

**RESPONSE OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL AND BISHOPS
TO THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM GRAND RIVER SOLUTIONS**

January 2023

Response to the GRS Report A Personal Statement from Bishop Steven A Breedlove

Dear Clergy and Leaders of the Diocese of Christ our Hope,

As you know, our Diocese has been involved for over two years in seeking to investigate and resolve allegations of misconduct against a rector in our Diocese. Our initial work to bring this issue to resolution began in June 2020 and extended to February 2022 before we realized that our efforts up to then had not only failed but had, in fact, increased the pain and confusion for everyone involved. At that time, the Diocesan Council stepped back from the process and remanded the investigation to the oversight of a temporary team led by Bishop Alan Hawkins, the Diocesan Coordinating Team (DCT). During that same shift of oversight, I requested the Diocesan Council to authorize a thorough investigation of our handling of the situation up to this point. The Council wholeheartedly supported this and engaged the DCT to research investigative firms. At their recommendation, we contracted with Grand River Solutions to provide an objective evaluation of our efforts so that we could clearly learn from our mistakes, own our failures, and bring healing to the wounds inflicted over the previous 20 months of unsuccessful effort. We also hoped this evaluation would help us develop best-practice processes for future investigations of alleged clergy misconduct.

GRS delivered their report on October 26, 2022, and since that time, the Diocesan Council, bishops and chancellor have been studying their findings. In mid-November we established a small team to go over the GRS report in order to answer three questions:

1. How can we create a constructive path for responding to future allegations of misconduct that ensures we do not repeat the mistakes of the past?
2. How can we apply newly formed processes to bring the still-unresolved allegations of misconduct to closure with truth, justice, and honor for all parties, as quickly as possible?
3. How can we own our personal shortcomings and failures and seek to make amends with those who have been wounded and have lost trust as a result of the Diocese's initial efforts to resolve this issue?

In answer to the first question, we determined to complete the development of a principled, trustworthy, and transparent process for responding to allegations of clergy misconduct in the Diocese. To that end, we had already been working throughout 2022, learning, incorporating, and adapting insights from the professional investigative world as well as best practices currently being developed by the ACNA for responding to allegations of clergy misconduct.

These efforts have been strengthened by the recommendations contained in the GRS report. All of this is detailed in the accompanying response statement from the Diocesan Council which includes *Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding our Churches*. We are confident that this seven-step process will serve clergy and laity in the DCH well going forward.

The answer to the second question will be the faithful application over the next few months of appropriate elements of the *Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding our Churches* to the unresolved allegations of misconduct.

That leaves the third question remaining, “How can we own our personal shortcomings and failures and seek to make amends with those who have been wounded and have lost trust as a result of the Diocese’s initial efforts to resolve this issue?” While that is a question that the whole Diocesan Council and bishops are asking, in a unique way it is a question I must face. Responsibility for any failed institutional process fundamentally lies with its senior leader.

I am grateful that the GRS team, after reading and studying thousands of emails and meeting with many people personally, concluded that there was no evidence of malice or bias on my part toward any of the parties involved. That fits my own self-awareness, prayers, and deepest desires toward everyone involved in this situation. Nevertheless, I also understand that people were truly, actually wounded, not just by the process, but by me, the bishop of the Diocese. “Complainants” and “respondent” are abstract, generic terms, but in reality, they describe people I know and who matter greatly to me; people with faces, voices, ministries, vocations, and families; people I was responsible to care for as a shepherd; people I met with in person, talked with on the phone, and met face-to-face on screens. The thought that, for any reason, I could be the source of personal trauma to people under my care weighs heavily on me.

Therefore, facing and owning personal shortcomings and failures and making amends starts with meeting personally with those people caught in the ongoing confusion and pain. I am committed to reaching out to each person I am aware of and doing whatever I can to make arrangements (acceptable to each one) for meeting personally. My prayer is that I can find good ways with each individual or couple to begin the conversations through which we could start rebuilding what has been lost. In those conversations, I commit to listen well, to seek God’s help to understand and learn, to own everything that is mine, and to make amends in whatever specific ways I can.¹

¹ I know I am likely unaware of everyone who might desire to meet in this regard. I will be grateful if you who receive this letter would reach out to encourage anyone who needs / wants to talk with me to get in contact with me for the purpose of beginning to rebuild what has been lost. Alternatively, could you kindly let me know if there is someone I need to be sure to reach out to? I will gladly do so.

The overarching phrase about my personal responsibilities in this moment comes from John the Baptist's warning to the Pharisees, "bring forth fruit in keeping with your repentance." If I stand humbly before God and accept his judgment, what fruit of repentance might there be? Beyond the important institutional changes we are developing, I trust that true, righteous, substantial fruit will emerge from open-hearted personal times with individuals and couples in the weeks ahead.

May I ask your prayers for continuing clarity and guidance through this process for me and for our whole team of leaders? Can you also pray for all people still personally involved in unresolved issues, that God will bring a redemptive and merciful conclusion to this for all?

In the bonds of Christ Jesus, our Savior, who came to set us free from our sins (Matt 1:21),

Bishop Steve Breedlove

RESPONSE OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL AND BISHOPS TO THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRAND RIVER SOLUTIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRAND RIVER SOLUTIONS:

At the request of the Diocesan Council, Grand River Solutions [GRS] was hired on March 4, 2022 to conduct a thorough investigation of the actions of the Diocese in response to allegations of clergy misconduct spanning the time period of June 2020 through February 2022. GRS delivered a 22-page report, including three summary recommendations, and a 7-page executive summary to the Diocesan Council on October 26, 2022. The three summary recommendations are:

1. Receiving a Report of Misconduct

The Diocese might consider training those who receive complaints to ask questions that might elicit information about details and the factual underpinnings of an allegation, so that the Diocese is better able to determine the appropriate next steps. In addition, if there is an expectation of two or more witnesses, those receiving complaints should be trained to ask the complainant or reporting party about the possibility of potential witnesses.

When a complainant or reporting party uses conclusory language, it is helpful for the individual receiving the report to ask gentle probing questions, such as “can you tell me what that term means to you,” or “could you define that for me, so that I am better able to understand. One such term is “spiritual abuse”, which was used by many, but did not carry a set definition. One community member interviewed as part of this review proposed identifying appropriate stakeholders in the Anglican polity, clergy and laity, with expertise in this area and convening them as soon as possible. This person acknowledged that it is difficult to define these concepts and clarity would be helpful.

2. When to Launch an Investigation:

To the extent that the diocesan practices will continue to require two or more witnesses¹ (and, again, we take no position as to the need to follow scripture that underpins this determination), the Diocese might wish to consider whether documents (text messages, emails, video recordings, photographs) might also be considered as sufficient support for

¹ The language of the canons of both the Province and the Diocese do not use the term *witness* to describe someone making an accusation of misconduct. Instead, a *witness* in a canonical investigation is someone who corroborates the statement of either a complainant or a respondent.

allegations, as a way to protect the elders of the church against meritless allegations while still permitting the Diocese to more timely proceed with an investigation in order to determine whether or not misconduct occurred, and thus provide finality on a more timely basis.

The Diocese might also consider that, should there be only one witness, the Diocese is not entirely limited in the steps it might take to reduce the likelihood of misconduct. For example, the Bishop might monitor more closely, gather feedback, have educational discussions with the accused, or otherwise find non-disciplinary steps that might be taken to reduce the likelihood that future misconduct might occur.

Broadly speaking, we would advise against establishing a protocol that shields those in positions of authority from scrutiny simply because they had the presence of mind or foresight not to behave badly in the presence of others.

3. Launching an Investigation:

Before launching any investigation², it is helpful to pause and ask, “If all of the facts as alleged were true, what canon (or policy) would this violate?” By going through this process, the Diocese would not launch an investigation that would never result in a finding that any canon had been violated. Once the Diocese decides to move forward, it would then be in a position to more easily identify the specific canon(s) at issue, which will in turn help to properly focus the investigation.

We also recommend that the Diocese provide written notice of an investigation to complainants and respondents, and then provide a copy of the notice to the investigator(s). While the specifics of such a notice may vary, at a minimum it should include some factual information about what is alleged to have occurred (even if bare bones), the specific policy or canon alleged to have been violated, and information about the investigative process. This may include an expectation that the parties maintain confidentiality, as well as information about who will be conducting the investigation, the anticipated investigative timeline, whether they will be contacted for an interview, the expectation that there will be no retaliation, and whether there will be any opportunity to review any of the evidence gathered, or any type of hearing (whether formal or informal). Additionally, the notice may provide insight as to what will occur after the investigation is complete. For example, the parties might be informed that the

² Our response to the term *investigation* is developed on pages 4 and 5 through our description of the DRT and DIT processes. In our process, we separate an *inquiry* from an actual *canonical investigation*, while GRS uses the term *investigation* to cover both aspects of an investigatory response.

investigators will write a formal report within a certain period of time, and if the investigators determined that policy or canon was violated then a designated person or panel in leadership would be called upon to determine appropriate corrective action.

DIOCESAN COUNCIL & BISHOPS RESPONSE: ACTIONS AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES

By June 2022, due to the challenges and length of the previous process (which generated our engagement with GRS), the Diocesan Council and staff had already begun developing what is now framed as the “Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches.” Our intent was to significantly improve our ability to process allegations of clergy misconduct and conduct investigations, and provide effective support for all people involved in a complaint process. In this context, we are deeply grateful for the thorough and good work of GRS. They reviewed a great amount of information and interviewed key participants to produce their report and recommendations. In addition to the three specific recommendations for improved process (noted above), their report includes significant evaluative insights that imply several ways we could improve our response to complaints and/or allegations of clergy misconduct. The GRS report and recommendations combined to encourage us that we are well on the way to developing an effective process for responding to allegations of clergy misconduct. This process is embodied in the Seven Dimensions of Safeguarding our Churches.

Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches

The Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches are:

1. **The Staffing of an Office for Ethics and Safeguarding.** In August 2021 our Diocese employed a Canon for Ethics and Safeguarding to develop standards, training, and oversight of the safeguarding and protection of children within our ministries. Over time, we saw the need to broaden this office to include developing and applying all aspects of clergy and adult ethics appropriate to our responsibility. While different individuals will occupy this office over time, in 2022 we commissioned Chief Operating Officer Lee Hilts to take the lead in ensuring continuity and consistency for the foreseeable future.
2. **Principles and Guidelines for Creating a Congregational Path for Dealing with Concerns or Complaints.** According to our diocesan Canons (I.7.1), disciplinary situations involving lay people are overseen fundamentally at the congregational level. Guidelines are being created that assist clergy and congregational lay leaders (vestries) in creating pathways for conflict resolution according to biblical directives. Our plan is to require vestries and

rectors to create ‘handbooks’ which will steer complaints and conflicts into the hands of mature spiritual leaders who are skilled in facilitating resolution in a manner consistent with scriptural principles and worthy of the Gospel. Our aim is to complete these guidelines and begin working with congregations to implement them no later than March 2023 with a goal of completing this aspect of safeguarding our congregations by August 31, 2023.

- 3. The Adult Misconduct Task Force** of the ACNA is charged with developing a provincial policy that builds a culture of healthy, safe interaction and ministry for all adults within our churches. This policy will be adapted and applied in the Diocese soon after it is made available to us with a tentative target date for completion by the end of 2023. Three people with experience in various areas of safeguarding practice from our Diocese are serving on this ACNA task force. Once the ACNA has released its sample policy, our Ethics and Safeguarding Leader(s) will review and edit the policy for release, training, and implementation throughout our Diocese. The desire of our Diocese is that our Child Safety Policy ([found here](#)), and our eventual Adult Misconduct Policy, will comprise the best comprehensive safeguarding requirements, guidance, and training for the churches in the Diocese.
- 4. The Diocesan Response Team (DRT)**, operational since April 2022. The DRT is a **“triage team”** that responds to and examines complaints of clergy misconduct. It is composed of trauma-informed, trained mental health professionals, clergy and lay members (both from within and outside of the Diocese), and a diocesan chancellor. A complaint can come to the DRT directly from an individual (via the DCOH website) or from referral by an appropriate congregational or diocesan leader. The point of contact between the complainant and the DRT is a licensed trauma-informed counselor. Once a complaint is filed, the DRT acts to ensure complainants have professional support and care, walk individuals through possible actions available to them (including filing a formal complaint), and make basic assessments of complaints. These assessments fall into three levels. The alleged misconduct 1) falls into the realm of reportable issues (i.e., to legal authorities); 2) appears to be fundamentally a pastoral issue; 3) is potentially a canonical issue. The DRT delivers its assessments to the Bishop(s) of the Diocese for further action.
- 5. The Diocesan Investigative Team (DIT)**, operational since September 2022. The DIT is primarily a **canonical investigative team** analogous to a grand jury – i.e., determining whether or not there are grounds for further canonical action. It is appointed by the Diocesan Council and is composed of people from within the Diocese who have

considerable experience in investigative processes, as well as trained legal investigators (outside of the Diocese). This team is utilized when any complaints escalate to the level of possible canonical investigation. The DIT serves as the functional canonical investigator stipulated by the Canons of the ACNA (IV.3.3.1) and therefore defines the scope and the process for the investigation. The DIT's role is "fact-finding," i.e., investigatory; it is not a trial body. There are two possible outcomes of a DIT investigation: 1) no grounds for presentment, or 2) there are cognizable grounds for presentment.

6. **The Ecclesiastical Trial Court.** In accordance with the canons of the ACNA (IV.5), the Diocese has a standing Ecclesiastical Trial Court ready to receive and act on any presentments passed to them. The diocesan Canons outline the court, its structures and purposes, and its actions (IV.5).
7. As part of any response process, the ministry of Bishops, the Diocesan Council and the diocesan staff is to ensure that both complainants and respondents have **Support Care**. We will maintain contact with trained professionals who can assist in providing spiritual, psychological, and advocacy support when needed. We are committed to staying abreast of the literature on best practices for caring for people involved in alleged clergy misconduct. Such support is implemented via the DRT and the Bishops.

Of the Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding our Churches, numbers 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7 are operational. Numbers 2 and 3 are still in development.

DIOCESAN INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES:

The following processes govern investigative efforts in the Diocese of Christ our Hope:

1. As an Anglican Diocese we are bound by canons regarding investigations. There is great wisdom embedded in these canons, accessible to careful reading and application of the canons by all parties involved in an investigative process. We are also aware that our Provincial canons assume that our Bishop(s) will play several roles in all investigative processes, making it challenging to conduct the processes well while also pastorally serving people under their care. Therefore, we have created the systems mentioned above to ensure that our Bishop(s) have opportunity for their proper pastoral and oversight role, while the primary efforts to drive investigations have been delegated to specialized teams. For further reading, the canonical steps for accusations (complaints) and investigations concerning presbyters and deacons are found in the ACNA Canons (IV.3.1).

2. Any complaint of alleged clergy misconduct filed with the Diocesan Response Team (DRT) triggers an **inquiry process**. The **Diocesan Response Team** processes and evaluates initial complaints, working (as a team and with complainants) through several possible action points (*see Appendix A*). Through this process, the DRT can eventually make one of three recommendations to our Bishops:
 - a. The complaint requires contacting law enforcement agencies;
 - b. The nature of the complaint(s) possibly fall within the realm of violation of ACNA Canons (IV.2.1);
 - c. The remedy and possible resolution of the complaints and allegations do not merit a Title IV disciplinary process but merit a purely pastoral response.

3. As noted, the DRT can recommend a Canonical Investigation, and if this is approved by the Bishop(s), it triggers an investigation that will be conducted by the **Diocesan Investigative Team (DIT)**. The **Diocesan Investigative Team** is charged with establishing the scope and process and conducting the investigation into possible canonical violations by clergy in the Diocese.

The DIT is bound to follow the canons regarding all Title IV disciplinary measures throughout their investigative work. The scope of the investigation will be determined by the DIT and must be directly connected to the allegations that have been made.

A Bishop of the Diocese who can serve as a neutral participant takes part in a DIT investigation. However, if none of the diocesan Bishops are free of conflict of interest, the role of investigative Bishop will be transferred to the Bishop Ordinary of another diocese. In that case we will take measures to ensure that the Bishop we engage to serve in this capacity has the bandwidth, proper systems, and training to execute the Canonical Investigation (*see Appendix B*).

4. A launched Canonical Investigation is not made public but only made known to the appropriate parties.

5. If a Canonical Investigation has been called for by Bishop(s) of the Diocese, our canons require that the complainants as well as the respondent are notified through the appropriate channels of the need for and substance of the Canonical Investigation. If the respondent is not a rector, the rector and senior lay leaders/wardens are also notified. If the respondent is a rector, then the wardens and vestry of the church where he serves are notified.

6. It is important to lower the stigma that comes from assuming that a Canonical Investigation is a canonical trial. It is not. A canonical investigation is the process of fairly hearing all sides concerning the matter(s) involved and discerning if the allegations and potential misconducts are violations of the canons and merit an Ecclesiastical Trial.
7. Once a Canonical Investigation has been called and started, the respondent will see the specific accusations, and the facts surrounding the accusations, and be given a period of time (60 days) to respond to the allegations in writing.
8. The DIT concludes the investigation by making one of two possible recommendations to the Bishop and Diocesan Council: 1) Presentment for Charges, or 2) closure of the Canonical Investigation.
9. The Bishops and the Diocesan Council have the final responsibility to receive and act on the recommendations of the DIT.

CONCLUSION:

As a result of the flawed investigation and corresponding injury and erosion of trust by complainants and the respondent, our Diocese has worked vigorously to implement better systems and safeguards for receiving, responding to, and processing complaints of misconduct. The recommendations we received from GRS affirm and strengthen the work of our diocesan leaders to develop and implement better awareness, processes, and training systems for safeguarding congregants and churches in the Diocese of Christ our Hope.

We have also employed GRS to review our written response and to inspect the *Seven Dimensions of Safeguarding Our Churches*. Their additional comments can be found on the next page.

GRAND RIVER SOLUTIONS REVIEW OF THE RESPONSE OF THE DIOCESAN COUNCIL AND BISHOPS TO THE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GRAND RIVER SOLUTIONS

NOTE from the Diocesan Council and Bishops: By prior agreement, the Diocesan Council and Bishops sent their written response (i.e., this document) to GRS for their review and comments. We received their feedback (in italics below) the evening of January 4 2023. Because our commitment all along has been to make our entire response to the GRS Report and Recommendations available publicly during the first week of January 2023, we are appending GRS's comments simply as we received them. The Diocesan Council, Bishops, and Chancellor will review GRS's advisory recommendations (below) in depth within the next few weeks and make appropriate adjustments to further strengthen our actions RE: safeguarding our churches.

1. DRT can make one of three recommendations to Bishops (from Diocesan Investigative Process #2 above):

- a. The complaint requires contacting law enforcement agencies;
- b. The nature of the complaint(s) possibly fall within the realm of violation of ACNA Canons (IV.2.1);
- c. The remedy and possible resolution of the complaints and allegations do not merit a Title IV disciplinary process but merit a purely pastoral response.

GRS comment: Both a and b can be an appropriate next step; we urge the Diocese to think through how it will handle a complaint that is both criminal and a potential canonical violation. It may be necessary to allow the two processes to proceed, simultaneously. As the legal system uses very different standards, the two processes may lead to different conclusions (i.e., that a jury cannot make a finding beyond a reasonable doubt, but also a finding that it is more likely than not that an ACNA Canon was violated). This parallel process is common in campus and workplace investigations, and can be conducted without damage to a criminal prosecution, although may require a small delay (two – three weeks) to allow police detectives to gather evidence, conduct pretext calls, etc.

2. Complaints involving lay people overseen at the congregational level (from Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches #2 above):

GRS notes that the Diocese plans to require vestries and rectors to create 'handbooks' which will steer complaints and conflicts into the hands of mature spiritual leaders who are skilled in facilitating resolution in a manner consistent with scriptural principles and

worthy of the Gospel. GRS strongly suggests that these mature spiritual leaders have annual (at a minimum) training on mandatory reporting obligations, so that they are prepared to refer matters to law enforcement and/or child protective services, when appropriate to do so.

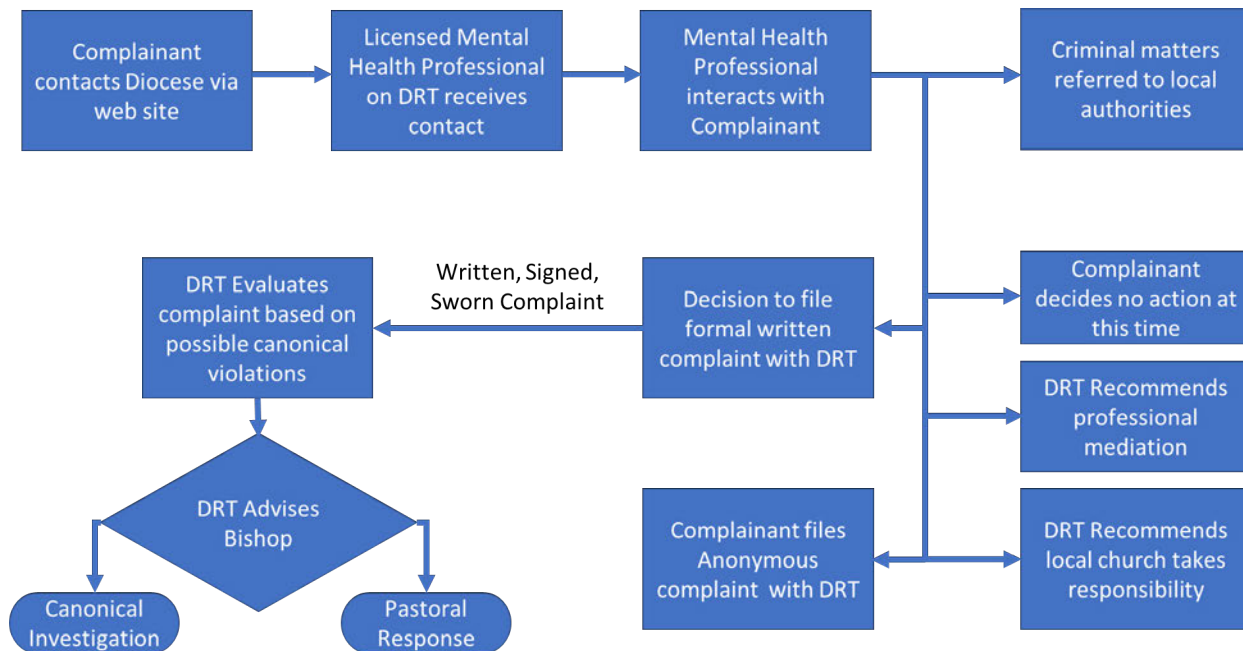
3. The Diocesan Response Team will evaluate “credible” complaints so as to move credible complaints forward (from Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches #4 above):

GRS strongly suggests moving away from conducting any credibility determination at this stage, as those conducting such an analysis are often found to use inappropriate factors in making those determinations. For example, those analyzing credibility are sometimes found to have used improper factors such as demeanor, whether the complainant appears to be truthful, a party’s charisma (or lack of), lack of corroboration, etc. Best practices dictate that credibility be assessed only after all facts are gathered. At this early stage, perhaps the better determination is either probable cause, or whether the complaint (if true) sets forth a claim that a canon was violated. This latter assessment is similar to the legal concept of a demurrer, meaning that the facts set forth in the complaint need to be accepted as true at this stage, solely for purposes of this initial analysis.

4. Support care (from Seven Dimensions for Safeguarding Our Churches #7 above):

GRS suggests that this support, particularly for complainants, be provided by one who holds a privileged under state law, meaning that information shared with the support care provided is legally protected from disclosure; this is often the place where a complainant might be talking through the nature of their experience, but not yet certain how they feel, or trying to talk themselves out of acknowledging the harm. Growing national best practices suggest that such conversations should be privileged so that they cannot later become evidence to be considered as part of any investigation.

Appendix A: CANONICAL INQUIRY PROCESS



Appendix B: CANONICAL INVESTIGATION PROCESS

