

ALABAMA CBF's POLICY for CHURCH and INDIVIDUAL REPORTING OF CLERGY and MINISTERIAL SEXUAL ABUSE

When the awful event of sexual abuse happens in a church or from a clergy-person outside the church, it's important to take this situation very seriously. It is natural to want to protect the victims, church members, and even the community from further trauma and grief. Many churches simply want to move on and forget that any minister could violate trust and power in such a destructive manner. Unfortunately, hiding or ignoring the situation may create an opportunity for others to get hurt by the same person in a similar situation.

Because of the historic ecclesial structure in Baptist life, there is no "outside authority" over churches that participate in AlabamaCBF. Each church is autonomous in decision-making, answering to no authority beyond its own congregation.

However, as a community of churches, AlabamaCBF recognizes the need for a community standard and reporting process when a clergy-person connected to AlabamaCBF is determined guilty of sexual abuse. Furthermore, as an organization committed to justice-making, we are committed to standing with those who have suffered oppression and abuse from authority figures, including religious authorities.

Churches connected to AlabamaCBF can help stop the cycle of clergy sexual abuse by reporting an incident of clergy abuse. Individuals who have suffered from abuse by a clergy-person can also report an incident through AlabamaCBF.

The Alabama Cooperative Baptist Fellowship maintains a confidential file of church incidents related to sexual abuse by clergy. Access to the file is limited to the Coordinator of AlabamaCBF and the Moderator of AlabamaCBF. Information regarding particular persons within the file will only be given to church representatives within the circumstances described below.

Churches can cooperate through AlabamaCBF to provide information about clergy who have broken the trust of their congregation and have violated the sacred role God has given them.

This policy is applicable to all churches who are listed on the AlabamaCBF website as "partnering churches." This policy will also apply to all ministers on staff within a church, not just ordained clergy.

A. Confession, adjudication and church determination

AlabamaCBF will take certain actions when a clergy-person or minister confesses to conduct that constitutes sexual abuse; when there is a civil or criminal adjudication of a clergy-person for sexual abuse; or when a church provides documentation that after a church review process a finding of sexual abuse by a clergy-person was determined. AlabamaCBF's actions will include the following

- a. If the clergy-person's or minister's name is listed in any AlabamaCBF literature or on the AlabamaCBF website, AlabamaCBF will remove the person's name from those materials after so notifying the individual.

b. The clergy-person or minister will be denied any opportunity to utilize AlabamaCBF's reference and referral services.

c. AlabamaCBF will include the clergy-person's or minister's name on a particular page of AlabamaCBF's website listing clergy who have confessed or been civilly or criminally adjudicated and found guilty of sexual abuse.

d. A record will be kept on file of the adjudication or admission, maintained by the Coordinator of AlabamaCBF. The name of the clergy-person or minister and the nature of the information in the file will be provided to churches who inquire about that particular clergy-person or minister when seeking information about whether to hire that person to their church. Record will likewise be kept of clergy or ministers who are asked to leave a church because of credible accusations of sexual abuse. In that case, the record will clearly indicate that the accusations were never admitted nor proven but that the clergy or minister and church decided to sever the relationship. The record will include the name of the church and dates the clergy person or minister served it.

We believe that these actions will help to better protect others from being abused in the future, as well as helping churches to avoid the pain and suffering which other church members have endured.

B. Individual reporting of abuse with AlabamaCBF Review

How to submit a report of clergy or minister sexual abuse:

1. A signed statement must be submitted in writing of the incident. Any individual with credible knowledge may submit a report of clergy or minister sexual abuse. Additionally, an individual may submit a written report on behalf of a minor.

2. The report should include as much information as possible, such as: written or dictated statements or depositions of victims or anyone else with knowledge, accounts of church action, a written confession, a statement of civil action, or a record of conviction.

3. Mail all related documentation to:

Confidential
AlabamaCBF
2539 John Hawkins Parkway
Suite 101-113
Hoover, AL 35244

All reports will be handled in strictest confidentiality to the degree permitted by state and federal law. We cannot accept reports by phone or by e-mail or anonymously.

The following process will be followed by AlabamaCBF upon receipt of a report of clergy or minister sexual abuse:

1. All applicable laws relative to the reporting of sexual abuse in the state of Alabama will be

followed. All ministers and ordained clergy are required by law to report information immediately regarding sexual abuse or the suspicion of abuse to local authorities or the Department of Human Resources of the state of Alabama. (If legal action (criminal or civil) is already being pursued or will be pursued relative to the claim of abuse, AlabamaCBF will take no action until such legal action is resolved. Upon such resolution, the Coordinator and Moderator of AlabamaCBF will then make a decision as to whether to proceed.)

2. A five-person committee, with the Coordinator of AlabamaCBF serving as an ex-officio member, will be appointed to review the report. This committee will consist of three members of the State Coordinating Council. Two additional persons will be asked to serve on this committee outside of the State Coordinating Council. These two persons should be non-Baptist, with strong consideration given to selecting persons who have experience in psychology, counseling, social services or other fields that would provide necessary expertise to the committee. At least two member will be of the same gender as the person against whom the alleged abuse occurred. The five-person committee will be approved by a majority vote of the State Coordinating Council. This committee will proceed in strict confidence to the extent permitted by law and a fair investigation. If legal action (criminal or civil) is already being pursued independent of this committee's investigatory action, the committee's work will be suspended until such legal action is resolved. When such action is resolved, the committee will decide whether further investigation by the committee is warranted.

3. A designated representative of this committee will contact the individual who submitted the report in a timely manner to verify receipt of the report and clarify any questions the committee may have.

4. The committee will, in a timely manner, inform the clergy-person or minister and two additional church officers of the clergy-person's or minister's church of the accusation. If possible, a male and female representative from the committee will make contact with the pastor in a face-to-face meeting to inform them of the accusation. If possible, a church officer of the opposite gender from the person making the accusation will be one of the two church officers notified of the accusation. The minister and church officers will be made aware of AlabamaCBF's process for investigating reports of clergy and minister sexual abuse.

5. This committee will ask the clergy-person or minister to submit a written statement in response to the accusation. It should address the allegations directly, supplying any evidence to the contrary or clarifying the circumstances alleged. The committee will engage in good-faith investigatory action to gather evidence that has direct relevance to the allegations of clergy or minister sexual abuse. Both the person making the complaint and the accused will be invited to suggest names of people whom the investigator(s) may contact for relevant information. The investigator(s) will contact as many as reasonably possible.

6. The committee will set a time at which the accused clergy-person or minister may appear in person before the committee to respond to the accusation of sexual abuse. Church leaders from the clergy-person's church will be invited to attend.

7. After the gathering of evidence and careful deliberation, the five-person committee will reach a decision based on the preponderance of the evidence as to whether the allegations of abuse are credible. The committee may determine that some allegations are credible and others are

not. The distinction will be noted in any report of communication with the people being notified.

8. A designated representative from the committee will inform the clergy person and the two above-mentioned church officers in writing of the decision of the committee. The individual who submitted the report of clergy sexual abuse (or submitted it on behalf of a minor) will also be informed in writing of the committee's decisions.

9. If the committee determines that all or some of the sexual abuse allegations are credible, then the following actions will be take:

a. If the clergy-person's or minister's name is listed in any AlabamaCBF literature or on the AlabamaCBF website, AlabamaCBF will remove the person's name from those materials after having given the clergy-person or minister notice.

b. The clergy-person will be denied any opportunity to utilize AlabamaCBF's reference and referral services.

c. A record will be kept on file of the adjudication, admission or credible accusation determination, maintained by the Coordinator of AlabamaCBF. The name of the clergy-person and the nature of the information on file will be provided to churches or other religious and educational institutions that inquire about that particular clergy-person when seeking information about whether to hire that person to their church or institution.

We're active in the state through various mission efforts, including a major collaborative mission work in Perry County, Sowing Seeds of Hope. We start new churches in places that need them the most. We cultivate healthy congregations by providing resources. We help churches connect with mission efforts around the world who are sent by the National Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. We bring clergy and laypeople together for renewal, fellowship and encouragement. We partner with mission and education groups across the state.