

To our friends in Texas & New Mexico,

We would like to share with you some more information that we have learned about CSA/SA reporting. We also want to make everyone aware of two project goals that we have in mind: A new administrative process for supporting victims in our fellowship, and a new communication platform that we hope to share with all of you in the near future.

Reporting

We strongly encourage anyone who has an accusation to report it to the proper legal authorities rather than on social media. We understand that many survivors are finding their voice in a forum where they feel support and comfort; however, we are strongly urging any victim to take their accusation through the proper legal channels. If you choose not to do so it severely limits your case, and it makes it more difficult, if not impossible, for us to follow the guidelines we have in place for our fellowship. Our hope is that making you aware of this information will allow all legitimate claims to reach their proper conclusion.

We have been informed by attorneys that if you present your accusation via social media several things happen:

1. The “alleged perpetrator” is made aware and they could then take steps to avoid investigation.
2. Any information you post on social media that does not coincide with the information provided/obtained during the investigation could potentially impair any criminal prosecution of any crimes committed by the alleged perpetrator.
3. Posting your accusation on social media before contacting authorities potentially calls into question the legitimacy of the accusation.

We hope that providing you this information, combined with the proper reporting procedure we included in our last email, will help everyone understand that silence from our ministry staff on any communication platform does not mean that we are ignoring the cry of the victim. We are following the legal protocols that will provide the best opportunity for the investigation to proceed unhindered.

We want to remind everyone that in a case where there is an immediate threat, law enforcement will deal with that immediately.

Looking toward the future, we have a model in mind that will shift the load of this process onto several appointed deacons. We plan to have two deacons (one man and one woman) appointed in different regions of Texas and New Mexico. After an accusation has been made to the proper legal authorities, we are asking that the person who filed the claim contact one of the two deacons in their region (whichever one they feel most comfortable with) to make them aware that an accusation has been made to the proper legal authorities.

The deacon will serve in a purely administrative role, recording the information to provide an internal record of steps taken. The deacons are not investigators and are

not involved in the investigation process in any capacity. The deacons will be responsible for the following:

- Writing an Incident Report (as outlined in our previous email sent July 10th)
- Contacting the authorities to ask what, if anything, can be communicated to the elder and the fellowship meeting where the “person of interest” attends
- Contacting the workers in the field
- Following up once the allegation has been processed
- Connecting victims with an advocate in their area

It is essential to follow this process to protect the privacy of all persons involved. Our hope is to have this model in place by the Fall.

Combined with the deacons, we are hoping that some would be willing to fill the role of a Victim Advocate. The role of Advocates will be to:

- Provide emotional support
- Link victims with professional resources
- Accompany victims if requested, to meetings with elders, deacons or workers within the fellowship or with external authorities
- Gather information necessary to advocate for the victim’s best interests

We are currently in an information gathering process and we are learning new aspects of this process daily. Once we have concluded our Listening Sessions, we will appoint the deacons who will help in this capacity. We pray, and we ask that you pray also, for the Lord’s direction in raising up the appropriate people to fill this office.

Communication

We have created a private platform through the Mighty Networks app that is reshaping how we communicate as a staff. We plan to share this link with all of you, giving you access to the Communication and the Policy and Guidelines portions. This will allow you to see all of the email notifications we have sent since this process began and all of the resource documents we have shared, making them available to you in one accessible location. We are still developing this portion, but hope to share it with everyone as soon as possible.

Listening Sessions and Conventions

We have held four Listening Sessions so far, and each one has been a profitable and an emotionally intense experience. Two takeaways from these sessions:

- The heightened awareness of CSA/SA is moving us in the direction of an informed and aware culture.
- The need to express feelings, to offer suggestions, and to ask questions is moving us toward a culture of openness and transparency.

We are thankful for that. It is our hope that as we continue with the Listening Sessions, these cultural changes will take root in our fellowship.

Our conventions in New Mexico and Texas have felt exceptionally tender. There has been a depth to the testimonies, a deeper focus on our individual relationship with our Heavenly Father and our Savior, and a spirit of thankfulness for the encouragement we draw from fellowship.

We are aware that some have viewed this convention season as being “ill-timed” in light of the current crisis, and that holding conventions is an attempt to have “business as normal.” Others have expressed that this time of spiritual restoration and fellowship is both needful and helpful to them. Everyone has a right to choose what is best for them, and we respect that. No one opinion will ever be representative of everyone’s feelings.

Sincerely,

The Texas/New Mexico Staff