

Recommendations from the LMPC Safeguarding Team

Based on a thorough review of the report of the Ad Interim Committee on Domestic Abuse and Sexual Assault (DASA) to the 49th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) in June 2022.

Approved by LMPC Session 10/17/2022

1. Recommend that the elders of the LMPC Session study this report and consider its advice when shepherding the flock of God, in agreement with the advice of the Ad Interim committee on p.2302, Advice #1.
2. Recommend that the elders of the LMPC Session have a special, concentrated discussion of Attachment #11: Divorce and Domestic Abuse.
3. Recommend that the LMPC Pastoral Review Committee study the entire report and have a special, concentrated discussion of Attachment #11: Divorce and Domestic Abuse.
4. Recommend that those in the annual officers training class study Section One: Biblical and Confessional Foundations for Understanding Abuse; Section Six: The Misuse of Spiritual Authority; and Attachment 11: Divorce and Domestic Abuse.
5. Recommend that all other sections of the DASA report be noted and made available to those in annual officer training as a resource for reference and use.
6. Recommend that the Adult Discipleship team implement teachings of the Biblical basis for why the church is called to address abuse (Section 1) in on-going ways including:
 - a. A written summary of section 1 to use in various capacities such as Adult electives, Sunday school, Intro Class, & available as a general resource
 - b. Periodically (at least every other year) presenting the information in teachings or discussion settings preceding or following outside speakers on adjacent topics, utilizing these opportunities to change the ethos of our community to one that presumes we should and will address abuse.
7. Recommend that the Safeguarding Team discern and develop a clear resource sheet as to the particular laws regarding mandatory reporting to the civil magistrate in the civil jurisdictions of both Georgia and Tennessee. This is in accordance with the advice of the Ad Interim committee on p.2303, Advice #7.
8. Recommend that LMPC adopt a 2-option reporting structure, with an acknowledgement that the church will engage in ways deemed appropriate for the church to engage, but will assist a victim in engaging help from outside resources when their needs are beyond the scope of the church:

- a. Reports can be received internally by the Crisis Intervention Team** and will be assessed for the best action plan to address the particular situation. There will be one male and one female member of the team designated to receive initial reports (through a confidential email address such as CRISISHELP@lmpc.org) and will follow up with the victim in order to begin the assessment process. Internal options for action could include directing the victim to law enforcement; gathering a few people around them and directing them to the best resources to assist them in their particular circumstances; expanding the conversation to the full Crisis Intervention Team; or other avenues deemed appropriate.

** The Safeguarding Team recommends that the make-up of this team be between 5-7 people, men and women, strategically selected; that these members would agree to serve a particular term and that there would be adequate rotation of service; that this team would receive particular training.

- b. Reports can be made externally to Law enforcement or to specialized agencies who can help a victim determine their situation if they are unsure about what or whether to report, such as:

Locally in Chattanooga

24/7 Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Crisis Hotline: 423-755-2700

<https://www.partnershipfca.com/123/victim-support-services>

The National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-7233 (SAFE)

<https://www.thehotline.org/>

other helpful agencies/resources:

<https://www.calledtopeace.org/>

<https://documenttheabuse.com/>

9. Recommend that the LMPC pastoral team receive on-going training in how to identify and respond to domestic abuse, which should include education regarding local and national resources for various situations.
10. Recommend that the Session clarify expectations of pastors as they counsel and shepherd members of the flock with the following. Perhaps a booklet of “Guidelines for Pastoral Counsel” could be developed based on the DASA findings:
- a. Pastors are to engage in offering biblical counsel that applies to people’s questions and situations. However, pastors are to refrain from professional counseling since they are neither trained nor licensed. Instead, in instances needing *professional* counseling, strong and reliable referrals should be made to trained and/or licensed counselors.

- b. In any situation involving allegations of any form of abuse (based on definitions in Attachment 1: Definitions), the pastor will advise the victim that it is church policy to seek collaborative wisdom from either a supervisory pastor AND/OR the Crisis Intervention Team, depending on the circumstances and whichever the victim is most comfortable with.
 - i. The pastor can explain that, in the best interest of all parties receiving the best care in the situation, further counsel is necessary.
 - ii. The pastor can explain that anonymity will be maintained as much as possible, and the victim will be informed and have input if identity needs to be revealed.
 - c. A small group of elders and female church members, personalized for the victim, should be considered for the purpose of gathering for support and prayer with whatever bounds of confidentiality the abused victim sets.
 - d. Pastors should understand and operate with the principles on p.2360 concerning Shepherding the Victim to Safety and the principles of confrontation, separation, team, agency, network, and evaluate. A help guideline sheet of these principles that could be in the desk of each pastor is recommended.
 - e. Pastors should implement the counsel on page 2356, "It is not wise to conduct marriage counseling with both spouses *together* in cases of alleged, suspected, or disclosed abuse. Marriage counseling can be dangerous in cases of domestic abuse and may even result in further harm to the victim. Marriage counseling should not occur until individual counseling with an informed counselor has resulted in long-term evidence of the abuser's repentance, empathy, and genuine godly sorrow for their abusive behavior. An unbalanced focus on "keeping the marriage together" at any cost may prevent confrontation of the private sin of abuse that happens behind the closed doors of a Christian home....An abusive marriage is a blemish on Christ's body. The church must protect Christ's reputation AND eradicate the evil of abuse in Christian marriages."
11. Recommend all elders and deacons attend the upcoming Darby Strickland seminar (Feb. 24-26, 2023) or listen to recordings if unable to attend.