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## **SPIRITUAL ABUSE POLICY AND PROCEDURES**

The Way Church of Denham Springs is committed to creating and maintaining a gospel-centered, environment free of spiritual abuse. It is therefore the policy of the Way Church that all church leaders (elders, pastors, shepherds, and teachers) are to maintain the integrity of the ministerial, employment, and professional relationship at all times and are to behave in accordance with the expectations of Scripture. Spiritual abuse is a violation of the principles set forth in Scripture and of the role of pastors, employees, volunteers, counselors, supervisors, teachers, and advisors of any kind who are called upon to exercise integrity, sensitivity, and caring in a trust relationship. Spiritual abuse breaks the covenant to act in the best interests of members, clients, co-workers, and students. Spiritual abuse takes advantage of the vulnerability of persons who are less powerful to act for their own welfare, including children.

Spiritual abuse by any church leader, minister, or pastor is a misuse of authority and power that breaches Christian ethical principles by misusing a trust relationship to gain advantage over another in an abusive, exploitative, and/or unjust manner. Spiritual abuse is an egregious violation of the principles set forth in Scripture and of the role of elder, pastor, shepherd, counselor, advisor, or teacher. It is antithetical to the gospel call to work as God's servant in the struggle to bring wholeness to a broken world. It violates the mandate to protect the vulnerable from harm

### **EXPECTATIONS OF CHURCH LEADERS**

Church leaders shall exemplify the biblical directives concerning their respective offices and/or responsibilities (*1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; James 3:1*) and shall pay careful attention to their own spiritual condition and the spiritual condition of those over whom they lead (*Acts 20:28*).

Those appointed to the office of elder or pastor are called to a noble task (*1 Tim. 3:1*). yet they are called to be servant leaders, the "first of the last" (*Matt. 20:25*). While they are called to be "overseers" (*1 Tim. 3:1*) and to "shepherd the flock of God" (*1 Pet. 5:3*), they are but "God's stewards" (*Titus 1:7*) who will one day give an account to the Master (*Matt. 25:14-30*). Elders and pastors "must be above reproach" (*1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7*), be "sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, ... not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome" and should not become "puffed up with conceit" (*1 Tim. 3:1-7*).

Church leaders are called to be gentle, not bullies (*1 Tim. 3:3*); called to set an example, and not be domineering (*1 Pet. 5:3*); called to be servants, and not lording it over those in their charge (*Matt. 20:25*); and called to be kind to everyone, rather than quarrelsome (*2 Tim. 2:24*).

In order to shepherd the church well, elders and pastors shall also guard against false repentance by perpetrators of abuse or misconduct. The Way Church is committed to discerning whether perpetrators of violence or misconduct are feeling worldly regret, grief for themselves, or godly repentance. Godly repentance is always focused on how sin offends God and harms others (*2 Cor. 7:10-11*). Godly repentance works toward true restoration and accepts the natural consequences of sin, including the legal consequences of sin, as we submit to the governing authorities ordained by God (*Rom. 13:1-7*).

## **DEFINITIONS**

“Church leader(s)” means any person who has been duly ordained, licensed, or recognized by the Way Church as an elder, pastor, minister, shepherd, or small group or house church leader/teacher.

“Church partner(s)” means any person who has signed a membership covenant with the Way Church and/or holds themselves out as a member of the Way Church.

“Church staff” or “staff member” means any person who is employed by the Way Church as an elder, pastor, administrator, teacher, child care or nursery worker, Parents’ Day Out (PDO) employee, or custodian.

“Church volunteer(s)” means any person who volunteers or participates in any ministry of the Way Church or the church’s Parents’ Day Out program.

“Dating partner” means any person who is involved or has been involved in a sexual or intimate relationship with the child characterized by the expectation of affectionate involvement independent of financial considerations, regardless of the length of time or duration of the relationship.

“Emotional abuse” is a pattern of behavior that promotes a destructive sense of fear, obligation, shame, or guilt. It may take the form of neglecting, frightening, isolating, belittling, exploiting, blaming, shaming, or threatening a victim, as well as playing mind games or lying. Emotional abuse can also be referred to as verbal, mental, or psychological abuse and may include, but is not limited to, the following conduct:

- Consistently disregarding, ignoring, or neglecting a victim and their needs;
- Telling a victim that they are mentally unstable or incompetent;
- Isolating a victim from their family and community; or

- Gaslighting a victim.

“Family member” means any parent, sibling, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or any other ascendants or descendants, who is related to the child either by blood, step, or adoption; or any foster parent of the child.

“Financial abuse” is way of controlling a person by making them economically dependent or exploiting their resources. Financial abuse may be subtle or overt, and its different forms include concealing financial information, limiting a victim’s access to assets, controlling their ability to acquire money, exploiting their resources, or dictating how funds are spent. Financial abuse may include, but is not limited to, the following conduct:

- Rigidly limiting access to family funds;
- Giving a spouse an allowance or closely monitoring what they buy;
- Keeping hidden accounts or preventing a victim’s access to bank accounts;
- Using a victim’s identity, without permission, for fraud or credit;
- Refusing to speak with a person about finances;
- Forcing a person to work;
- Taking money from another to spend on him/herself;
- Using funds intended for a particular use on his/her own interests;
- Running up debt without spouse’s approval, agreement, or knowledge;
- Refusing to give money, food, rent, medicine, or clothing to meet the needs of the other;
- Spending money on him/herself, while refusing to allow the victim to spend money on him/herself;
- Not including the victim in investment or banking decision, particularly those that can or will affect the victim;
- Canceling life or insurance policies without the victim’s consent or knowledge;
- Refusing to work or contribute to the family income, while requiring others to do so;
- All assets are placed in his/her name, placing the victim in a particularly vulnerable place;
- Running up debt, using credit cards, or refusing to pay bills, such that it ruins the victim’s credit;
- Forcing a victim to turn over a paycheck, benefits, financial interests or other assets, or granting a power of attorney to him/herself;
- Forbidding the victim to work or controlling the amount of time that the victim can work or how he or she gets to work;
- Sabotaging the victim’s work or employment opportunities;
- Stalking or harassing the victim at his or her workplace; or
- Preventing the victim from attending a job-training or advancement opportunities.

“Gaslighting” is using insidious and manipulative techniques to make a person doubt their perceptions, memory, feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and opinions and feel that they are invalid, inaccurate, or untrue. Gaslighting is usually a gradual process that usually intensifies over time. Common tactics of gaslighting include, but are not limited to, the following:

- “Withholding” or pretending to not understand what a person says or refusing to listen to that person;
- “Countering” or questioning a person’s memory of events;
- “Diverting” or challenging a person’s thought process or repeatedly changing the subject;
- “Trivializing” or minimizing a person’s needs or feelings;
- “Love-bombing” or showering a person with compliments, affection, and intimacy in order to learn that person’s insecurities and innermost desires so that they can later be exploited for the purpose of tearing that person down; or
- “Denying” or pretending to have forgotten things that have happened or refusing to remember things that a person says.

An abuser may also use gaslighting techniques on others in order to convince them that their victim is mentally or emotionally unstable, untrustworthy, or unreliable.

“Misuse of technology” is the use of technology that results in sexually harassing or abusing another person, including texting or emailing suggestive messages and images to persons with whom one has a ministerial relationship. It is never appropriate to view pornography on church property. When this includes a person under the age of eighteen (18), it is considered child sexual abuse and will be reported to the appropriate authorities. There is never an expectation of personal privacy when using technological equipment owned by the Way Church or within the context of ministry.

“Physical abuse” is the intentional or reckless use of physical force that may result in bodily injury or physical pain. Physical abuse does not need to cause pain or leave a bruise; it also includes actions that lead to harm—such as preventing a victim from sleeping or refusing them medical care. Physically abusive actions range from throwing things all the way to choking or beating, and may include, but is not limited to, the following conduct:

- Kicking, biting, scratching, or pulling hair;
- Throwing objects or destroying property;
- Withholding needed medication or medical care

“Sexual abuse” is any physical contact with a sexual or intimate part of the body, or other forms of sexual activity, conducted without consent, or engaged in for the purpose of sexual gratification or to degrade or abuse.

- Physical contact includes:
  - Anal, vaginal, or oral sexual intercourse;

- Touching, grabbing, patting, slapping, pinching, rubbing, fondling, groping, poking, or other forms of contact, whether over or under clothing; or
- Rubbing one's genital area up against another person or touching another person with one's genitals, whether over or under clothing. This includes instances when an individual acts as though the rubbing was inadvertent but was in fact intentional.
- Sexual or intimate body parts include, but are not limited to:
  - Breasts;
  - Buttocks;
  - Genitals;
  - Groin area; and/or
  - Upper Thigh
- Other forms of sexual activity include:
  - Photographing, videotaping, or making any other visual, descriptive, or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body; or
  - Displaying to another any writings, photograph, videotape, or other visual or auditory recording of sexual activity or the sexual or intimate parts of a person's body
- Lack of consent includes:
  - Explicit indication of lack of consent;
  - Physical/verbal force or intimidation, whether express or implicit;
  - Circumstances in which one individual is an adult and one individual is a child, since children cannot legally consent to sexual activity with an adult;
  - Circumstances in which one individual is too intoxicated to say "no" or to understand or appreciate the circumstances in which that individual finds himself/herself;
  - Circumstances in which one individual is asleep;
  - Circumstances in which one individual lacks knowledge of the activity's occurrence; or
  - Circumstances in which one individual does not have the physical or mental capacity to consent.
- Sexual abuse can also be manipulative and coercive, such as when an oppressor uses unrelenting pressure or threats to leverage a sexual encounter even after a victim expresses discomfort or refusal. It may also include, but not limited to, the following conduct designed to be sexually manipulative or coercive:
  - Demanding that the victim wear more (or less) provocative clothing;
  - Making demands for sex or to perform sex acts that the victim is uncomfortable doing;
  - Callously disregarding a victim's desire not to engage in sexual activity;

- Callously degrading, shaming, or criticizing a victim's body or sexual performance;
- Threatening to expose intimate details, images, or videos of the victim;
- Unjust accusations of infidelity; or
- Using sex as a bargaining chip (e.g., withholding money, resources, affection, or visits with extended family).

“Sexual harassment” includes, but is not limited to, the following behavior:

- Unwanted sexual advances, invitations, or comments;
- Oral or written communication that contains offensive name-calling, jokes, slurs, negative stereotyping, or threats;
- Nonverbal conduct, such as repetitive staring or leering, or giving inappropriate gifts;
- Visual conduct such as derogatory and/or sexually-oriented posters, photography, cartoons, drawings, screen savers, or gestures;
- Intentional physical conduct such as an assault/battery, unwanted touching, the blocking of normal movement, or the interfering with work;
- Threats and demands to submit to sexual requests as a condition of continued employment/participation in ministry, or to avoid some other loss, and offers of employee/member benefits in return for sexual favors; or
- Retaliation for having reported or threatened to report harassment.

“Sexual harassment” occurs when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or relationship with the church;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment or ministry/program decisions affecting such individuals; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or ability to participate in church activities or has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or worshiping environment.

“Sexual misconduct” includes, but is not limited to, the following behavior:

- Child sexual abuse;
- Misuse of technology;
- Rape or sexual contact by force, threat, or intimidation;
- Sexual abuse;
- Sexual harassment;
- Sexual malfeasance; or
- Any of the above behavior committed by a spouse, family member, or dating partner against their spouse, family member, or dating partner

“Sexual malfeasance” includes, but is not limited to, the following acts committed by anyone in a ministerial or leadership position at The Way Church, or by any non-member/non-employee counselor or minister/pastor involved in a ministry of The Way Church:

- The use of offensive, obsessive, or suggestive language or behavior, unacceptable visual contact, unwelcome touching or fondling that is injurious to the physical or emotional health of another; or
- Sexual activities within a professional ministerial relationship that results in misuse of authority or position arising from the professional ministerial relationship.

“Sex offender” or “sexual offender” refers to any individual convicted of a “sex offense” as defined by Louisiana or federal law, any individual who is on probation or parole for a “sex offense” as defined by Louisiana or federal law (or as recognized by the State of Louisiana if for a conviction from another state, territory, or jurisdiction), or any individual who is currently required to comply with state and/or federal Sex Offender Registration and Notification (SORNA) laws.

“Spiritual abuse” is the coercion, control, or abuse of a person by another in a spiritual context or under the guise of religion, whereby that person experiences spiritual abuse as a deeply emotional personal attack. This abuse includes, but is not limited to, any of the following:

- Use of religious ideology, precepts, tradition, or sacred texts to commit the emotional, financial, physical, or sexual abuse of a person, or sexual misconduct;
- Compelling a person to engage in religious acts against his or her will;
- Mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support, or spiritual encouragement
- Abuse that occurs in a religious context (e.g., church or youth group);
- Abuse perpetrated by a religious leader (e.g., pastor, youth minister, teacher); or
- Invocation of divine authority to manipulate or exploit a person into meeting the needs of the abuser.

## **SPIRITUAL ABUSE AS A FORM OF DOMESTIC ABUSE**

Spiritual abuse can also occur within intimate partner relationships or within families. It can occur as part of a pattern of abusive behavior or as a standalone form of abuse. In a domestic or dating partner setting, spiritual abuse often includes the abuser:

- Ridiculing or disparaging the other person’s religious or spiritual beliefs;
- Preventing their partner from practicing their religion or spiritual beliefs;
- Exploiting their partner’s religious or spiritual beliefs or practices to manipulate or shame them;
- Misusing religious texts, beliefs and practices to minimize or rationalize abusive behaviors such as controlling behavior, physical, emotional or sexual abuse and rape;
- Claiming that cultural values are mandated by religion; or

- Using religious or spiritual beliefs to control any children in the household including controlling their religious life.

Spiritual abusive or oppressive individuals often display one or more of the following characteristics in an intimate partner relationship or family:

- They overemphasizes their spiritual authority, including elevating their views above those of their pastors, teachers, or the Bible itself. Spiritually abusive husbands or fathers often require unconditional submission by their family.
- They are image-conscious, particularly when it comes to their own righteousness. They often cover up or ignore their own sins and bring attention to their own acts of holiness.
- They are paranoid. As one scholar states, “[t]heir thinly veiled, performance-based spirituality is threatened by exposure” and “they cannot afford to be recognized for who they really are, so they often cut off people who pose a threat to them.”<sup>1</sup>
- They suppress criticism, not allowing questions, dissent, or discussion about certain issues.
- Their theology is flawed or unbalanced and they tend to focus on minor or peripheral theological issues.
- They have lower standards for themselves than for others, often excusing themselves, while not being as tolerant or forgiving to others.
- They are not teachable and frequently keep company with like-minded individuals, or individuals who do not disagree with them.
- They are legalistic and frequently enforce rules beyond those proscribed in Scripture.
- They often do not submit to authority, particularly church and governmental authority, and will often misuse Scripture to justify their position.
- They use fear and coercion to persuade others to obey them or accept their point of view.

Research does not show any significant differences between different denominations or theological standpoints in the rates of domestic abuse. Faith is a core part of the way we live our lives and the way we understand our world. Although spiritual abuse can happen within any religion, it is inevitable that Christianity shapes the experiences of Christian survivors of domestic abuse. Christian faith and churches can be a source of comfort and strength for survivors offering love, hope, and support to challenge abuse and leave abusive partners. However, spiritual abuse is an example of deliberately using someone’s faith against them and of how the Christian faith and teachings can be misused, causing pain, suffering, and despair.

Spiritual abuse justifies and excuses beliefs and practices which reinforce gender inequality through misusing God, Jesus, sacred texts and church doctrine. It creates a dynamic where Christian teachings can be used to reinforce abusive behaviors and make it harder to seek help both inside and outside the church.

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<sup>1</sup> Strickland, D.A. (2020). *Is It Abuse? A Biblical Guide to Identifying Domestic Abuse and Helping Victims* (p. 215). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.



Where survivors do seek help from their faith leaders or community, spiritual abuse can often be furthered by inappropriate responses. Sometimes survivors are put under pressure to stay with, support and even pray for their abusive partner. Often, women are put under pressure to preserve their marriage and home over their personal safety. Sometimes, women are discouraged from seeking advice or support by initial responses from their faith community in which they are disbelieved or dismissed. In other cases, churches have chosen to support the perpetrator of domestic abuse or dating violence or to push the survivor into forgiving him. This means that spiritual abuse, and the advice given by faith leaders, can be a major factor in survivors leaving the Church for good.

We believe that each person is created equal in the image of God and that all are precious in His sight. We must find ways to ensure that our faith and our church empowers all, nourishes all, and promotes fullness of life for everyone. Any violation of a person's integrity, of his/her body, of his/her dignity, his/her autonomy, including spiritual abuse, is a sin against that person and a sin against God.

## **COMMON SUPERVISORY POLICIES & PROCEDURES**

### **Screening of Church Leaders**

Any person who is being considered as a candidate for the following positions shall be screened by church leadership:

- Elder (and spouse);
- Pastor (and spouse);
- Shepherd (and spouse);
- Children's ministry team member or volunteer;
- Youth ministry team member or volunteer;
- Parent's Day Out (PDO) employee or volunteer; and/or
- Nursery worker or volunteer.

The Way Church requires the following screening procedures:

- The completion of a written application.
- All candidates either must provide a valid driver's license or state identification card or must consent to be photographed, with copies of their driver's license, identification card, or photographs to be kept in their personnel file.
- At least two references to be contacted. These references should include:
  - Previous employers;
  - At least one reference not supplied directly by the applicant; and
  - Personal references if the applicant is under eighteen.
- A background check that includes the following information:

- Confirmation of education;
  - Local criminal records check;
  - State criminal records check;
  - FBI criminal records check;
  - State central child/dependent adult abuse registry check;
  - State sex offender registry check;
  - Motor vehicle records check;
  - Professional disciplinary board background check; and
  - An interview that explores a candidate's written application and introduces the *Child Protection Policy & Procedures* to the candidate.
- All candidates must acknowledge in writing that they have received a printed copy of this policy, that they understand them, and that they agree to abide by them.

If the screening process yields information that an individual abused, mistreated, or neglected a child in any way or has been convicted of a violent and/or sexual crime, that individual shall not work with children in any capacity and may be rejected from further consideration as a leader, employee, or volunteer at the Way Church. The Elder Board shall make the final determination in this regard.

The Way Church keeps confidential all information received in the applicant selection process. Such information will be stored with access afforded only to appropriate church staff and/or teams on a need-to-know basis. If the church learns of false, misleading, or amended information on an application that could cause potential danger to individuals or groups these polices endeavor to protect, or other liability to the church, that person will be terminated or have his/her application rejected.

All employees (part time or full time) or volunteers in a supervisory, caretaking, or teaching position with direct relation to children under the age of eighteen (18) years must have been members of The Way Church for a minimum of six (6) months prior to being considered for the position and must submit to a criminal background check before being considered for the position. This rule does not apply to Parents' Day Out (PDO) employees or volunteers, though it is a requirement of the Parents' Day Out (PDO) Director.

No applicant or volunteer ever convicted of a sex offense is eligible for service in a position with direct relation to children and is permanently barred from ministry.

Any applicant or volunteer who is a survivor of child abuse or domestic violence in the past must notify the Elder Board prior to service in a position with direct relation to children or with domestic abuse survivors or offenders. This disclosure will be kept in the strictest of confidence by the Elders of the church and will be used exclusively for deciding whether the applicant is a good fit for the considered position and so that the elders may better serve the spiritual and emotional needs of the applicant or volunteer. Any violation of this confidentiality, without the

expressed consent of the applicant or volunteer, by an elder shall be grounds for disciplinary action.

All church leaders and church staff shall report any arrest or conviction for any criminal offense, excluding traffic offenses, to the Elder Board within seventy-two (72) hours of arrest or conviction.

Any applicant or candidate for church leadership or other position of authority or influence in the church shall be screened by the Elder Board and demonstrate a biblical understanding of servant leadership, repentance and accountability, forgiveness and redemption, marriage and family, and the gospel ministry before being approved for the position.

### **The Two Adult Rule:**

A minimum of two (2) adults are required to be present in any setting or activity regarding children, where parents or other adults will not be present. In cases where an adult has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child (i.e., counseling, visitation), all workers should obtain the consent of the child's parent or guardian prior to being alone with the child.

Exceptions:

- Some students (sixth-twelfth grades) may have only one primary worker in attendance in approved cases by the minister in charge. In these instances, doors to classrooms will remain open, or the meeting will take place in an open area with other students and/or adults.
- Workers related to one another may serve together in certain situations upon special approval by the Elder Board, in consultation with the minister in charge of said ministry area and the Child Protection Director.

In situations where two workers are scheduled but one of those does not arrive on time, or is absent for the entire event(s), the minister overseeing the event(s) must be notified and take whatever precautions are necessary to ensure the participant's safety and protection as best he/she can.

Any time an elder or pastor conducts any counseling or ministerial conversations with a member of the opposite sex, there should be another person present or should be conducted within view of other adults.

In cases where a church leader has a legitimate reason to be alone with a child (i.e., counseling, visitation), that leader should obtain the consent of the child's parent or guardian and an Way Elder prior to being alone with the child. In such cases, the church leader should first attempt to have another adult present, with the child's consent, and only agree to meet with the child alone

if there is not another adult available that the child trusts to be present. This will be strictly enforced.

In cases where church leader has a legitimate reason to be alone with an adult member of the opposite sex (i.e., counseling, visitation), the elder or pastor should first attempt to have another adult present, with that person's consent, and only agree to meet with the person alone if there is not another adult available that the person trusts to be present. This will be strictly enforced.

## **Reporting Procedure**

The elders and pastors of The Way Church are responsible for addressing any suspicious behavior or any behavior that may be contrary to church policy and to document and report such occurrences to the Elder Board.

Any employee, minister, leader, member of the Way Church, or any other person(s) involved with the church who is aware of any instances of spiritual abuse should report the alleged act immediately to a Way Elder. Any employee, minister, leader, member of the Way Church, or any other person(s) involved with the church who believes he or she has been subject to spiritual abuse should do the same. If the complainant is uncomfortable in discussing the matter with any of the Way Elders directly, then that individual may report the alleged act to a Way Pastor or ministry leader, who will then be responsible for bringing the matter to the attention of the Elder Board. Employees, ministers, leaders, volunteers, and members should report such behavior promptly.

Any complaints of sexual misconduct involving a child shall conform with the *Child Protection Policy and Procedures*. Any complaints of sexual misconduct involving an adult shall conform with the *Sexual Misconduct Policy and Procedures*.

Any report or complaint should include details of the incident or incidents, names of the individuals involved, and names of any witnesses. A thorough and objective investigation of the allegations will be conducted promptly by the Elder Board and will be handled as confidentially as possible. Upon completion of the investigation, the appropriate parties will be notified of the findings.

## **Investigation & Follow Up**

The Way Church and its leadership will take all allegations of spiritual abuse seriously. In the event that the allegations involve a member of the church staff or leadership, then the Elder Board shall promptly, thoroughly, and equitably investigate whether misconduct has taken place. The Elder Board may utilize an outside third party to conduct an investigation of misconduct or assist in the investigation. The Elder Board will take every reasonable measure to ensure that those named in complaint of misconduct or are too closely associated with those involved in the complaint will not be part of the investigative team.

Any employee, minister, leader, teacher, or volunteer who is accused of spiritual abuse may be relieved temporarily of his or her duties or responsibilities until the investigation is completed.

The Way Church will cooperate fully with any investigation conducted by law enforcement or other government entities and church leadership shall take all necessary steps to ensure the safety and physical and spiritual well-being of any victim of spiritual abuse and their families.

To the fullest extent possible, but consistent with our legal obligation to report any suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities, we will endeavor to keep the identities of the alleged victims and investigation subject confidential.

If the investigation by the church or by the government substantiates the allegation(s), the perpetrator shall be subject to discipline by the Elder Board, including termination of employment or termination of membership with the Way Church and exclusion from all church properties.

In the event that the allegations involves a person who is not a member of church leadership (such as a church member, volunteer, visitor, or any other person), then the Elder Board shall take all necessary actions to ensure the safety and physical and spiritual well-being of the victim and cooperation with any investigation being conducted by law enforcement or other government entities. If the allegations are such that they do not constitute a crime under the laws of the State of Louisiana or the United States, but would be misconduct as defined by Scripture, then the Elder Board shall proceed with disciplinary proceedings as set forth in the *Constitution & By-Laws*.

### **Retaliation and False Accusations Prohibited**

The Way Church strictly prohibits any retaliation against anyone, including any employee, minister, leader, volunteer, member, student, or individual, who in good faith reports suspected spiritual abuse, alleges that it is being committed, or participates/assists in any investigation prompted by their good faith reporting of suspected spiritual abuse.

Intentionally false or malicious accusations of spiritual abuse are prohibited.

Anyone who improperly retaliates against someone who has made a good faith allegation of spiritual abuse, or intentionally provides false information to that effect, will be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

### **Liaison with the Community**

The senior pastor, the church's legal counsel, or such other person as the Elder Board may direct, will serve as the church's sole access to the media. The church should emphasize to the public its position on child abuse and neglect, its concern for the victim and the extensive steps being taken to address the safety of all who attend the church.