen to voices expressing pain, anger, and suffering, particularly without diminishing the hurt of victim survivors, minimizing the damage of their own actions, or excusing or defending their behavior.

Q41: I've heard people say it's important to educate your kids about this. How important is that? I'd like to protect them from knowing too much, and having to worry about all of this.

It's common to avoid discussing this topic with children because it feels uncomfortable and we want to preserve their innocence. But as hard as it is, it's far better for their innocence to be taken away by knowledge than by experience. We might feel confident that we can protect our children without having to discuss it, however, we won't be around them 100% of the time. They will go to school, have after school activities, go to neighbor's and friend's houses, etc. Knowledge is our first line of defense.

In an age-appropriate manner, they need to be aware and know what to do in certain situations. This may include education about proper terms for anatomical parts, encouragement to speak to parents or guardians about situations where they feel uncomfortable, and reminders of their right to bodily autonomy. There are many educational resources available online or in book format (see the *Education* section at the end of our policy). Some have found it easiest to have their children watch a video about the topic... here are videos used by Boy Scouts of America in their annual training for kids Grades K-5, and this is available for anyone:

<https://www.scouting.org/programs/cub-scouts/preview-adventures/protect-yourself-rules/>

Also, from a young age, please teach your kids that if someone says no, to stop whatever they're doing or saying. Young children will often continue, in order to annoy a sibling, or out of unwillingness to stop, but it's important for them to get used to respecting others' wishes, even when the behavior isn't necessarily harmful. As they get older, encourage them to have healthy friendships with the people they date, and to look for someone they can admire, respect and trust.

Q42: Is it possible that some of this is exaggerated? Is all of this actually abuse, or could some of it just be accidents or misunderstandings?

We're talking about actual sexual abuse, typically molestation or rape. There would be other instances of sexual harassment, red flag or other inappropriate behaviors, but those aren't included in these statistics. When we think about CSA specifically, we need to be clear that there is no such thing as 'accidentally' harming a child or misunderstanding sexual boundaries. We want to be careful to use language such as this as well when we discuss this topic because it can be invalidating, damaging, and silencing to victims.

Q43: Any abuse is bad, but I'm just trying to get my head around the scope. I've heard these reports go back to the 1930's. Having 800 cases doesn't seem as shocking when considering that it's spread over ~90 years, and the fact it's worldwide.

Although some allegations do reach back far into the past, most of the abuses reported occurred from the '60's through the 90's, and many (but not all) of the perpetrators are still alive. The average age of disclosure for CSA is 52, meaning that victim survivors do not report it at all for several decades after the abuse. It's also important to realize that there are always far more allegations that go unreported (one estimate is that 85% of CSA goes unreported), so the number of allegations we've received are likely only a small fraction of actual abuses. By all measurements, comparisons and estimates, our fellowship is rife with abuse and comparable to any other organization, including the Catholic Church, the Mormon Church, and Boy Scouts. As another way of looking at it, when looking at the worker's list from one year for our region a few decades ago, 5 of the 23 brother workers listed have since been found to be perpetrators; 21% is a very high rate for such a limited sample and helps illustrate the scope of the problem.

Q44: I don't understand how seemingly good people can commit egregious crimes such as CSA and SA. How does this happen and where does this come from?

It's hard for many of us to fathom how this happens. Around 3% of men have pedophilia, which is a sexual attraction to children, ingrained into their nature. Not all pedophiles act on their urges. It's also true that some sexual offenders don't commit these crimes for sexual gratification, but rather for the pleasure of exercising control over someone who is vulnerable. Sometimes people who experience a lack of control in their lives may act out this way. Others who gain a lot of respect and trust from others get this temptation to wield power over the vulnerable in a sexual manner.

Q45: I've noticed a 15-year old flirting with young men in their 20's. Is it possible that some girls are asking for it, and would that be considered abuse?

No victim ever asks to be assaulted or abused. By law, there can be no consent under age 16 in Washington and Alaska, or age 18 in Idaho. In Alaska there is a 4-year age difference exemption, and in Washington 2 years; Idaho has no exemption. If someone under the age of consent is in a sexual relationship with someone older than the close-in-age exemption, a sexual relationship is illegal and considered to be rape. If a young person tries to initiate a sexual relationship with someone above the close-in-age exemption, the adult is responsible for saying "no" and for distancing themselves.

Q46: What about Paul, who had been a murderer? They would've known he was dangerous, but he was never banned from regular meetings.

Paul wasn't a murderer because of a lust in his flesh to kill; he was complicit in the death of others because of misguided zeal for God. If Paul would have had fits of rage and killed people during his rages, then he wouldn't be safe to be around others, even if he kept his temper under control "most" of the time. CSA/SA is lust (sexual and control), not misguided zeal. Although we 100% believe that hearts can be changed and given new life and power from God, we've proven over the last several generations that we, in our human discernment, cannot

rightly judge who is living in the spirit and who isn't. And more importantly, we know that new life in the Spirit doesn't completely remove our human nature. It gives us victory over it, as long as we're renewed by the spirit, but we can also fall again and again. Stumbling in this case is a risk we cannot accept, as it harms the souls of our little ones.

Q47: Why are these Guidelines so hard for people to accept?

There have been lots of reasons given. Much of the initial feedback was around the wording and style of the guidelines, and many of those suggestions were incorporated.

There was always a general feeling, however, that it was too legalistic, leaving no room for discretion or judgment. But we feel that this is an important strength of the guidelines because if you leave room for discretion, particularly stemming from inconsistent and emotion-based judgment, you go back to the way these cases were handled in the past. We explained that in the application of the guidelines, there could be rare exceptions made as long as there's professional involvement and full transparency. Mentioning this changed nobody's mind. There was also a lot of concern about the Expectations and Red Flag sections, that you would be forced to turn people in for any of those things, otherwise there would be consequences. We felt those sections were clearly written as educational in nature, and that you would only turn people in if there were any safety concerns.

It seems that the crux of the dissatisfaction is some don't think perpetrators should be completely sidelined from regular meetings for life. It's often a hard concept to accept because we believe in forgiveness, change, restoration, redemption, etc. To some it seems unforgiving, vengeful, hopeless, and hardened. But little do they know and understand, this is what actually helps offenders. This is what the law does, and for good reason. It often takes a long time, and a lot of help, to take accountability and to want change. Prison, therapy, and restrictions are all to HELP perpetrators. When we witness accountable change in offenders, it occurs after a long, long road of effort, including attending therapy, abiding by restrictions, and being willing to continue showing accountability. Offenders cannot receive meaningful help with an attitude of "Everyone is welcome. We love everyone. Nobody is excluded. Just forgive." These words may sound nice, but without accountability, they are empty.

Q48: What are some scriptural references that could help me understand God's thoughts on these issues and how they should be dealt with?

We have compiled a list of some scriptural references that we have considered in this process; this list is not exhaustive but provides some examples. We won't interpret them, rather just list them into groups for any who would like to read them. It is not our intent to wield or bend scripture to fit a certain narrative.

ADVOCACY

Proverbs 31:8-9

Open your mouth on behalf of those unable to speak,
for the legal rights of all the dying.
Open your mouth, judge in righteousness,
and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Psalms 82:1-4

God stands in the assembly of El;

in the midst of the gods he renders judgment.
He says, "How long will you make unjust legal decisions
and show favoritism to the wicked? (Selah)
Defend the cause of the poor and the fatherless.
Vindicate the oppressed and suffering.
Rescue the poor and needy.
Deliver them from the power of the wicked.

Luke 10:25-37

Now an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus, saying, "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? How do you understand it?" The expert answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

But the expert, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, but when he saw the injured man he passed by on the other side. So too a Levite, when he came up to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling came to where the injured man was, and when he saw him, he felt compassion for him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring olive oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever else you spend, I will repay you when I come back this way.' Which of these three do you think became a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The expert in religious law said, "The one who showed mercy to him." So Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Ephesians 5:11-13

Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. For the things they do in secret are shameful even to mention. But all things being exposed by the light are made visible.

Job 29:12-17

For I rescued the poor who cried out for help,
and the orphan who had no one to assist him;
the blessing of the dying man descended on me,
and I made the widow's heart rejoice;
I put on righteousness and it clothed me,
my just dealing was like a robe and a turban;
I was eyes for the blind
and feet for the lame;
I was a father to the needy,
and I investigated the case of the person I did not know;
I broke the fangs of the wicked,
and made him drop his prey from his teeth.

Jeremiah 22:3

The LORD says, "Do what is just and right. Deliver those who have been robbed from those who oppress them. Do not exploit or mistreat resident foreigners who live in your land, children who have no fathers, or widows. Do not kill innocent people in this land."

Matthew 25:31-46

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?' And the king will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did it for one of the least of these brothers or sisters of mine, you did it for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire that has been prepared for the devil and his angels! For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink. I was a stranger and you did not receive me as a guest, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' Then they too will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not give you whatever you needed?' Then he will answer them, 'I tell you the truth, just as you did not do it for one of the least of these, you did not do it for me.' And these will depart into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Galatians 6:1-5

Brothers and sisters, if a person is discovered in some sin, you who are spiritual restore such a person in a spirit of gentleness. Pay close attention to yourselves, so that you are not tempted too. Carry one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Let each one examine his own work. Then he can take pride in himself and not compare himself with someone else. For each one will carry his own load.

SERIOUSNESS OF OFFENSE

Matthew 18:5-6

And whoever welcomes a child like this in my name welcomes me.

But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the open sea.

SCRIPTURAL PRECEDENT FOR ESTABLISHING GUIDELINES AND A SAFETY TEAM

Exodus 18:13-27

On the next day Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood around Moses from morning until evening. When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why are you sitting by yourself, and all the people stand around you from morning until evening?"

Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a dispute, it comes to me and I decide between a man and his neighbor, and I make known the decrees of God and his laws."

Moses' father-in-law said to him, "What you are doing is not good! You will surely wear out, both you and these people who are with you, for this is too heavy a burden for you; you are not able to do it by yourself. Now listen to me, I will give you advice, and may God be with you. You be a representative for the people to God, and you bring their disputes to God; warn them of the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. But you choose from the people capable men, God-fearing men, men of truth, those who hate bribes, and put them over the people as rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. They will judge the people under normal circumstances, and every difficult case they will bring to you, but every small case they themselves will judge, so that you may make it easier for yourself, and they will bear the burden with you. If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will be able to go home satisfied."

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he had said. Moses chose capable men from all Israel, and he made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. They judged the people under normal circumstances; the difficult cases they would bring to Moses, but every small case they would judge themselves.

Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and so Jethro went to his own land.

Numbers 11:14-17 & verses 24-25

[Moses said to God,] "I am not able to bear this entire people alone, because it is too heavy for me! But if you are going to deal with me like this, then kill me immediately. If I have found favor in your sight then do not let me see my trouble."

The LORD said to Moses, "Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know are elders of the people and officials over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting; let them take their position there with you. Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take part of the Spirit that is on you, and will put it on them, and they will bear some of the burden of the people with you, so that you do not bear it all by yourself...."

So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. He then gathered seventy men of the elders of the people and had them stand around the tabernacle. And the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to them, and he took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but did not do so again.

Acts 6:1-6

Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the twelve called the whole group of the disciples together and said, "It is not right for us to neglect the word of God to wait on tables. But carefully select from among you, brothers, seven men who are well-attested, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this necessary task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." The proposal pleased the entire group, so they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas, a Gentile convert to Judaism from Antioch. They stood these men before the apostles, who prayed and placed their hands on them.

All of Acts 15 but perhaps especially verses 19-34

"Therefore I conclude that we should not cause extra difficulty for those among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we should write them a letter telling them to abstain from things defiled by idols and from sexual immorality and from what has been strangled and from blood. For Moses has had those who proclaim him in every town from ancient times, because he is read aloud in the synagogues every Sabbath."

Then the apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to send men chosen from among them, Judas called Barsabbas and Silas, leaders among the brothers, to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent this letter with them:

From the apostles and elders, your brothers, to the Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, greetings! Since we have heard that some have gone out from among us with no orders from us and have confused you, upsetting your minds by what they said, we have unanimously decided to choose men to send to you along with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul, who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas who will tell you these things themselves in person. For it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us not to place any greater burden on you than these necessary rules: that you abstain from meat that has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what has been strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from doing these things, you will do well. Farewell.

So when they were dismissed, they went down to Antioch, and after gathering the entire group together, they delivered the letter. When they read it aloud, the people rejoiced at its encouragement. Both Judas and Silas, who were prophets themselves, encouraged and strengthened the brothers with a long speech. After they had spent some time there, they were sent off in peace by the brothers to those who had sent them.

Note: We read again of this same set of written guidelines in Acts 21. It's hard to determine but it could be around 8 years later.