

# AHCC CARE MANUAL



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## What Is Care?

As the people of God, we should care for one another, our local communities and the world because God cares (Zech. 10:3; 1 Pet. 5:7). It is the goal of this care plan to provide a basic theology, philosophy and practice of congregational care at AHCC, including its biblical basis, its expressions within the body and suggested parameters for its implementation. At AHCC, our theology drives our philosophy, which drives our practice.

### A Brief Theology of Care

Two prominent biblical motifs guide our theology of congregational care—the shepherd motif and the family motif. God is both a Shepherd and a Father. The nation of Israel was born into the shepherding motif. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all shepherds (Gen. 13:7; 26:20; 30:36), as was Moses (Ex. 3:1). God is first called a shepherd in Genesis 48:15 and 49:24. As a shepherd, God leads and guides (Ps. 23:2–3; Isa. 40:11), provides (Ps. 23:1; Gen. 48:15; Ps. 23:5–6; Hos. 4:16; Mic. 7:14), protects (Ps. 28:9; Gen. 49:23–24), saves those who are lost or scattered (Jer. 31:10; Ps. 119:176; Isa. 53:6; Ezek. 34:11–16; Matt. 18:12–14) and judges (Ezek. 34:17–22; Jer. 23:1; Zech. 10:2–3; 11:16; Matt. 25:32–46). Israel is referred to as God’s flock in Psalms 79:13, 95:7, 100:3 and Ezekiel 34:31. David asserted, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Ps. 23:1).

Jesus referred to Himself as the “good shepherd” who “lays down his life for his sheep” in John 10:11 and is also called the “great shepherd of the sheep” in Hebrews 13:20 and the “Chief Shepherd” in 1 Peter 5:4. The Church is called God’s flock in 1 Peter 5:2 and Acts 20:28–29. In both of these texts, the elders of the Church serve God’s people as under-shepherds of the true Shepherd. The mandate Jesus gave to Peter in John 21:15–17 is given to all who shepherd God’s flock. That mandate calls us to “feed my lambs...take care of my sheep...feed my sheep.” Shepherds who do not care well for God’s people are condemned in Jeremiah 23 and Ezekiel 34. God’s people represent Him, in part, by shepherding each other (1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4; the 59 “one anothers” of the New Testament). As shepherds care for their sheep, so God’s people—particularly those who are called to pastoral ministry – are to care for one another.

Not only is God a Shepherd, he is the eternal Father (Isaiah 9:6). First and foremost, the Father has existed eternally as Father to the Son (John 1:1, 14; 17:24). As Creator and Sustainer of all things, God is called the Father of all creation (1 Cor. 8:6). In the Old Testament, God is called the Father of the nation of Israel (Deut. 32:6; Isa. 63:16; 64:8; Jer. 3:4, 19; 31:9; Mal. 1:6; 2:10), the Father of David (2 Sam. 7:14; 1 Chron. 17:13), of Solomon (1 Chron. 22:10; 28:6), of the fatherless (Ps. 68:5) and of the promised Christ (Ps. 89:26). In the New Testament, God is the Son’s own Father (John 5:18) and the Father of all the redeemed, whom He has adopted into His family (John 1:12–13; Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5).

### Philosophy of Care

The Scriptures paint a beautiful picture of how believers are to interact with and care for one another: with love, humility and respect (Eph. 4:2, 32; 1 Pet. 3:8; Col. 3:13). We are also to encourage one another and be unified (2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 4:18; Heb. 3:13; Phil. 2:5; James 4:11). The New Testament identifies 59 “one anothers” that describe the way we care for and love other believers. We

believe that congregational care is best provided in the context of community (Acts 2:42–47; 1 Cor. 12:25).

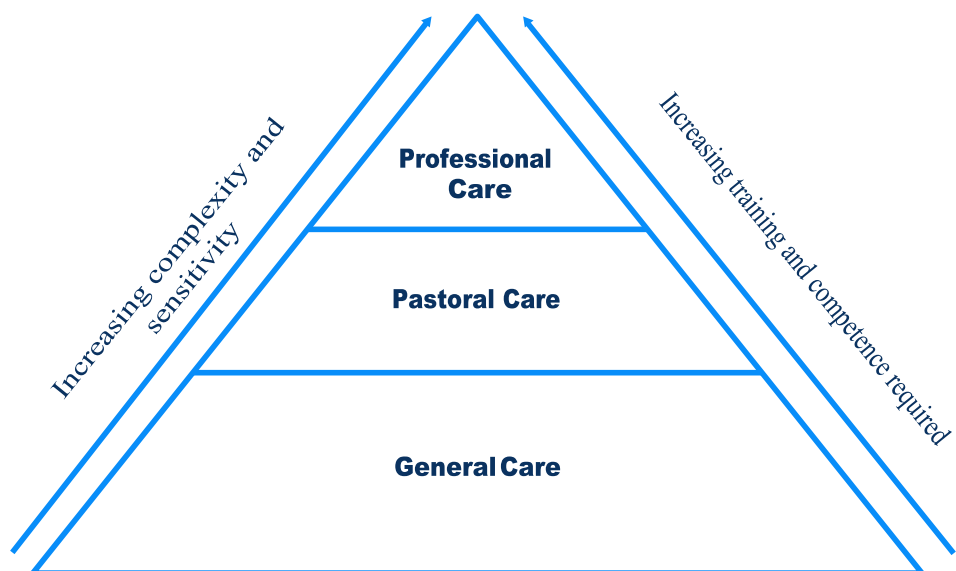
Elders (pastors) shepherd through prayer and the ministry of the Word and appoint reputable deacons to meet specific care needs (Acts 6:1–7). Elders have the responsibility for oversight of the care of all the flock (Acts 20:20) as under-shepherds of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:1–4) to whom they are accountable. These texts place the primary burden and accountability of shepherding God’s flock on elders, but also grant elders the authority to appoint others to help them carry out this important work. This is an impossible burden to carry without the Lord and can be heavy even with His help.

Care includes both formative care (discipleship) and corrective care (discipline). A church is a covenant community and belonging to a church entails:

- Professing our need for and belief in the gospel—not just at the moment of conversion but for all of life (1 Cor. 6:9–20; Eph. 4:17–25).
- A desire to submit to the lordship of Christ, evidenced by living in accordance with the teaching of Scripture and repenting—godly sorrow evidenced by tangible change, sometimes called “fruit” (Matt. 3:8; Luke 6:43–45; 2 Cor. 7:9–12)—when we fall short of biblical standards (Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 5:23) in such a way that makes our lives as Christians an identifiable contrast to the world around us (1 Pet. 2:9).
- Allowing other believers to spur us on in living a life that brings honor to the name of Christ (Rom. 12:4–5; 1 Cor. 12:12–26; Gal. 6:1–5; Heb. 10:24–25).

When a church member departs from living under the lordship of Christ, the loving implication of being in a covenant community is that the church, represented by the elders and fellow believers, calls that member back to a holy life that honors God, represents Christ well to our city, blesses others and leads to the member’s personal flourishing. This process of calling a church member back to his or her commitment to Christ is often referred to as church discipline, or corrective care.

## Three Levels of Care Available to All Churches



### Corrective Care at AHCC

There are two kinds of discipline that regularly happen in the church: formative and corrective. All Christians participate in the regular practice of formative discipline (1 Cor. 9: 24–27; Eph. 4:11–12). We place ourselves under the teaching of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16), we participate in the ordinances (Rom. 6:1–4; Matt. 26:17–30) and we walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:16–26). The Christian life is the continual practice of formative discipline for the sake of growing in godliness and holiness (1 Tim. 4:7; 1 Peter 1:14–16).

The church also practices corrective care. Like formative care, corrective care is about love. The author of Hebrews contends: “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb. 12:6). Therefore, the motive for practicing corrective care is love, and the ultimate goal is restoration (1 Cor. 5:5). When the motive of love and the goal of restoration are lost, the church will likely begin to abuse the practice of correction, putting policies before people and practices before pastoral sensibilities. In light of this, the church must always enter into the practice of corrective care with sobriety, humility and love.

When practiced rightly, corrective care will result in the good of the person being disciplined, the good of other Christians, a healthier church, a gospel-centered corporate witness of the church and the exaltation of Christ.

### Practice and Structure of Care (The Care Pyramid)

Care at AHCC is structured as a pyramid (see above), escalating from general care to pastoral care to

professional care as the issues become more complex and require increasing levels of training and competence.



## General Care

General care is the foundation for care and is provided by and for the members of the church, with pastor/elder training and oversight. This care occurs as the body of Christ lives out the 59 biblical “one anothers” found in the New Testament. General care occurs at weekend worship services, Community Groups, men’s and women’s Bible study classes, ministry teams and wherever else the church gathers. Another form of general care is marital and premarital mentoring.

## Specialized Support and Accountability (Focus Groups)

Focus Groups provide the context for specialized support and accountability at AHCC. This ministry is a leader led and accountability environment for specific conditions of sin and suffering (grief, pornography, life struggles of various kinds, etc.). Focus Groups are not counseling and are not a substitute for counseling.

Focus Groups are member-facilitated but must be supervised by trained and specialized leaders. Facilitators must receive specialized training prior to leading, and they lead under the oversight of the Elders.



## **Community Group Care**

The first, and primary, place care happens at AHCC is within a community group. Because one of our core values is living in authentic community, community groups are the key place where general care occurs. Groups members are encouraged to share with one another, carry each other's burdens, challenge one another towards the gospel and forgive one another.

A community group also provides a first tier safety net when someone is going through a significant life event (i.e. birth of a child, surgery and recovery, death, job change, etc.). Group members can help provide emotional support, prayer, meals, transportation, finances and many other practical evidences of grace and provision.

## **Elder Regional Ministry Care & Prayer Support**

In addition to community groups, AHCC designates one elder over each geographical region of the church; north, east, south and west. Each member of the church is assigned to a region that corresponds to where they live. The elder in that region is in charge of providing both ministry care and prayer support.

Ministry care means that families and individuals can reach out to their regional elder to request ministry assistance or engagement. The regional elder acts as a triage connecting the family or individual to the right person for additional follow-up and support.

Prayer support means families and individuals can reach out to their regional elder to request prayer for themselves or someone in need. Each Elder goes through their region each month on their own praying for those in that region.

## **Limitations of General Care**

Though lay caregivers can do much to serve the body, there is also much that they should not do, unless they have specific pastoral or clinical training. Great humility should be exercised in the role all believers have to care for and love one another so that we do not unwittingly do harm to one another. General care:

- Is a place to practice the "one anothers" in community
- Is a place for one-on-one mentoring
- Is a place to share common experiences, struggles and victories
- Is a place to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep
- Is a place to point each other to Christ, the gospel and the Word for daily life
- Is a place to provide support and encouragement for the efforts that are being made at the pastoral and professional care levels
- Is not a place for making psychiatric or medical "diagnoses"
- Is not a place to offer advice outside one's general life experience
- Is not a place to offer advice regarding matters about which one's personal experience cannot be safely generalized—for example, mental health issues, abuse, biblical permissibility of divorce/remarriage, etc. (Example: "I went through a season of depression and didn't need medication, so you don't either.")
- Is not a place to offer authoritative advice beyond what is explicitly prescribed by the Bible

- Is not a place to undermine or invalidate the work that is being done at the pastoral and professional care levels

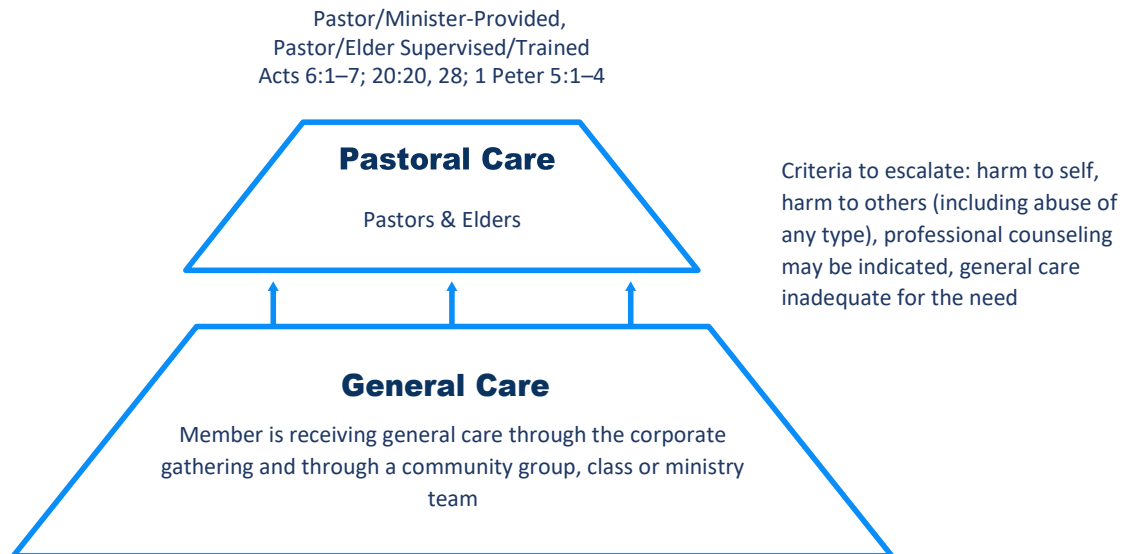
## Pastoral Care

The transition to pastoral care occurs when general care resources are no longer sufficient. This transition occurs when a member reaches out to their community group leader, Elder or Senior Pastor for additional resourcing or when a care case escalates above the level of a leader's ability and competency. The Senior Pastor and Elders are responsible for making sure that general care stays within the bounds of general care and for escalating care immediately when harm to self or harm to others (including abuse of any type) is present, when professional counseling may be indicated or when care needs are not adequately being met with general care resources.

At this point, one of the Elders will meet with the individual to determine appropriate next steps and resources. It is assumed that general care is ongoing and will continue in some form when pastoral care commences.



## Escalation to Pastoral Care



## Care Triage

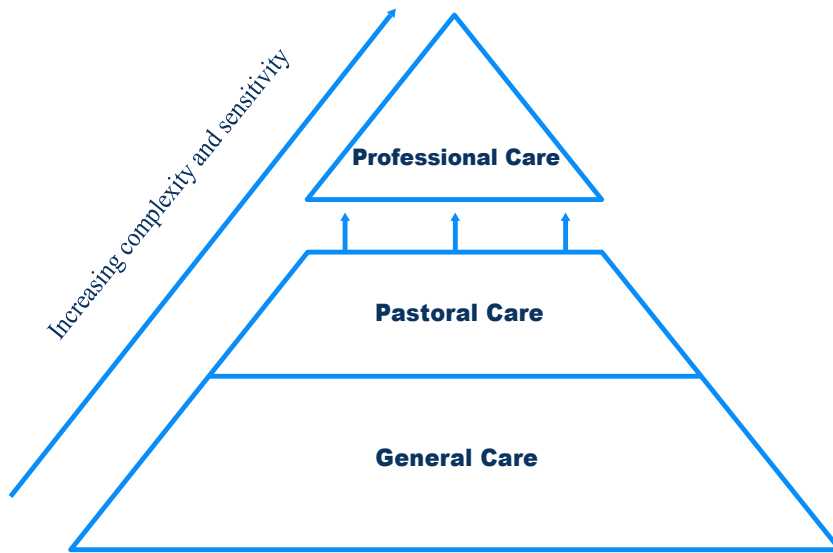
No two congregational care cases are the same. By its very nature, Care Ministry is messy and hard. When a lay leader, minister or pastor reaches out for help, a subject-matter expert should be available for consultation so that the specific case can be assessed and wise, helpful and situationally-appropriate next steps can be pursued.

- How can this individual's "general care" community come alongside him/her in this season?
- Is a specialized Focus Group an appropriate community for this individual at this time?
- Is there a wise, more mature believer in the church body who has some level of training or experience and can provide more extensive accountability and support?
- Is this individual a candidate for some kind of professional help? If so, what kind of help and who is most qualified to provide it?

## Limitations of Pastoral Care

Pastoral/ministerial staff serve primarily to provide spiritual direction based in God's Word and how it applies to one's life before God. We ask our Elders and Pastors to limit the scope of their care to guiding our people spiritually, pointing them to Christ, the gospel and the Word for daily life. As in general care, we ask them to avoid the use of psychiatric labels or clinical "diagnoses," to not counsel outside the bounds of general spiritual guidance and to support the work of professional counselors and other mental health providers and agencies as requested.

## Escalation to Professional Care



### Criteria to Escalate:

Chronic or extreme anxiety, depression, mental illness, danger to self or others (including abuse of any sort), trauma (PTSD/CTSD)

A member may be recommended to see a counselor or may choose to see a counselor on their own at any level of care, but at this level, professional care is primary.

## Professional Care

Members are escalated to professional care when the care needed exceeds the training and expertise of the Elders and Pastors. Reasons for professional care include, but are not limited to: chronic or extreme anxiety, depression, mental illness, danger to self or others (including abuse of any sort) and trauma (PTSD/CTSD). It is acknowledged that a member may be recommended to see a counselor or may choose to see a counselor on his/her own at any level of care. At the professional care level, professional care is primary. Referrals to professionals should be done by the minister subject-matter expert.

### Relationship to the Church

AHCC aligns itself primarily with professional counselors who support and work with the local church as much as possible. Likewise, the church recognizes and respects the privacy of the client-counselor relationship. If the church member/client is receptive, and if the counselor is receptive, we believe it is helpful for the pastor/minister/elder who is most closely involved with the church member to have the client's/ church member's release of information/consent to share information between the church and the counselor, for the benefit of the client. However, we do recognize that such consent is the client's/member's right to grant or not to grant.

### Affirmations and Denials for Care

The intersection of theology, psychology and counseling can be a dangerous crossing within the church today. The goal of our affirmations and denials is not to redesign the roads or bypass the intersection, but to put up some helpful signposts and guardrails so we might safely navigate the intersection without causing injury to those in our care.

We affirm that God created men and women as complex, unitary beings consisting of a soul that reflects the immaterial God and a body that grounds him/her in material creation—an “outer self” and an “inner self” (Gen. 2:7; 2 Cor. 4:16).

We deny that the human person can be simplistically dichotomized (body-soul) or trichotomized (body-soul- spirit), as if these aspects of humanness are siloed. Therefore, we will counsel and/or provide referrals with the whole person in mind. Wise counseling should view the problems of humankind as problems of the whole person.

We affirm that all humanity, created good, was pervasively corrupted in the Fall (Gen. 3), resulting in varying degrees of sin, suffering and biopsychosocial damage affecting all members of the human race. All whole-person (body and soul) troubles are ultimately rooted in humanity's rebellion against God. For this reason, we gravitate toward counseling approaches which give adequate recognition to the categories of suffering and biopsychosocial damage, as well as personal sin.

We deny that all counseling issues are spiritual issues or rooted in personal sin. For this reason, we gravitate away from potentially reductionist counseling approaches which would root most psychological, emotional and mental health issues in personal sin without giving adequate recognition to the categories of suffering and biopsychosocial damage.

We affirm that the Bible is God's self-revelation. As His inspired Word, it is authoritative, inerrant, clear and sufficient to tell us everything we need to know about God and ourselves in relationship to Him. It is the final, ultimate authority regarding human beings and their holistic healing, so it must inform the use of knowledge from other disciplines.

We deny that Scripture intends to provide exhaustive knowledge about people and the diversity of problems in a broken world. The doctrines of general revelation and common grace permit Christians to benefit from other forms of care as long as they do not contradict the clear testimony of Scripture.

We affirm that counseling is a common grace of God to promote human flourishing.

We deny that all counselors or counseling approaches are equally valid for promoting human flourishing.

We affirm that common grace knowledge and means are necessary to function as a human being. Medical treatment, psychological research, psychotherapy and counseling, and psychoactive medication provide real help and healing to people.

We deny that the Bible intends to serve as a textbook for biopsychosocial problems, although it does give insight into them. We deny that psychoactive medication or psychotherapy alone cures all mental illness.

## **Theology of Oppression**

The Church needs a theology of oppression to accompany her theology of suffering. The theme of suffering is ubiquitous in the Scriptures, but so is the theme of oppression. God's Word teaches us that suffering produces sanctification (Rom. 5:3–4), that pain is purposeful (Rom. 8:28–29), that God comforts us in our suffering so that we can comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3–4), that suffering is a gift (Phil. 1:29) and that we suffer because Christ suffered (1 Pet. 2:21), among other things. A theology of suffering is essential for a church leader, but a theology of suffering without considering God's view of, and response to, violence and oppression, can lead to reckless care and harmful counsel.

God hates oppression. Believers should always pay attention when the Bible tells us that God hates something. We should hate what God hates.

"The Lord tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence" (Ps. 11:5).

God hears the cries of the oppressed and delivers them. In Scripture when the oppressed cry out to God, He hears them and He does something about it. God sees the oppressed. He hears the oppressed. And He acts on behalf of the oppressed to deliver them (see Gen. 16, 31 and Ex. 1–2).

God's people must respond to human oppression as God responds to it. Because God sees the oppressed, hears their cries and acts with compassion, mercy and justice, we should do the same.

## Policies and Protocols

### Domestic Abuse Policy

Domestic abuse, or intimate partner abuse, is the desecration of the image of God in the abuser's spouse or intimate partner through a pattern of intentionally misusing power, overtly or covertly, in words or actions, to gratify self.

- Abuse is an assault upon the image of God in another human being.
- Abuse usually occurs in a pattern that is typically increasing in frequency and/or intensity.
- Abuse is intentional, though the abuser may not be self-aware enough to recognize the intentions of his or her heart. Abuse is never perpetrated on accident.
- Abuse is about the misuse of power to control or manipulate another for selfish gain. It is an act of oppression.
- Abuse can involve physical, emotional, verbal, sexual, economic, spiritual and/or psychological means.
- The goal of abuse is self-gratification—to get what one wants at the expense of another.

Domestic abuse, which can be used interchangeably with the term “domestic violence,” is pervasive in our culture. The statistical probability is that domestic abuse is just as pervasive at AHCC as it is in the culture outside of the church, so we must be alert to it.

Domestic violence in any form—physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological or spiritual—is an assault upon the image of God in a fellow human being and is therefore an assault upon God Himself. When it is between a husband and a wife, it further violates the one-flesh covenantal relationship that God established. Under no circumstance is abuse ever justified. Neither is it ever the fault of the victim. Domestic abuse severely damages relationships and often destroys the relationship beyond repair. An act of abuse is never an act of Christian love. Christ's self-giving love encourages flourishing, while domestic abuse seeks to stifle the victim's autonomy through dominance, replacing love with fear. Given this acknowledgment, AHCC affirms the following:

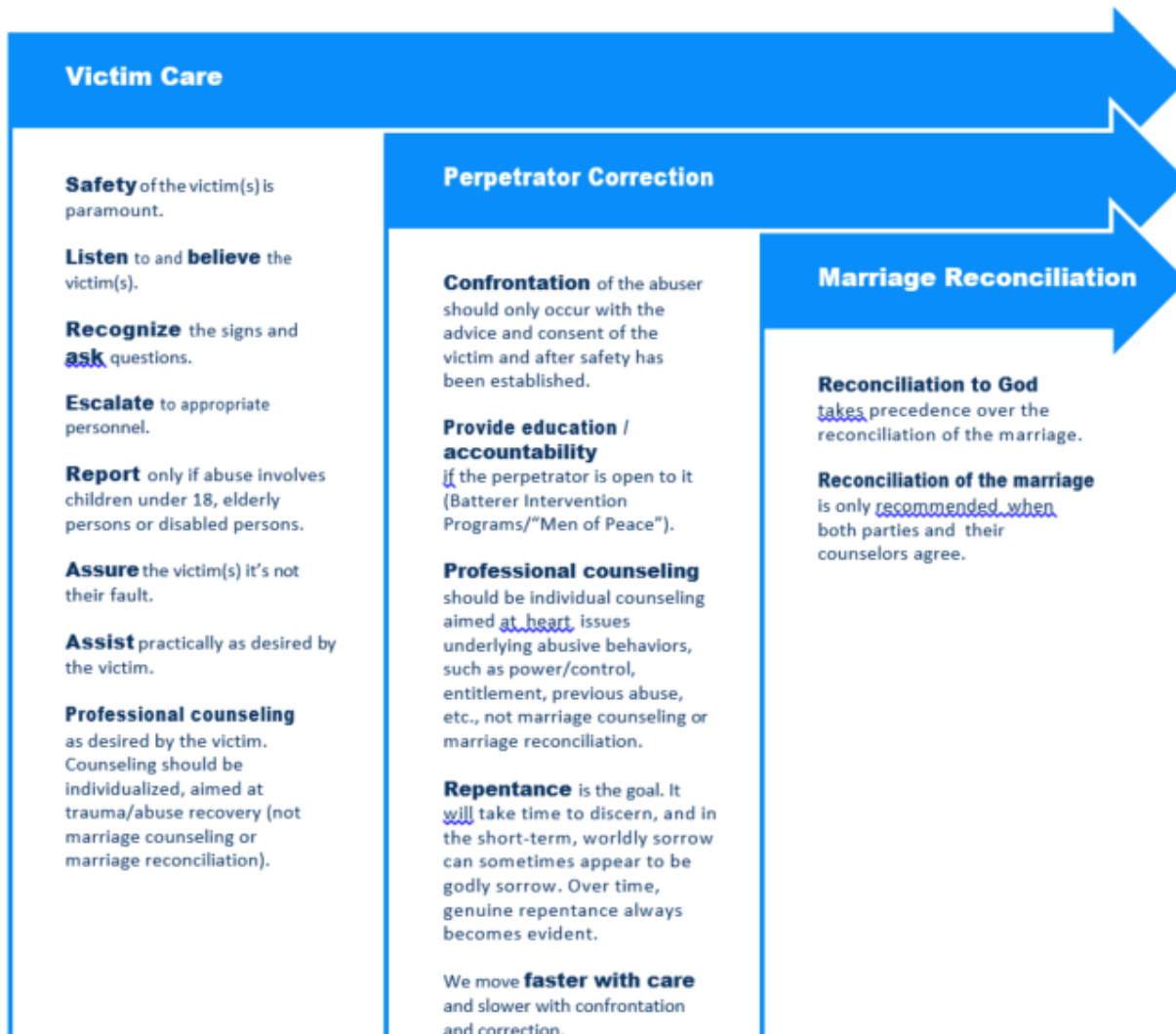
- Domestic abuse in all its forms is sinful and incompatible with the Christian faith and a Christian way of living.
- All abuse is spiritually damaging for both the victim and the abuser and has collateral damage that extends to children, extended family and close friendships.
- Domestic abuse is a serious problem which occurs in church families as well as in wider society.
- Domestic abuse is not primarily an anger problem, a marriage problem, the victim's problem or even a legal problem, but rather a sin problem.
- We will listen to, believe, support and care for those affected by domestic abuse.
- We will urge abused persons to consider their own safety and that of family members first and to seek help from the church, professional counseling and legal resources, to bring healing to the individuals and, if possible, to the marriage relationship.
- We will not seek to investigate charges of abuse, but will refer both the abused person and the perpetrator of the abuse to competent professional counselors, potential legal counsel and the police if necessary, and rely upon their determinations.
- We will stand with victims in seeking legal remedies should that be their decision.
- We will discipline abusers and remove them from the church if they are unrepentant.

- We will work with local domestic violence support agencies, will learn from them and will support them in appropriate ways.
- We will teach that domestic abuse is a sin.
- We will teach what it means to be male and female image-bearers of God, equal in value, dignity and worth.
- We will train all pastors/elders at ongoing workshops and training events.
- We will seek to utilize trained professionals to encourage best practices and keep church members and leadership trained on and informed about the implementation of the domestic abuse policy.

## Responding to Domestic Abuse

In cases of domestic abuse, we will move first to care for the victim, then to correct the perpetrator and finally, if appropriate, to reconcile the marriage.

### Domestic Abuse Protocol



## **Elders' Statement on Divorce in Cases of Domestic Abuse**

The elders affirm that all forms of abuse—including physical, emotional, verbal, economic, spiritual and sexual abuse—of one's spouse or children are egregious evils because they are a desecration of the divine image of God in a person. We acknowledge they may be considered grounds for divorce as a breach of the marital covenant and/or desertion of the marriage, since stopping the abuse may require physical separation.

## **Elders' Statement on Divorce and Remarriage**

Marriage is the sacred and covenantal union between one man and one woman, and God's intention is for marriage to last a lifetime (Gen. 1–2). When a divorce occurs, it is always a result of sin (whether from one spouse or another). However, divorce is not always sinful. Biblically, divorce is permitted, but not required, on the grounds of sexual immorality (porneia) or abandonment (Matt. 5:31–32; 19:1–9; 1 Cor. 7). We believe sexual immorality (porneia) is best understood biblically as consisting of a range of actions with varying degrees of severity. We believe physical, sexual or other forms of abuse can be a form of abandonment. Marriage reconciliation can be the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work, but it may not always be wise, possible or biblically commanded.

When divorce is not biblically warranted, any subsequent remarriage (to someone other than the original spouse) results in biblical infidelity. In situations where divorce is biblically warranted, remarriage is possible. Christians who have been remarried following an unbiblical divorce should remain with their current spouse, but follow the biblical admonition to repent and be forgiven of their past sins and make whatever amends are necessary.

We acknowledge that the subject of divorce and remarriage is biblically challenging in its interpretation and requires prayerful discernment and often a team of wise counselors in its personal application. In all instances, it includes complexity and nuance that cannot be oversimplified into a blanket policy, but requires prudence, patience and pastoral sensibility.

Please refer to the C&MA's [official position on divorce and remarriage](#) for additional clarification.

## **Responding to Child and Senior Abuse**

AHCC is committed to providing a safe environment for children. To this end, any allegation or suspicion of abuse will be taken seriously and will be reported, in compliance with Washington law.

AHCC reports all suspected abuse and neglect of children.

- Washington State law requires that any person who has cause to believe that a child has been abused or neglected must immediately make a report to law enforcement or Child Protective Services (1-866-363-4276).
- All adults in the state of Washington are mandatory reporters.

## **Adult-to-Adult Disclosures**

An individual must make a report if he or she has cause to believe that an adult was a victim of abuse or neglect as a child, and the individual determines that disclosure of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of another child.

Examples: *The alleged abuser is serving in a position of trust with children OR the alleged abuser is currently abusing or neglecting a child.*

The person making a report must identify, if known:

- The name and address of the child
- The name and address of the person responsible for the care of the child
- Any other pertinent information concerning the alleged abuse or neglect

All suspicions of child abuse or neglect, or any inappropriate behavior of a colleague or coworker toward a child, must be reported to an immediate supervisor in the area or to a member of AHCC Elder Team.

## **Overview of AHCC Safety System**

We desire to protect minors involved in our ministry. AHCC requires all volunteers and staff working with minors and other vulnerable populations to complete three safety steps before ministry work or volunteer placements begin.

### **Step One: Screening Process**

Volunteers or staff working or serving with our Children's or Youth Ministries are required to complete AHCC's Screening Process, which includes:

1. A volunteer or employment application
2. An in-person interview conducted by a ministry staff member
3. A background check
4. A reference check

### **Step Two: Policies and Procedures**

Volunteers and staff members are required to review the policies contained in the Children's & Youth Ministry Policies and Procedures Handbook and sign the last page, indicating they have read and understood the material and agree to comply with policy requirements.

### **Step Three: Criminal Background Check**

AHCC requires all volunteers and staff working with or volunteering in Children's or Youth activities to undergo a criminal background check. Depending upon the ministry position, differing levels or intensity of criminal background check may be required.