

# **Independent Investigation of First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow**

Final Report &  
Recommendations

September 17, 2024



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## Executive Summary

In January of 2024, First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow (hereinafter “FBCBA”) engaged GRACE to independently investigate allegations of sexual misconduct against Matthew Kennedy by the Reporting Victim (hereinafter “RV”), including FBCBA’s knowledge of and response to alleged misconduct, present environment and culture, and recommendations for changes or additions to policies, practices, and protocols. GRACE conducted 22 interviews of 23 individuals whose names were shared by the church, who contacted GRACE, or who were referenced by other witnesses. Accordingly, the material presented in this report should not be considered a comprehensive articulation of relevant information.

The witnesses included, but were not limited to, four former FBCBA leaders and two former FBCBA staff members from the timeframe of the allegations, in addition to the reporting victim. The alleged offender did not participate in the investigation, but multiple witnesses relayed relevant statements and/or communications to the GRACE team.

Section III(A) of this Final Report provides details regarding the primary allegation, which revolved around events on or about June 21, 2006. Matthew Kennedy reportedly invited RV to his house so she could avoid “temptation” relating to her dating interactions. Once alone at the house, Kennedy allegedly pulled RV on top of him, kissed her, performed oral sex on RV, and had RV conduct oral sex on him. RV reported Kennedy’s use of vulgar and shaming language and the dynamic of her dissociation during the encounter. Section III(B) summarizes Kennedy’s differing characterizations of the events to third parties who spoke with GRACE during the investigation.

Section III(C) details RV’s early allegations against Matthew Kennedy to several witnesses, with disclosures made as soon as the night of the primary allegation in 2006, undercutting problematic narratives or alleged motives for fabrication later assigned to RV by some in the FBCBA community. In 2008, both the alleged sexual misconduct and the victim-shaming narratives within the FBCBA community, which echoed Kennedy’s words during the event itself, significantly contributed to RV’s suicide attempt and hospitalization.

Additional corroborating evidence is discussed in Section III(D), including the consistency of RV’s details with the layout of the house, as well as behavioral corroboration by both the reporting victim and alleged offender, including Kennedy’s deceptive and boundary-crossing behavior in other contexts, such as his use of vulgar language in a separate sexual context and other problematic behaviors.

Section III(E) analyzes the potential grooming behavior of victim selection, access, isolation, individual and communal trust development, and desensitization to sexual

content. Relevant dynamics were identified throughout interactions between Kennedy and RV, dating back to their initial encounters in the summer of 2004, when Kennedy spent a significant amount of time alone with RV during a church missions trip in Mexico. This pattern continued in 2005 and 2006, with Kennedy allegedly engaging in frequent one-on-one meetings with RV at the church, blurring boundaries and establishing trust under the guise of spiritual guidance. These unsupervised, isolated conversations violated known FBCBA policy expectations to adhere to the “Billy Graham Rule.”

Relevant literature considers the grooming dynamic of desensitization to sexual content to be a more severe or “red flag” behavior. This dynamic was also identified, with the most obvious example being Kennedy’s alleged guidance to RV that she masturbate and use a vibrator, during the supposed one-on-one “accountability” relationship. At the time, Kennedy was a married minister, aged 29, while RV was still a minor.

Section III(F) provides GRACE’s determination of the credibility of allegations, based on corroborating evidence, RV’s consistent disclosures over time before any alleged motives for fabrication, and Kennedy’s lack of credibility. Section III(G) includes an analysis regarding the potential inclusion of this case within SBC’s MinistryCheck, noting a seismic, underreported, and problematic shift in the SBC’s approach during 2024.

Section IV analyzes relevant policies and procedures at FBCBA and the development and expansion of the church’s expectations and efforts toward safeguarding those in their care. Section IV(C) considers FBCBA’s knowledge of and response to allegations across four distinct phases: mid-1990s, 2003-2006, 2006-2011, and since 2021, with important lessons for the future of FBCBA’s response to the vulnerable.

The Final Report concludes with Section V’s recommendations and analysis of the six principles of trauma-informed practice: Safety; Trustworthiness and Transparency; Peer Support; Collaboration and Mutuality; Empowerment, Voice, and Choice; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Factors. Appendices include RV’s 2021 Facebook post and a timeline of key events.

GRACE wants to acknowledge the moral courage, loving sacrifice, and integrity demonstrated by RV. First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow owes a debt of gratitude to her as she attempted to bring truth into the light. GRACE also commends First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow for its commitment to truth and light through the initiation of this independent investigation. FBCBA now has the opportunity to demonstrate the transformative love of Jesus in the days and months ahead.

# I. Introduction & Background on First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow

First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow, OK, (FBCBA) was founded in March of 1904 next to a grain silo and a railroad car.<sup>1</sup> After 80 years, the church relocated to a 150-acre campus.<sup>2</sup> By the 1990s, the church became heavily focused on missions.<sup>3</sup> During this time, the church experienced rapid growth, in part due to an explosion in the city's population.<sup>4</sup>

The church has a good rapport with the community and strong ties with local businesses. According to their website, "We are followers of Jesus Christ first and foremost. We desire to be word driven. That's to say that we want to be guided by the Holy Scriptures in theology and ministry practice."<sup>5</sup>

## II. Scope and Methodology

GRACE's assessment was limited to the scope defined in the Engagement Agreement and was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews<sup>6</sup> and qualitative content analysis of collected relevant documents. The following section provides a summary of the scope and methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> L4 Tr. at 3.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> FL2 Tr. at 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> "Beliefs." FBCBA, 2024, <https://www.fbcba.org/beliefs>. Accessed 8/8/2024.

<sup>6</sup> Questions included a mix of open-ended, direct, and hypothetical prompts towards both factual and policy-oriented subject matter.

## A. Scope

Pursuant to the Engagement Agreement:

1. GRACE shall investigate allegations of sexual misconduct<sup>78</sup> against Matthew Kennedy, while serving as Minister of College and Singles at FBCBA from September 8, 2003, to September 13, 2006.<sup>9</sup>
2. In addition to the misconduct alleged by the reporting victim, GRACE may also investigate additional allegations by those attending or connected to FBCBA during this time period as discovered in the course of the investigation and as being perpetrated by Matthew Kennedy. The investigation should indicate whether any additional reports of misconduct are directly or indirectly related to FBCBA.
3. GRACE shall investigate whether FBCBA had any knowledge of the alleged misconduct before Kennedy was terminated, and if so, how FBCBA responded once this misconduct was discovered.
4. GRACE shall assess FBCBA's present environment and culture pertaining to its response to the alleged abuse and recommend any changes or additions to policies, practices, and protocols designed to prevent and respond to sexual abuse in the church.
5. GRACE shall provide the parties identified in Section I with a Final Report that outlines the investigation findings. GRACE shall also provide recommendations based on those findings, best practices, Scriptural

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<sup>7</sup> Sexual Misconduct is defined as any verbal, nonverbal and/or physical acts of an immoral, indecent, improper, or sexual nature that are 1) unwelcome or 2) performed without consent or 3) committed by one in a position of authority upon a subordinate or 4) committed by an adult upon someone under the age of 18 regardless of consent. Examples include, but are not limited to, derogatory or indecent statements about a person's body; slurs, epithets, anecdotes, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual or intimate nature; verbal advances, propositions, or invitations of a sexual or intimate nature; suggestive or obscene gestures or communications; unwanted attention such as leering or staring; "groping" or any unwanted touches of a sexual or intimate nature, adult sexual assault, and sexual abuse of a minor. "Without consent" means that consent is not freely given or obtained, and is accomplished through force, intimidation, violence, manipulation, coercion, threat, deception, aggressive come-on, disregard for nonverbal cues of discomfort, or misuse of authority or power.

<sup>8</sup> Sexual abuse of a minor is any sexual activity-- verbal, visual, virtual, or physical-- upon a minor (a person 17 years of age or younger). The minor is considered unable to consent due to developmental immaturity and an inability to understand sexual behavior. An offender may perform acts involving sexual abuse against the minor, or the minor may be told, forced, or in any other way, the offender may cause the minor to engage in sexual behavior with the adult. This also includes nude or sexually suggestive or explicit photographic images of a child which are produced, possessed, or distributed by any person.

<sup>9</sup> Clarity on the details of Kennedy's duties and employment at FBCBA emerged throughout the investigation that impacted earlier understanding of these dates.

values, and SAMHSA's Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice. GRACE shall be available to meet with FBCBA leadership to review the Investigation findings and proposed recommendations, as outlined in the Report.

The findings of GRACE's investigation will be analyzed using the methodology discussed in Section II(B), "Methodology," below. The investigation was limited to the scope of the Engagement Agreement.

## **B. Methodology**

The following section provides a brief summary of the investigation methodology. The investigative methods consisted of conducting interviews and collecting documents and other non-testimonial information.<sup>10</sup> Because this investigation was not a judicial proceeding, GRACE did not have the power to subpoena witnesses or documents. GRACE's investigation relied upon the voluntary cooperation of individuals with relevant information.

GRACE conducted 22 interviews of 23 individuals whose names were shared by the church, who contacted GRACE, or who were referenced by other witnesses.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the material presented in this report should not be considered a comprehensive articulation of relevant information. The witnesses included four former FBCBA leaders and two former FBCBA staff members from the timeframe of the allegations, in addition to the reporting victim. The alleged offender did not participate in the investigation, but multiple witnesses relayed his statements and/or communications to the GRACE team. Most individuals are referred to through coded witness designations. In some cases, additional steps are taken to preserve witness identity and confidentiality, such as the use of multiple designations for a single witness.

GRACE sought to pursue and conduct each interview in a way that reflected the character of Christ, viewing each person in the process as image-bearers who are deeply loved by God. GRACE interviewers sought to apply trauma-informed principles to each interview and exchange in order to promote safety, trustworthiness, transparency, and agency. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recordings, transcripts, and related correspondence were stored in a secure database.

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<sup>10</sup> Non-testimonial information included: publicly available audio and video resources, text messages, and emails relevant to the scope of the investigation or information received from witnesses. Engagement with the church's email account was targeted to direct phrases or specific recipient addresses, to avoid intersections with material and communications beyond the scope of the investigation.

<sup>11</sup> One interview included a married couple.



## 1. Standard of Proof and the GRACE Evidentiary Standard

GRACE adopts a holistic approach to conducting its investigations and writing its reports and recommendations. While GRACE does not consider its work purely or primarily through a legal lens, it does apply certain fundamentals and principles of U.S. legal theory to inform its investigations and reports.

One such fundamental is the application of a “standard of proof.”<sup>12</sup> Under U.S. law, every actionable offense or liable action has an applicable standard and burden of proof.<sup>13</sup> Critically, GRACE’s analysis is fundamentally distinct from the analysis of legal liability. Nothing in this report is, or is intended to be, legal advice or the evaluation of current or potential legal claims. GRACE is not a law firm and has no attorney/client relationships. To the extent legal concepts are referenced, it is for the purpose of illustrating evidentiary considerations related to GRACE’s definitions of misconduct.

In the case of criminal offenses, the most common standard of proof is “beyond a reasonable doubt.”<sup>14</sup> This standard of proof imposes a high burden on the charging party (typically the local, state, or federal government in criminal actions) to prove wrongdoing, given that criminal conviction places the defendant’s liberty and sometimes life in jeopardy. It is the highest standard of proof used in U.S. jurisprudence.<sup>15</sup>

Another common standard of proof used in U.S. legal proceedings is called “preponderance of the evidence” or “the greater weight of the evidence.”<sup>16</sup> This burden of proof imposes a much less stringent standard. A common analogy for this standard is a two-sided scale; if evidence is produced to tip the scales ever so slightly in the direction of the party with the responsibility to prove the wrongdoing, this burden of proof has been met.<sup>17</sup>

GRACE understands it is not a judicial body. Similarly, GRACE is not a charging party or plaintiff. However, to thoroughly analyze the credibility of allegations based on the evidence collected, GRACE finds it useful to apply an evidentiary standard to its

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<sup>12</sup> I.e., the “[d]egree of proof required.” See “Glossary of Legal Terms,” United States Courts, [www.uscourts.gov/glossary](http://www.uscourts.gov/glossary).

<sup>13</sup> I.e., “[t]he duty to prove disputed facts.” See “Glossary of Legal Terms, United States Courts, <https://www.uscourts.gov/glossary>: “In civil cases, a plaintiff generally has the burden of proving his or her case. In criminal cases, the government has the burden of proving the defendant’s guilt.”

<sup>14</sup> *In re Winship*, 397 U.S. 358 (1970). In this case, the United States Supreme Court concluded that due process demands a burden of proof of “beyond a reasonable doubt” when imposing criminal liability.

<sup>15</sup> See “Glossary of Legal Terms,” United States Courts, [www.uscourts.gov/glossary](http://www.uscourts.gov/glossary): “In criminal cases, prosecutors must prove a defendant’s guilt ‘beyond a reasonable doubt.’ The majority of civil lawsuits require proof ‘by a preponderance of the evidence’ (50 percent plus), but in some the standard is higher and requires ‘clear and convincing’ proof.”

<sup>16</sup> See “Preponderance of the Evidence.” Wex, Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School, [www.law.cornell.edu/wex/preponderance\\_of\\_the\\_evidence](http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/preponderance_of_the_evidence).

<sup>17</sup> See United States Courts, *supra*.

investigation. GRACE closely considered all evidence collected and found credible only those allegations that GRACE feels are supported by evidence sufficient to exceed a simple “greater weight” test. Conversely, GRACE was not so stringent as to find credible only those allegations that are proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Throughout this report, this evidentiary standard may be referred to as the “GRACE evidentiary standard.”

## 2. Investigatory and Legal Principles and Rules of Evidence

Before an evidentiary standard can be applied, individual pieces of evidence are analyzed for credibility. There are many factors to be examined and weighed in determining the credibility of a witness. These factors include the consistency and specificity of their statements, any potential motivation to lie or lack thereof, any complete or partial admissions of the accused, and corroboration by other witnesses or through documentation evidence.

In addition to evidentiary rules concerning someone’s *actions*, there are also rules that help determine someone’s *truthfulness*. One such rule allows for evidence and testimony of a witness’s character of truthfulness or untruthfulness.<sup>18</sup> Another helpful tool to determine truthfulness is to examine a witness’s prior statements. The rules of evidence allow a party to offer evidence of a witness’s prior statement to show that the witness either changed or did not change their testimony. This is referred to as “prior inconsistent” or “prior consistent” statements.<sup>19</sup> Of course, should evidence show that a witness’s testimony is substantively consistent with their own prior statements, this tends to prove that they are truthful. Conversely, if a witness changes their testimony in the absence of sufficient explanatory factors, this may show that they are not being truthful.

Another important aspect of prior consistent statements is how many consistent statements/acts there are and what sources are confirming them. For instance, if multiple witnesses report the same prior consistent statement or act from various different times, it lends more veracity to the claim. This concept is similar to one of the reliability arguments used to articulate the veracity of the Bible. The Bible was written by 40 authors of differing backgrounds, in three different languages, on three different continents, over the course of 1,500 years.<sup>20</sup> Despite this, the consistencies throughout Scripture demonstrate its veracity. In this way, receiving the same or similar information from various sources over an extended period of time tends to prove the credibility of that information.

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<sup>18</sup> Federal Rule of Evidence 608.

<sup>19</sup> Federal Rule of Evidence 801(d).

<sup>20</sup> Jason Carlson and Ron Carlson. “Is the Bible the Inspired Word of God?” Christian Ministries International, [christianministriesintl.org/is-the-bible-the-inspired-word-of-god](http://christianministriesintl.org/is-the-bible-the-inspired-word-of-god). Accessed 7/22/24.

### 3. Trauma-Informed Principles

In evaluating FBCBA's current policies and its response to the allegations discussed herein, GRACE applied the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's six principles of a trauma-informed approach. These six principles are: Safety; Trustworthiness and Transparency; Peer Support; Collaboration and Mutuality; Empowerment, Voice, and Choice; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Issues.<sup>21</sup>

These six principles are further described in Section IV, which contains an analysis of FBCBA's culture, policies and protocols, and response to these allegations.

### 4. Biblical Principles

GRACE presents analysis and recommendations in this report in a manner that strives to be consistent with Scripture. To that end, GRACE applied Biblical frameworks and principles to this matter to identify FBCBA's responsibilities and suggest improvements to FBCBA's practices.

## III. Findings and Analysis

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this investigation, with an associated analysis of relevant dynamics. For a brief timeline of key occurrences, see Appendix B.

### A. Allegations Against Matthew Kennedy

**Warning:** This section of the report describes explicit conduct and speech and may be activating for those who have endured abuse, harassment, or other trauma. Readers who may have difficulties reading the content should be careful and may wish to speak with a professional prior to reading the report. We also encourage parents and caregivers to read the report themselves before allowing youth who may be interested in the report to review it.

On September 15, 2021, Reporting Victim ("RV") published a Facebook post containing allegations of sexual misconduct against Matthew Kennedy ("Alleged Offender" or "AO") and tagged both AO's and FBCBA's Facebook pages. In addition to referencing some themes explored more fully in Section IV(C), "Church Knowledge and Response," the post included a few key details of AO's alleged actions and their impact on RV, excerpted

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<sup>21</sup> "SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach." SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

below:

For months i thought about the secret we shared . i thought about your wife and your son . i thought about what people would think of me and the sin i committed . i just let it happen. i thought about how bitter you tasted, the glass of water you handed me and how you hugged me afterward . you begged me not to tell anyone what we did.

i thought of what you said to me and what you made me say out loud , “i’m a slut” and i believed it . and i thought of you every time i said it to myself . honestly to this day, i still wonder if it's true .

i thought about you ... until i had to talk about you and i defended you when they told me you were to blame because, of course, it had to be my fault . mine. the seductress , the woman . but actually the girl . the girl who just froze as she watched you use her body in the reflection of the french doors .

i thought about you when they brought me in to tell my side of the story. but i didn't speak . they spoke. and they told me you had already told the story. what did you say ? did you tell them how you told me you had wanted me for such a long time . ... did you tell them you said you wanted to \*\*\*\* me but you held back because you knew i was a virgin . or did you tell them i flirted with you. that i wanted it too. i might never know . they didn't need to me tell anyone my story. i had turned 18 ten days before you entered me. as an adult, i could take responsibility for my own actions and for yours. lucky you.

i thought about how i trusted you. i think i was even attracted to you . you noticed me and it made me trust you . you were safe. untouchable you, the pastor .

i thought of you when i tried to take back control of my body. i started to use her on others . it made me feel like i could change something . i thought of you when i felt like the slut you christened me to be.

i thought of you every time someone tried to give me pleasure. it was your face looking up at me when i looked down. i'd see your \*\*\*\*\* desperate face. i thought of you every time my husband opened my legs. every time. it feels the same that it did that night.

have you thought about me ? because i want you to. i want you to know what you did wasn't just one night. i want you to think about everything you stole from me. ... i want you to think of me the rest of your life .

so that maybe then, i can finally stop thinking about you .

The scope indicated that Matthew Kennedy served as Minister of College and Singles at FBCBA from September 8, 2003, to September 13, 2006. (As discussed *infra*, Kennedy resigned on August 1, 2006.)<sup>22</sup> Elements and dynamics reflected in the Facebook post are discussed further throughout this report.

As part of the investigation, GRACE spoke with the Reporting Victim. RV recalled first meeting Matthew on an FBCBA missions trip to Sonora, Mexico, which occurred in Summer 2004, around her sixteenth birthday. One of RV's enduring memories of the trip is when AO reportedly "asked me to stay up late and teach [him] how to throw a softball."<sup>23</sup> (The photos below reflect RV and AO (at bat) during the Mexico trip.)



There was a lot of alone time that I remember spending with him as well. And I remember I played softball growing up... And he said that he didn't really know how to throw, and he wanted me to teach him how to play catch and to throw a ball. And so, I remember we stayed in a place with the gym, and

<sup>22</sup> Clarity on the details of Kennedy's duties and employment at FBCBA emerged throughout the investigation that impacted earlier understanding of these dates.

<sup>23</sup> RV Facebook post, 9/15/2021; RV Tr. at 4.

there were side rooms, and I would stay up *[with him]* after people were in bed. I remember having communication with him and teaching him how to throw a ball... And I remember having a lot of close contact with Matt in that main space just outside of *[the sleeping areas]*.<sup>24</sup>

RV's recollection of the trip and timeframe were corroborated through AO's family member's recollection of their move to Broken Arrow in 2003,<sup>25</sup> as well as a 2008 statement made by RV to a family member<sup>26</sup> and a prior consistent disclosure to a friend.<sup>27</sup> RV recalled that when AO asked "if I could teach him how to play catch... I felt proud of it... I thought it was cool to be asked for that."<sup>28</sup> Another witness reported that AO played on a softball team at some point in 2004–2006 but was "not the most coordinated."<sup>29</sup>

Witnesses attested to RV's proactive involvement on a praise team composed of high-school-aged girls in 2006, when RV was approximately 17 and AO approximately 29,<sup>30</sup> with one witness describing RV as "hungry to please," "looking for attention and affection," "in need," and "vulnerable."<sup>31</sup> Despite a witness elaboration that AO would typically be involved in a different co-ed praise team, the witness stated, "There were times where they would do things together,"<sup>32</sup> and another witness attested to AO's conversations with RV before and after the praise team practice.<sup>33</sup>

One leader expressed concern about this dynamic, stating that "the idea of a teenage girl coming to the office of a 29-year-old college and singles minister, who is not even specifically her minister, her pastor, but just one in the church should be a cause for question."<sup>34</sup> This concern contrasts with a statement made by the former senior pastor, who estimated AO to be in his "early twenties" in 2006 and stated, "they were close enough in age that I think his attraction for her and hers for him was not... like a 50-year-old man attacking her."<sup>35</sup>

Additional relevant interactions between RV and AO are separately analyzed throughout the report, including one-on-one accountability-style individual meetings for

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<sup>24</sup> RV Tr. at 4 and 7.

<sup>25</sup> W4 Tr. at 7.

<sup>26</sup> W2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>27</sup> W1 Tr. at 3: "One of the things I thought was weird is.. she had told me that he asked her to help teach her how to throw a softball or something, and that it was just him and her that stayed up late and did that. And I just thought that it kind of struck me as odd that it was just the two of them."

<sup>28</sup> RV Tr. at 9.

<sup>29</sup> W8 Tr. at 12-13.

<sup>30</sup> RV Tr; Also see AO Background Check.

<sup>31</sup> FS2 Tr. at 4; Also see L5 Tr. at 26; W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>32</sup> FS2 Tr. at 5.

<sup>33</sup> W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>34</sup> L5 Tr. at 26.

<sup>35</sup> FL2 Tr. at 9.

RV's "temptation" in a relationship with a peer, which escalated into frequent "check-ins" with RV.<sup>36</sup>

The primary allegation revolved around a meeting at Matthew Kennedy's house following a youth group senior class event off church premises on or about June 21, 2006, shortly following RV's eighteenth birthday.<sup>37</sup> RV recalled attending a "hangout" where AO was also present and asked about her dating interactions. When RV replied, "I don't know, I might see him tonight," AO reportedly responded something to the effect of "Come to my house so you don't mess up" and "Don't put yourself in temptation."<sup>38</sup> RV was not concerned with this invitation "because anytime I experienced going to a pastor's house, that wasn't a problem because it was just going and hanging out with their family."<sup>39</sup> RV recalled following AO to his house.

RV articulated the layout of the house,<sup>40</sup> and the "feeling of like, 'Oh... There's no one else here'" and "a very sudden feeling" that something was off.<sup>41</sup> RV reported inquiring about AO's wife and child, receiving clarity that they were not home, and being "uneasy" from that point on.<sup>42</sup> RV reported that Matthew invited her to sit on the sectional couch, and when she sat near an arm of the couch, he gestured for her to come closer to the corner of the sectional where he was sitting.<sup>43</sup> RV indicated that she moved where he directed on the couch, that they became "physically closer with time," and that AO "pulled [her] on top of him" and kissed her.<sup>44</sup> She relayed a distinct memory of dissociating:

I saw myself in the doors, the sliding glass of the back door. And when I think about that night, I think of trading places with my reflection. I feel like there was this moment where I just kind of dissociated. And it was either right at the beginning or right at the beginning of some of the physical touch.<sup>45</sup>

Critically, AO allegedly stated "something like, 'I've always wanted this to happen,' or, 'I've been waiting for this to happen.'"<sup>46</sup> RV further remembered him asking, "Didn't you always want this to happen?"<sup>47</sup> She indicated that she shook her head but did not speak, as AO asked in the way someone does when "they [have] already made up their mind about

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<sup>36</sup> RV Tr. at 19-21.

<sup>37</sup> RV Tr. at 22: "I turned 18 [about] 10 days before the night."

<sup>38</sup> RV Tr. at 21, 27.

<sup>39</sup> RV Tr. at 21.

<sup>40</sup> See Section III(D), "Other Evidence Relevant to Allegations."

<sup>41</sup> RV Tr. at 29.

<sup>42</sup> RV Tr. at 28-29.

<sup>43</sup> RV Tr. at 29.

<sup>44</sup> RV Tr. at 29.

<sup>45</sup> RV Tr. at 29.

<sup>46</sup> RV Tr. at 29.

<sup>47</sup> RV Tr. at 29-30.

the answer.”<sup>48</sup>

RV’s report reflected a lack of agency in the physical actions that took place during this encounter with AO. She recounted, “I don’t feel like anything I did was not made [to] happen,” and described AO standing her up and taking off her clothes.<sup>49</sup> She then recalled, “I made eye contact with my other self [*reflected in the sliding glass doors*]. And I remember having a feeling like, ‘Well, I can go home as soon as it’s done.’”<sup>50</sup>

RV described AO placing her in the corner of the couch, “push[ing] my legs open,” and performing oral sex on her.<sup>51</sup> AO also reportedly “did a lot of touching with his hands.”<sup>52</sup> RV relayed the use of vulgar and shaming language by Matthew Kennedy during the encounter:

He said that he really wanted to \*\*\*\* me, but he knew I was a virgin, so he didn’t want to \*\*\*\* me. And he also called me a slut and told me to say that I was a slut. So I do remember saying that out loud.<sup>53</sup>

RV reported that AO stood in front of the couch and that she “had to do the thing he wanted” her to do: “And so I tried, and he just ended up kind of doing it himself and touching himself and finishing inside of me, my mouth” before going to the bathroom.<sup>54</sup> RV then “went to go and spit in the bathroom.”<sup>55</sup>

Upon returning from the bathroom, Kennedy allegedly said, “Oh my God, what did we do?”<sup>56</sup> RV reported that his next statements focused on her age and the need for secrecy: “‘You’re 18, right?’ He said something about if I had turned 18 or if I was 18, and you can’t tell anyone about this.”<sup>57</sup> AO gave RV a glass of water and again reportedly emphasized, “We can’t tell anyone what we did.”<sup>58</sup>

RV relayed putting her clothes on and leaving. She articulated the “very new and very confusing and very alarming” nature of the actions, saying, “I did not understand it. It was not something I experienced. It was [a] very bizarre interaction and very uncomfortable, and I think novice and not the way that that should be explored.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Id.*

<sup>49</sup> *Id.*

<sup>50</sup> *Id.*

<sup>51</sup> *Id.*

<sup>52</sup> *Id.*

<sup>53</sup> *Id.*

<sup>54</sup> *Id.*

<sup>55</sup> *Id.*

<sup>56</sup> *Id.*

<sup>57</sup> *Id.*

<sup>58</sup> *Id.*

<sup>59</sup> RV Tr. at 34.



## B. Alleged Offender's Response to Allegations

AO did not participate in an interview with GRACE investigators. However, certain statements by AO were reported from other sources in reference to RV's allegations.

On July 29, 2006, a meeting was held involving AO and three FBCBA leaders. One leader, FL5, conveyed notes from this meeting to FBCBA leadership that provide insight into AO's response:

During the meeting, the minister [AO] explained that he and his wife had been having marital problems and undergoing counseling, but during a recent trip his wife had taken, he invited the young lady to come over to his house and during this time they engaged in consensual kissing and heavy petting, short of intercourse. He expressed this was the one and only time. The minister expressed remorse for his bad judgement [sic] and understood there would be consequences.<sup>60</sup>

In January of 2024, FBCBA leaders contacted AO to notify him about the investigation. One leader stated that he had a short conversation with AO, approximately 30 minutes in duration, in which the leader "didn't sense at all a surprise of the alleged allegations. There really wasn't much of a denial of something that happened."<sup>61</sup> The leader further stated that AO was "contrite" and "probably apologized six times,"<sup>62</sup> and further elaborated:

He was very contrite and adamant that this was a one-time, foolish, unfortunate, horrific incident that took place, that he identified his home, he identified that his family was not there, he identified that the survivor was in a season of disarray. There were relationships that were fractured, that the survivor had reached out to him, that he had foolishly invited the survivor into his home. He did admit to an encounter. He apologized... multiple times that the church was having to go through this.<sup>63</sup>

Another leader present during this conversation stated,

[AO] then proceeded to tell us that he had a counseling relationship with [RV] as she was dealing with difficulty in another relationship. He acknowledged

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<sup>60</sup> FL5 notes from 7/29/06, provided to FBCBA 2/9/24. A different leader attested to seeing AO packing up his office after his dismissal, and stated "He [AO] told us that he was caught doing some things that he shouldn't have been doing and that he really messed up and that he wouldn't be working for the church anymore. He was very disappointed. I remember him appearing very sad and distraught about it." L3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>61</sup> L4 Tr. at 6.

<sup>62</sup> *Id.*

<sup>63</sup> L4 Tr. at 7.

that she had come over to his house one night when his wife was out of town and that, shamefully, he engaged in a kiss with her. He stated that it was more than quote “a simple kiss” end quote, but that her allegation about the extent of their physical contact, which he noted he was aware of from her posting a letter on his door two years ago, was false.<sup>64</sup>

After an announcement was made later that month on FBCBA’s website regarding the allegations and investigation, the FBCBA leader received an email from AO in which he disagreed with the announcement’s characterization of RV as being “part of our high school student ministry” and stated, “it’s important to note that at the time of the incident in question, she had already graduated, was 18 years old, and therefore, at the time, was not in the high school ministry.”<sup>65</sup> FBCBA leaders clarified that the allegations include actions leading up to the incident and that the high school ministry typically includes those who recently graduated high school.<sup>66</sup>

## C. Initial and Subsequent Disclosures

In a courtroom setting, one route to the admission of evidence is the prior consistent statement hearsay exception. For instance, “statements that are consistent with the witness’s testimony can be offered to rebut attempts to impeach that witness via an express or implied charge against the witness of recent fabrication or improper influence or motive.”<sup>67</sup> In this case, RV made a series of prior allegations against Matthew Kennedy to numerous witnesses.

### 1. Night of the Allegations

RV reported that after leaving AO’s house, she shared with a peer (W1) on the same night that she “did something really bad,” relaying “probably a good amount of the

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<sup>64</sup> L5 Tr. at 13. It is important to note that the letter that AO mentioned was not corroborated by any other accounts.

<sup>65</sup> AO email to L4 and L5, 2/16/2024. FBCBA responded in part, “While the incident in the summer of 2006 is certainly an important part of the circumstances in question, the allegations cover a broader period of time, including the nature of the relationship in the months or years leading up to that incident. In our statement, we felt it was important to refrain from suggesting that the circumstances for which we are seeking an independent investigation involve only a one-time encounter. Doing so would have been providing a detail of the circumstances which we feel is best left for the investigation.” See FBCBA email to AO, 2/19/2024.

<sup>66</sup> FBCBA email to AO, 2/19/2024.

<sup>67</sup> Robert J. Peters & Christa Miller, “Getting Forensic Interviews Admitted: 11 Strategies for Child Abuse Prosecutors,” Zero Abuse Project (citing D.C. Code § 14-102; KRE 801A; MD R Rev. Rule 5-802.1(b)); Robert J. Peters, et al., Child Statement and Forensic Interview Admissibility, National District Attorneys Association, National Children’s Alliance, & Zero Abuse Project (2022).

details.”<sup>68</sup> She recalled, “I told her something happened. He was married, and I felt awful.”<sup>69</sup> W1 confirmed this near-immediate initial disclosure to GRACE:

I was the first person that she told after the incident, and I didn't exactly know how to, I guess, handle that information. And then I didn't know if she would get in trouble or how that would happen. And so she was like, “Don't tell anyone.” ...I was not the person who told. It was actually somebody else—one of her friends—who had eventually told an adult, and I never did.<sup>70</sup>

W1 also corroborated the context of accountability communication from AO to RV, as well as RV's recent eighteenth birthday at the time of AO's actions and the initial disclosure.<sup>71</sup> W1 also related an important perspective of RV's demeanor during this initial disclosure, noting that she was “really upset, really scared... she was just kind of like, ‘I don't know how it happened. And I'm scared.’”<sup>72</sup> W1 recalled a general impression of the sexual nature of the encounter, RV's lack of agency in the physical acts, and AO's use of demeaning language:

I think it was him telling her to do things to him and making her say things about herself, about her maybe being a slut or something. And then I don't really remember if he touched her, but I know that I thought he made her do stuff to him. So I don't know if that was oral or other things, but I just basically, I remember just saying, “Oh no, this is really bad.”<sup>73</sup>

Two additional witnesses corroborate W1's early knowledge of the allegations. One of these witnesses reported that W1 discussed the allegations with her, saying, “Don't tell [RV] I told you, but this has happened.”<sup>74</sup> This witness relayed W1's statement “that [RV] was molested by our youth pastor and that it happened a day or two after she turned 18. And I thought, ‘Wasn't that convenient?’”<sup>75</sup> A second witness indicated their belief that RV “told [W1] pretty immediately after it happened.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> *Id.* at 31.

<sup>69</sup> *Id.*

<sup>70</sup> W1 Tr. at 3.

<sup>71</sup> W1 Tr. at 3: “...if I remember correctly, too, it would've been shortly after she turned 18. And so I remember thinking, ...Well, crap, you're 18 now. That seems odd. It just happened to fall... You had been meeting with him for months about this guy [RV's boyfriend] and then all of a sudden, all this happens.”

<sup>72</sup> W1 Tr. at 4: “She was really upset when she came home. It wasn't like, ‘Oh my gosh, lemme tell you about what happened.’ This was her being really upset, really scared. I think she understood the impact of him having a family and her feeling like, What do I do now? And with everything that happened, and honestly, I was kind of scared for her too. And I think that was probably why I didn't tell.”

<sup>73</sup> W1 Tr. at 4.

<sup>74</sup> W3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>75</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>76</sup> W6 Tr. at 9.

## 2. Early Disclosures

RV recalled being in a vulnerable place approximately one week later and enduring a difficult experience. In the aftermath, she “broke down” to another individual “and just told [them] what happened.”<sup>77</sup> At least one additional individual corroborated RV’s disclosure to that individual.<sup>78</sup>

Around the same timeframe, RV also disclosed to Former Leader 3 (FL3) but framed the event as a kiss. RV recalled FL3 indicating that she needed to tell, and her own response of “Please don’t tell anybody, and promise me that you never will.”<sup>79</sup> RV went on to reflect that despite her pleas not to tell, “[FL3] probably did... I think I hated [FL3] for it.”<sup>80</sup> FL3 corroborated this disclosure to GRACE, including RV’s framing of the interaction as “Matt had kissed her—not anything else,” FL3’s statement that she needed to report, and RV reacting strongly and negatively to the possibility of reporting.<sup>81</sup>

RV’s intersections with FBCBA leadership shortly after the disclosure to FL3 are analyzed separately in Section IV, “Church Policies, Biblical Analysis, and Church Response.”

## 3. College Disclosures

RV described a friend confronting her during her freshman year of college, pushing for more information about “a conversation that people are having [about RV being] the instigator of an event that led to” AO’s departure from FBCBA.<sup>82</sup> RV recalled that the framing was not “I heard something happened to you,” but “I heard a rumor of something you did.”<sup>83</sup> An in-person meeting ensued with RV, the friend, and a third individual, in which RV made a disclosure and “felt supported by her in that moment.”<sup>84</sup>

RV articulated the impact of knowing “that it was out there” as a result of this conversation.<sup>85</sup> She “really started to break down,” noting, “That was the day I called my dad

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<sup>77</sup> RV Tr. at 40-41.

<sup>78</sup> W1 Tr. at 5.

<sup>79</sup> RV Tr. at 41.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> FL3 Tr. at 5: “...I remember the night, as vivid as, it's clear as day... First, she called me and she said, ‘Can I come over?’ And I said, ‘Of course.’ And they came in my door and she couldn't even get in my door fast enough to tell me that Matt had kissed her, kissed her—not anything else, that Matt had kissed her. And so I said, ‘Well, come in, sit down, tell me what happened.’ She didn't tell me where they were or anything. She just said that Matt had kissed her. And so we talked a little bit through... And so I explained to her, I said, ‘[RV], you know I have to report this.’ And she goes, ‘No, no, no, you can't. You can't.’ And she started crying. ‘You can't report this. You can't.’ And I said, ‘[RV], I have to report this. This is not good. He can't do that.’ And she just had a fit because I was going to report it.”

<sup>82</sup> RV Tr. at 37.

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*

<sup>84</sup> *Id.*

<sup>85</sup> *Id.*

crying.”<sup>86</sup> This precipitated his driving to her college, where RV “told him more detail than you ever want to tell your dad.”<sup>87</sup> RV’s father corroborated a phone conversation regarding AO’s actions.<sup>88</sup> When he asked if RV wanted to take action, she declined: “No, because I felt like it was my fault. I didn’t want to get in trouble. I didn’t want anyone to know... I think I even said that I can’t do that.”<sup>89</sup> RV and her father both indicated that they have not spoken about AO’s actions from 2008 to the present. The father’s early knowledge of the allegations is corroborated by email correspondence provided to GRACE, dated April 17 and 18, 2008.

At some point early in RV’s time in college, she visited a former staff member (FS2), with another individual present, and shared feelings of betrayal, “like the church was kind of vilifying her, making her feel like she had done it.”<sup>90</sup> FS2 reported RV’s later disclosure to him that “she was coerced into sexual activity with [AO] at his house.”<sup>91</sup>

Another friend of RV (W6) who knew her at the time of the event reported that RV later disclosed to her in 2008 while they were in college together.<sup>92</sup> W6 corroborated the location, the timeframe “soon after [RV’s] eighteenth birthday,” the fact that RV and AO “were the only ones” at AO’s house, and that “there were sex acts,” although W6 did not recall which specific acts.<sup>93</sup>

RV also disclosed to supportive individuals following her suicide attempt in college.<sup>94</sup> One of these individuals indicated that they learned of AO’s actions “after the suicide attempt,” which they learned was “because of the abuse [by AO].”<sup>95</sup> That individual placed the suicide attempt and RV’s disclosure roughly two years after the encounter with AO.

RV described making multiple additional disclosures long before publishing the Facebook post, including filming a testimony video for a church around 2013, in which she “referenced pretty heavily that [she] was raped.”<sup>96</sup> She also “told [a romantic partner years

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<sup>86</sup> *Id.* RV’s father placed his initial awareness of the events a year later, in 2008—a distinction acknowledged and disputed by RV.

<sup>87</sup> *Id.*

<sup>88</sup> W2 Tr. at 2-3 and 8.

<sup>89</sup> RV Tr. at 37.

<sup>90</sup> FS2 Tr. at 6.

<sup>91</sup> *Id.*

<sup>92</sup> W6 Tr. at 4.

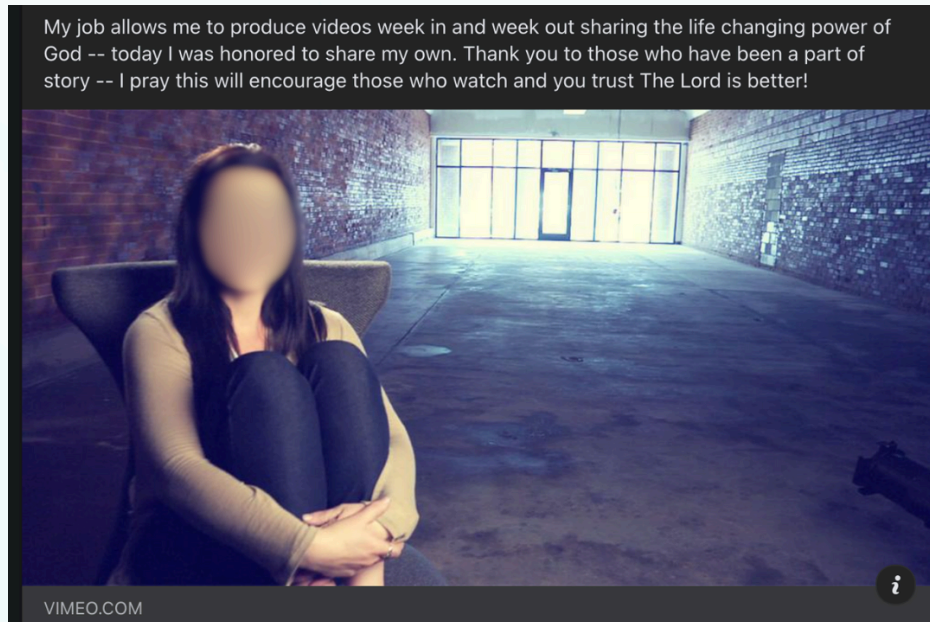
<sup>93</sup> W6 Tr. at 5: “Just a couple of years later, when [RV] and I became very close friends, she just shared with me that soon after her 18th birthday she had gone over to his house and they were the only ones there. From what I remember—because we really actually only talked about it once or twice, and we haven’t talked about it in many, many years, like the particulars—but from what I remember, they didn’t have penetrative sex, but there were sex acts that happened together. Yeah, they occurred at his home. I can’t remember exactly what all happened, but I know that it was like they were both naked, there were maybe some mutual masturbation, that kind of thing.” *Id.*

<sup>94</sup> RV Tr. at 40: “That was one of the, I feel like, first times we all really talked about it in the full force.”

<sup>95</sup> W3 Tr. at 7.

<sup>96</sup> RV Tr. at 39.

ago] while we were dating about what happened.”<sup>97</sup>



RV relayed that another friend told her, “I remember that time in [City Redacted] at [Redacted] when you told me what happened.”<sup>98</sup> RV indicated that she did not recall that conversation or what specifically she shared with the friend.<sup>99</sup> Former Youth 1 (FY1), who knew this friend, relayed to GRACE that RV “had confided in [the friend] in that 2010, 2011 range.”<sup>100</sup> FY1 went on to say, “And I think that’s when [the friend] initially went back... pulled out the scrapbooks or whatever, and saw that [AO] happened to be in a lot of just the candid type photos that we had from that summer camp our senior year.”<sup>101</sup>

The significant implications of the disclosures and other relevant evidence are analyzed in Section III(F), “Determination of Credibility of Allegations.”

## D. Other Evidence Relevant to Allegations

Additional categories of evidence reviewed by GRACE include corroborating evidence relevant to the location of the alleged offense and behavioral corroborating evidence relating to both Matthew Kennedy and RV.

<sup>97</sup> *Id.* at 41.

<sup>98</sup> *Id.*

<sup>99</sup> *Id.*

<sup>100</sup> FY1 Tr. at 10.

<sup>101</sup> *Id.*

## 1. Corroboration of Location

RV's recollection of the interior of AO's house was detailed, coherent, and consistent with her allegations. An individual with extensive knowledge of the residence also provided GRACE with details and a rough diagram of the layout and furniture at the time, and the two accounts are consistent.

Furthermore, RV's Facebook posts and testimony reference AO "us[ing] her body in the reflection of the french doors."<sup>102</sup> RV also reported that AO placed his penis in her mouth, while he stood near the couch. These details are supported by and consistent with the layout of the house,<sup>103</sup> especially the proximity of the couch, alleged sexual acts, and sliding glass doors.

## 2. Behavioral Corroboration: Alleged Offender

Witnesses portrayed Matthew Kennedy as "a really funny, fun-loving guy," "a goofy friend," "really approachable," "kind of nerdy," and not having "a lot of social skills" but being "a nice enough guy."<sup>104</sup> These opinions about Matthew led multiple witnesses to take a more dismissive posture towards the allegations. One witness, who acknowledged being focused on other experiences during this timeframe, relayed their impression that "seeing [AO] around the youth and the young adults, he was very on their level, and it felt like he was one of them in a lot of senses."<sup>105</sup>

Some perspectives reflected a lack of understanding regarding the dynamics of clergy sexual misconduct and the implications of power disparities, especially in a spiritual context.<sup>106</sup> FL5 expressed concerns to FBCBA leadership regarding the concept that clergy sexual interactions with congregants inhibit informed consent, saying in an email, "That suggests everyone is incapable of exerting their own free will around ministers as ministers are so powerful and influential... That is not consistently true but supports the lack of personal accountability when convenient... I barely knew the minister in question but... he was no Jim Jones or Koresch or Ravi Zacharias in the charisma and mind control/influence categories."<sup>107</sup>

It was notable, however, that the few witnesses with more advanced or intimate knowledge of AO shared a concerning perspective with GRACE. One witness alleged that

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<sup>102</sup> RV Tr. at 27-28; RV Facebook post, 9/15/2021.

<sup>103</sup> *Id.* at 29, 32; W4 Tr. at 14-15.

<sup>104</sup> FL1 Tr. at 4; L3 Tr. at 4, 5.

<sup>105</sup> L2 Tr. at 4-5.

<sup>106</sup> See generally Diane Langberg, "Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church." Brazos Press, 2020.

<sup>107</sup> Email to [Redacted], 2/10/2024.

AO “was different at home than he was at church. He was not authentic.”<sup>108</sup> RV was not the only witness to report manipulative behavior by AO,<sup>109</sup> as another witness with a significant relevant history referenced AO being “so controlling. I mean, he’s super controlling and manipulative.”<sup>110</sup>

RV alleged that, in hindsight, AO “was getting off on pushing boundaries of what was right and wrong.”<sup>111</sup> A witness with extensive knowledge of AO described “holding boundaries” with him, which AO perceived as “punishing him.”<sup>112</sup> The witness further reflected: “I don’t think he’s ever acknowledged exactly the extent of his behavior and how it impacted me. I don’t think he’s taken accountability for those things.”<sup>113</sup>

RV’s allegations of AO’s boundary violation are corroborated not only by this witness (W9) but also by AO’s actions in an employment context. A former FBCBA staff member who worked alongside AO described AO’s request to use his computer during lunch.<sup>114</sup> The staff member alleged that on his return, there was a request for pornography visible on his computer.<sup>115</sup> The staff member reported being understandably upset, since Internet activity could be tracked, and stated that he reported AO’s activity to a supervisor at FBCBA.<sup>116</sup> This raised concerns about AO, especially paired with AO’s “longer hours”<sup>117</sup> in his office at FBCBA:

Rather than going home and being in a healthy environment, he was instead pursuing things that were dark... If you are objectifying people at all, then you

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<sup>108</sup> W9 Tr. at 19.

<sup>109</sup> RV Tr. at 21: “You have this [dynamic of] probably me wanting that noticing and trusting him. And for me it’s no surprise that it took me more than a decade to stop thinking [that] what happened ...I was complicit in. I think it took a really long time to recognize the manipulation because you started to see the part you played in. It was so strong for so long.”

<sup>110</sup> W9 Tr. at 18: An example of controlling behavior was provided by a witness, who reported meeting in an accountability group with other women that “walked through Bible studies together, and [AO] hated that I was in that group, because he felt like I was sharing stuff that I shouldn’t be sharing. And he felt like I was always saying things that were... I mean, he blamed things on me that, then when you look back, you’re like, That wasn’t my fault.”

<sup>111</sup> RV Tr. at 19.

<sup>112</sup> W9 Tr. at 25.

<sup>113</sup> *Id.*

<sup>114</sup> FS2 Tr. at 8.

<sup>115</sup> The request for pornography was described as pornographic search terms still visible in the drop-down menu of the search engine. *Id.*

<sup>116</sup> *Id.* at 8-9. GRACE did not interview Kennedy’s former supervisor or investigate this matter further because it did not fall within the scope of this investigation—which focused on RV’s allegations of sexual misconduct against Matthew Kennedy during his tenure at FBCBA. (See GRACE’s definition of sexual misconduct on p. 4 of this report, in footnote 7.) However, the information obtained did speak to AO’s deception and pattern of boundary crossing behavior, a dynamic with relevance to RV’s allegations. It’s important to note that two separate witnesses (FS2 and W4) credibly described AO’s apparent or admitted pornography use without being specifically or directly asked about it.

<sup>117</sup> *Id.* at 8.



don't need to be in a place where you're serving them as well. And then people like [RV], who needed attention—it's frustrating that she was so vulnerable in that scenario.<sup>118</sup>

In addition to raising concerns due to the willingness to violate a colleague's boundaries, this alleged incident raises concerns due to the deception inherent in risking a colleague's good employment standing to satisfy a sexual desire.

AO's alleged deception is also demonstrated in how he reportedly framed the primary allegations to loved ones. A witness told GRACE, "What he told me at the time was that there was a young woman who was a recent high school graduate....And so he was at the house alone... She came over, and he said there was no sex and that it was just not right that she was there, and that was it."<sup>119</sup> This witness's perspective regarding AO's lack of veracity was noteworthy: "I didn't trust him to tell me the truth. So he could have said whatever. I didn't trust him. I don't know that I believe the first comment... I was like, 'Okay...'"<sup>120</sup>

Concerns relating to AO's alleged deception surfaced in a few additional contexts. First, an article in *The Oklahoman* referenced email communications with AO: "The former minister told *The Oklahoman* in an email that he has contacted his accuser and First Baptist-Broken Arrow but received no response from either of them. He declined further comment."<sup>121</sup> It is important to note that this statement is not supported by the evidence. Contrary to this narrative, GRACE received documentation of prior communication between FBCBA leaders and AO, as well as prompt response by FBCBA leadership to AO's email weeks prior to the article's publication on March 24, 2024 (see image on next page). Both documentation and testimony supported the conclusion that FBCBA leaders communicated with AO on January 2, 2024 (via email and phone call), and on February 19, 2024 (via email), in response to AO's February 16 email.

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<sup>118</sup> *Id.* at 9. The staff member's concerns were shared by others. W4 Tr. at 10: "He shared that he had a pornography addiction, and he had been on up to two hours a day at work. So I'm like, Well, no wonder if you're spending 10 hours not doing your job, then that's why I'm having to do your job. So that's why I just was like, 'How are you doing that? I saw the office. There's people everywhere.' Anyway, so yes, he was doing other things on the computer instead of his work."

<sup>119</sup> W4 Tr. at 10.

<sup>120</sup> *Id.* at 23-24.

<sup>121</sup> Carla Hinton. "Baptist church is grappling with 2006 abuse allegations." *The Oklahoman*, March 24, 2024, p. A01, A12.

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**"We are saddened to learn of the behavior that occurred, and we grieve with the abuse survivor."**

**Brian Hobbs**  
Oklahoma Baptists' communications director

## Church

Continued from Page 4A

He said church leaders notified the accused former minister and former church leaders about the allegations several weeks before making an announcement to the church and posting a statement on the church's website in mid-January 2024.

The accused minister told The Oklahoman in mid-February that he had contacted the church and his accuser but had not heard from either. Smith said that church leaders did reach out to the former minister and received an email from him about a month later, which they acknowledged immediately and then provided a "thorough response" to the next business day.

Keahbone said it's important to note that First Baptist-Broken Arrow, as a large congregation, has resources available that many smaller churches don't. He said that's why the ministry toolkit developed by the Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force is an important resource. Keahbone said the toolkit also

has launched a third-party investigation

----- Forwarded message -----

From: Matt K [REDACTED]  
Date: Fri, Feb 16, 2024 at 5:12 PM  
Subject: Re: First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow  
To: [REDACTED]  
Cc: [REDACTED]

Hi [REDACTED]

I'm reaching out to discuss the recent announcement made to FBCBA my past tenure at the church. While I appreciate the steps being taken by the authenticity of my conversation with you and [REDACTED] need for clarification regarding the framing of the incident in question.

Specifically, the announcement states, "The individual who has brought was a teenager in our church during this timeframe and part of our high school ministry." However, it's important to note that at the time of the question, she had already graduated, was 18 years old, and therefore was not in the high school ministry. This characterization has led to unnecessary inquiries from news agencies, and I'm being asked to comment on aspects that are not accurately represented.

My request is for this statement to be updated to reflect a more accurate of the accusation. Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I know what will be done to remedy this situation.

Sincerely,  
Matt

On Tue, Jan 2, 2024 at 2:26 PM [REDACTED]

Hi Matthew,  
My name is [REDACTED] and I am [REDACTED] I have the right email address for the Matthew Kennedy that

From: [REDACTED]  
Date: Monday, February 19, 2024 at 2:42 PM  
To: Matt K [REDACTED]  
Cc: [REDACTED]  
Subject: Re: First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow

Matt,

Thanks for reaching out to us with your concern about our announcement. We sincerely appreciate your willingness to communicate with us. I want to share our reasons for framing the message as we did.

While the incident in the summer of 2006 is certainly an important part of the circumstances in question, the allegations cover a broader period of time, including the nature of the

**Phone call with Matthew Kennedy**  
Tuesday, January 2, 2024  
[REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] emailed Matthew Kennedy in the early afternoon asking for a time to connect by phone. Matthew Kennedy responded soon after and a call was placed at 4:30pm with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] on the line. The call lasted 30 minutes.

Summary of the call:

[REDACTED] started by confirming that we were indeed talking to the Matthew Kennedy who served at FBCBA from 2003-2006. He stated that we were grateful for Matthew's response to our message and

Second, concerns regarding AO's alleged deception surfaced in credible witness testimony that AO dated other women and engaged in inappropriate chatting with women online on another individual's home computer<sup>122</sup> while still married to his spouse at that time.<sup>123</sup> The repeated discovery of undisclosed problematic behavior had significant

<sup>122</sup> W4 Tr. at 20-21. "[Redacted] pulled me aside. Matt was not there again, and she said, 'I have some things to show you.' She didn't know about all this stuff that was going on, so she was super sad about what she was going to show me. ...And she showed me screenshots. ...And Matt had logged onto their computer at their house and was talking again, very explicitly, with other women. And specific behaviors, like actions and, 'I can't wait to meet up with you, blah, blah, blah.'"

<sup>123</sup> W9 Tr: "But I know that when [AO and his wife at that time] were separated he dated, he had full-on relationships when they were not unmarried, they were still married, and he would not go see [the] counselor."

relational impacts.<sup>124</sup>

GRACE reviewed print-outs of emails which appeared to corroborate this behavior during the summer of 2006. One print-out reads, “can i just please tell you that I’ve been so \*\*\*\*\* horny for you.....let me come over sometime [sic] soon...i’m in tx all this week but next week let me come over and make you cum....over and over again...i want to taste you, hear you, feel you...”<sup>125</sup>The print-out of a separate explicit email sent to this account, reflected that the name for this email account, reportedly used by AO, was “Deviant Man.”<sup>126</sup>

RV’s Facebook post and testimony included AO’s alleged use of vulgar language in a sexual context.<sup>127</sup> In addition to the email print-outs above, RV’s post was also corroborated by testimony from other sources:

It was just a nasty comment. I cannot remember the wording, but I just remember thinking, this is not how I would ever talk, even in a sexual way. It was just, I don't know, perverted, but just like... It was not the way that I would ever want to be spoken to as a lady.<sup>128</sup>

I mean, [the language used by AO] was just about aggressive sex. \*\*\*\*\*. Aggressive. Aggressive. I don't remember words, but it was just super foul and not loving at all.<sup>129</sup>

I would believe [that AO utilized demeaning language during a sex act]... I mean, how he interacted with me, what he wanted to do [in an intimate context], what I saw on the screen, knowing you have a pornography addiction... I mean, yeah, I would believe [it].<sup>130</sup>

### 3. Behavioral Corroboration: Reporting Victim

Behavioral corroboration can take many forms depending on the circumstances of specific cases and the individualized responses of reporting victims.<sup>131</sup> Common categories of behavioral corroboration may include sexualized behaviors, maladaptive or negative

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<sup>124</sup> W4 Tr. at 17: “There had been incidents before this. ...I walked in, and I saw a chat from somebody. I'm like, 'Who is this?' So it wasn't the first time. ...And every time, I was like, 'If this is everything, okay, let's work through it.' And it just felt like there was never the end of it.” *Id.* at 20-21: “I was like because he had not shared that, I was like, 'You're not being honest, so you are not welcome to come back to Broken Arrow.’”

<sup>125</sup> AO email exchange with [Redacted], August 2006.

<sup>126</sup> AO email exchange with [Redacted], August 2006.

<sup>127</sup> E.g., RV Tr. at 30: “He said that he really wanted to \*\*\*\* me, but he knew I was a virgin, so he didn't want to \*\*\*\* me. And he also called me a slut and told me to say that I was a slut...”

<sup>128</sup> W9 Tr. at 20.

<sup>129</sup> *Id.* at 21.

<sup>130</sup> W4 Tr. at 25.

<sup>131</sup> See generally ChildFirst Forensic Interview Training Program, Zero Abuse Project (2024).

coping behaviors (such as self-harm), and accommodating behaviors.

Narratives that characterized RV as promiscuous or untruthful are analyzed separately in Section IV(C).<sup>132</sup>

Significant, unexplained shifts in behavior may be relevant and corroborative, especially when correlated with pertinent timeframes and dynamics. Multiple witnesses attested to noticeable changes in RV's behavior shortly after the encounter with AO, in the form of withdrawal from peer groups, increased sleeping, and reduced communication:

I could tell something happened because she became really withdrawn, very pulled into herself. ...But I remember one night having a lengthy conversation, well, a one-sided conversation when I was like, "[RV], I know something's going on. Please tell me so we can help you. You're different. You're more withdrawn, you're pulled in." And she just sat on the couch and just stared at me, very, very shut down. Never did get anything out of her. ...But every now and then I'm like, "[RV], I know something's going on. Please let me in and let me help you."<sup>133</sup>

I just remember, when I found out a few years later, being surprised that I didn't know. But also, it felt like, okay, some of this makes a little sense because... I had the impression that she withdrew a little bit from the group hangouts and things that we would do.<sup>134</sup>

I think after it happened... she would sleep really late and not get out of bed. ...I would say maybe she struggled with depression, kind of on and off after that. ...I don't really know if she always would sleep late and stuff, but I felt like it was more so.<sup>135</sup>

She slept a lot. I do remember her sleeping a lot. ...I thought, Something has happened.<sup>136</sup>

RV's Facebook post referenced her suicide attempt and drew a connection to the allegations against AO, stating, "i thought of how i couldn't bare to swallow what you put in my mouth but i easily swallowed two bottles of pills to punish myself . i thought of you amidst white walls and accompanied showers."<sup>137</sup> RV shared more context with GRACE:

I think at the time, when I put these pills in my mouth... A very current issue

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<sup>132</sup> It should be noted that there was an absence of deceptive factors in additional sexual encounters discussed relating to RV.

<sup>133</sup> W3 Tr. at 3-4. W3 places the one-sided conversation in August 2006. *Id.* at 5.

<sup>134</sup> FY1 Tr. at 5.

<sup>135</sup> W1 Tr. at 6.

<sup>136</sup> W3 Tr. at 7.

<sup>137</sup> RV Facebook post, 9/15/2021.

was me being embarrassed by this specific thing [*unrelated to AO*]... I was looking to punish myself and to hurt myself and to basically [*say*], “You are this stupid. You are this slut and you are this thing.” It was a direct—with a time jump—reaction. There was just this external catalyst that triggered that.<sup>138</sup>

RV’s 2008 attempt to take her life and subsequent hospital admission is also corroborated through witness testimony and medical records reviewed by GRACE.<sup>139</sup>

## E. Analysis of Potential Grooming Behavior

Grooming refers to the manipulative tactics employed to deceive a victim, encouraging compliance with sexual abuse while preventing disclosure. This section includes a brief overview of grooming literature, and its application to the investigation.

### 1. Grooming Defined

The harmful process of grooming has three main objectives: establishing conditions for easier perpetration of sexual abuse, enabling future acts against the victim, and reducing the likelihood of disclosure.<sup>140</sup>

Multiple witnesses characterized interactions between AO and RV as grooming behavior,<sup>141</sup> and numerous interpretations of grooming exist. Researchers Georgia Winters, Leah Kaylor, and Elizabeth Jeglic (hereinafter Winters, et al.) analyzed thirteen distinct definitions and synthesized prevalent themes from previous definitions to propose a comprehensive definition that presents the most essential themes. To avoid conflation with problematic, harmful, and inconsistent cultural misconceptions regarding grooming, GRACE applied this definition throughout its analysis:

Sexual grooming is the deceptive process used by sexual abusers to facilitate sexual contact with a minor while simultaneously avoiding detection. Prior to

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<sup>138</sup> RV Tr. at 46.

<sup>139</sup> W3 Tr. at 4: “I guess it was the end of her freshman year, possibly the end of her sophomore year when she made a suicide attempt. ...And so my husband and I jump in the car, we drive to [redacted] to stay near the hospital, kept tabs with her. She never actually told me of the abuse until really years later... Because [RV] has made the comment that everybody thought I tried to commit suicide because of [redacted]. But she said it really wasn’t. It was because of the abuse.”

<sup>140</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. “Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior.” *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>141</sup> See e.g., W1 Tr. at 3: “... I think there were other things that really struck me as odd—now, looking back on it—that she would tell me that she was doing with this person. I think that there was some grooming, I guess, obviously before that, that always struck me as odd, but she was just like, Oh no, I’m close with his family. I have dinner with his wife and kids... So looking back on it, I think that there were things that were there that maybe ...people should have seen...”

the commission of the sexual abuse, the would-be sexual abuser may select a victim, gain access to and isolate the minor, develop trust with the minor and often their guardians, community, and youth-serving institutions, and desensitize the minor to sexual content and physical contact. Post-abuse, the offender may use maintenance strategies on the victim to facilitate future sexual abuse and/or to prevent disclosure.<sup>142</sup>

In the context of the Church, literature on clergy sexual misconduct defines “grooming” as behavior by spiritual leadership seeking to develop a close relationship with targeted individuals, including flattering language, affection, sharing private information, religious language, and erosion of boundaries.<sup>143</sup> Grooming is also often perpetrated upon surrounding adults and institutions.

Importantly, the potential grooming behavior analyzed in this section included what relevant literature would characterize as “Certain behaviors that are more concerning and are thus more indicative of sexual grooming (i.e., more *severe* or “*red flag*” behaviors).”<sup>144</sup>

## 2. Selection

The Winters et al. definition discussed above included victim selection within its conception of grooming.<sup>145</sup> This is an early stage of grooming, which can be based on a number of victim or perpetrator characteristics including physical preferences, ease of access to an intended victim, familial conflict, psychological vulnerability, and reduced supervision of the child by adults.<sup>146</sup> This theme was articulated by several witnesses, including the reporting victim, who referenced her needs and vulnerability in that timeframe:

I would see [other students having connections with other pastors] and feel like, wow, I want to be one of those special kids who get to have this more relational connection with leaders. I wanted to be that important or seen as important or I wanted to have that time with people there... I was a loud

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<sup>142</sup> *Id.* at 8.

<sup>143</sup> See Diana R. Garland & Christen Argueta. “How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts.” *Social Work & Christianity*, Volume 37, 2010.

<sup>144</sup> See Section III(E)(5), “Desensitization to Sexual Content”; Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Georgia M. Winters, & Benjamin N. Johnson, Identification of Red Flag Child Sexual Grooming Behaviors, 136 *Child Abuse & Neglect* 105998 (2023).

<sup>145</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. “Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior.” *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>146</sup> *Id.*; Robert J. Peters. “Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse.” In “Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan,” edited by Robert Geffner, et. al. Springer, 2022.; Jason D. Spraitz & Kendra N. Bowen. “Examination of a Nascent Taxonomy of Priest Sexual Grooming.” *Sexual Abuse*, Volume 31, Issue 6, p. 707–728, 2019.

person but I don't think I was being like, "Notice me." I just knew... and looking back, it's like I wanted that feeling of wanting to belong there—to be one of the leaders, too.<sup>147</sup>

I believe that he knew exactly what he was doing. And I feel like he knew that I would be a good bet to mess with."<sup>148</sup>

Multiple witnesses articulated an impression that RV was "from a very difficult home"<sup>149</sup> and "looking for attention and affection."<sup>150</sup> Two witnesses described her as "vulnerable,"<sup>151</sup> and several others remarked upon the instability in her home life and the problems they believed it caused.<sup>152</sup> Considerations on this issue relating to church response are explored in Section IV(C)(1).

### 3. Access and Isolation

Winters et al. emphasized actions by would-be sexual abusers to "gain access to and isolate" victims prior to commission of abuse.<sup>153</sup> Perpetrators of sexual misconduct often "isolate the victim to increase dependence on them, create a sense of shared responsibility... and further reduce the likelihood of reporting."<sup>154</sup> The themes of access and isolation were reflected by witnesses and the reporting victim, who described "a lot of alone time"<sup>155</sup> during her first interactions with AO on the Mexico missions trip, a fact corroborated by others.<sup>156</sup>

A family member referred to AO's alone time with RV as "grooming" and recalled their initial processing of the allegations as the "ministers are getting smarter... Now they wait till their 18th [birthday] before the pastor makes the deal, so they can't get the really

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<sup>147</sup> RV Tr. at 12.

<sup>148</sup> RV Tr. at 19.

<sup>149</sup> FL1 Tr. at 4.

<sup>150</sup> FS2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>151</sup> *Id.*; W3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>152</sup> FS2 Tr. at 9: "And then people like [RV], who needed attention, it's frustrating that she was so vulnerable in that scenario." *Also*, L7 Tr. at 6; FL3 Tr. at 5; FL1 Tr. at 4; FS2 Tr. at 3-4.

<sup>153</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. "Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior." *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>154</sup> Robert J. Peters. "Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse." In "Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan," edited by Robert Geffner, et. al. Springer, 2022.

<sup>155</sup> RV Tr. at 4, 7: "There was a lot of alone time that I remember spending with him as well. ... And so, I remember we stayed in a place with the gym and they were side rooms and I would stay up [with him] after people were in bed. I remember having communication with him and teaching him how to throw a ball... And I remember having a lot of close contact with Matt in that main space just outside of [the sleeping areas]."

<sup>156</sup> See e.g., W1 Tr. at 3: "One of the things I thought was weird is.. she had told me that he asked her to help teach her how to throw a softball or something, and that it was just him and her that stayed up late and did that. And I just thought that it kind of struck me as odd that it was just the two of them."

serious charges.”<sup>157</sup> The family member referenced learning and being “appalled” by RV being alone with Kennedy on the missions trip and subsequently at FBCBA, comparing that to their professional context where “I can never be alone with [a minor in a youth organization]. I can’t even be alone with two [minors]. There have to be two senior members anytime there’s a [minor] involved, with very few exceptions. That’s just good standard practice. So it kind of appalled me when I heard that she was being alone with him.”<sup>158</sup>

The tragic implications of this isolation are heightened given earlier communication by RV’s family member to the former senior pastor indicating that the family was wounded and looking for a safe spiritual home in which to heal, as discussed in Section IV(C)(1), “Church Knowledge and Response: Mid-1990s.”

One witness referred to a close friend and scrapbooker who observed that “in hindsight, Matthew was in a lot of those photos [from high school]... she felt very much like he had inserted himself into a lot of the photographed moments. He was just very present and visible as she went and looked back.”<sup>159</sup> RV and other witnesses referred to FBCBA’s music ministry and the time before and after rehearsals as a common context for one-on-one conversations between RV and AO.<sup>160</sup> Another witness shared, “I knew they were spending time together alone, which was a red flag. I knew they were having conversations that might not be appropriate to have with a married male leader of the church.” When the interviewer asked where they understood these meetings to have occurred, the witness replied, “At the church.”<sup>161</sup>

A former staff member who had an office in close proximity to Kennedy recounted, “I visited with her before as far as the hallway...I know I talked to her, I know that, but I don’t recall her ever serving in the kids’ area or anything like that. Mostly, I would say if she was up [*in*] the offices or in the hallways.”<sup>162</sup> Witnesses indicated a knowledge of Kennedy

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<sup>157</sup> W2 Tr. at 5.

<sup>158</sup> W2 Tr. at 4-5. W2 raised specific concerns regarding RV “rid[ing] in the car alone with him,” but there are no direct allegations or evidence to support that this event occurred.

<sup>159</sup> FY1 Tr. at 5.

<sup>160</sup> RV Tr. at 12, 17: “I was always in choir. And actually at that time, you have this rise of—especially in youth groups—like bands. And I wanted to sing and be a part of that. ...There’s always the girl singer with the guy with the guitar, and I wanted to be that. And so I feel like he was giving me that chance. And so you’d have to rehearse before whatever service, I think Wednesdays and we would get there before. And I do recall a lot of one-on-one conversations with him stemming from that as well. I think part of why I was getting closer to him or anyone would’ve seen us paired off was because of that happening... he was giving me the opportunity to do this thing I really wanted.” *Also*, W6 Tr. at 4: “[RV] was involved in the music, I don’t know, music ministry I guess, of the church, and I believe Matt was as well. I think those conversations would often happen before or after practice. ...So, I believe it was mostly at church that those conversations were happening. I know the event itself happened at his house from what I remember, but before that I think it was mostly at the church.”

<sup>161</sup> W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>162</sup> FS3 Tr. at 5.



and RV being together,<sup>163</sup> and another witness attested to Kennedy's conversations with RV before and after the praise team practice.<sup>164</sup>



*Photo reportedly taken in Kennedy's office at FBCBA, likely in Fall 2005 or Spring 2006.*

It is significant that in spending one-on-one time with RV, Kennedy violated the "Billy Graham Rule," the belief that men should avoid being alone with women who are not their wives, which was a known policy expectation at FBCBA at the time.<sup>165</sup>

#### 4. Trust

Winters et al. highlight the role of trust in the grooming process, specifically developing trust "with the minor and often their guardians, community, and youth-serving institutions."<sup>166</sup>

RV reported her sense of trust in AO prior to her eighteenth birthday, which was reflected in part through AO's informal and unsupervised "accountability" process with RV while she was a minor. This process allegedly constituted a series of isolated one-on-one conversations and ongoing communications that focused on RV's "temptation" in romantic relationships with her peers as the "main topic."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> FS2 Tr. at 5.

<sup>164</sup> W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>165</sup> L6 Tr. at 6.

<sup>166</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. "Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior." *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>167</sup> RV Tr. at 19: "How's it going with your boyfriend? Are you messing up? I think that was, I feel like, a huge topic, or the main topic of any checkpoints when I would see him."

...The check-in was about if I was struggling with wanting or having or doing sexual things. It was very accountability-partner-style. It's so hard to separate what's church language. But yeah, I feel like it was check-ins of, 'Are you and your boyfriend struggling? Did you do this? Did you talk to this person? ... Did you make out? Did you touch something? Or did you let him touch you somewhere? ...So yeah, it was more of that... making out. 'How do you feel about it?'<sup>168</sup>

You're 16 and you're 17, and you're figuring what is going on. And I was not someone who was having sex with my boyfriend. It was just like, 'I feel turned on. I must be a whore' was taught, I think. But it was definitely really heavy on me. So any inclination of a temptation was so much guilt for me, and I felt like I didn't really have another person to talk to about that. And he wasn't pointing me to another female, either. And I certainly don't understand as an adult why no one saw me going into his office when he was the college, I think, minister or young adult. He shouldn't have been the person I was visiting with.<sup>169</sup>

It was a separating of, "Don't go to these other people. Come here with this. I can be the source of this struggle for you..." whereas I think any other right-minded person would be like, "Yeah, let me take you to the correct place for this. Let me point you into a healthier and safer space."<sup>170</sup>

He was the person that I was almost like a Catholic priest confessing to.<sup>171</sup>

Based on relevant church events and RV's testimony of "a progression at the time I was spending around the church that wasn't necessarily related to the service times," weekly meetings appeared to be a reasonable if not conservative estimate of frequency.<sup>172</sup> AO's frequent, isolated, one-on-one encounters with RV to discuss sexual temptation and related topics are corroborated by multiple witnesses with knowledge at the time of the encounters:

And then the other thing that was really odd was that at the time, she had some boyfriend that she was dating. ...She was saying that she was having temptation to do things with this person and that the pastor was helping her to not, working with her so that she didn't have sexual temptation. She was meeting with him about that. And I just thought that that seemed really odd

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<sup>168</sup> RV Tr. at 24.

<sup>169</sup> RV Tr. at 16.

<sup>170</sup> RV Tr. at 23.

<sup>171</sup> RV Tr. at 20.

<sup>172</sup> See RV Tr. at 19.

to be meeting with a male about things that she was going through. That just didn't seem appropriate to me...<sup>173</sup>

This would've been probably when she was 17. It was definitely before she was 18 because I know that event happened pretty immediately after she turned 18. But she shared with me that she was meeting with him. They were one-on-one, no one else was there. I think the conversation of sexual temptation came up, which isn't an inappropriate conversation to have with church leaders, but it is inappropriate to have, in hindsight, with a married leader of the church and a man. ...I knew they were spending time together alone, which was a red flag. I knew they were having conversations that might not be appropriate to have with a married male leader of the church.<sup>174</sup>

AO's ability to conduct this course of conduct, seemingly in plain view, may be reflective of the communal dimension of grooming, in which trust is developed with the "community, and youth-serving institutions."<sup>175</sup> In community grooming, perpetrators typically manipulate and build trust with the adults surrounding the child, both to enable access to victims and reduce the likelihood of the victim being believed in the event of an allegation.<sup>176</sup> Knowingly or unknowingly, this possibility was reflected in the perspectives of two former FBCBA-affiliated individuals who dismiss and accept, respectively, the severity and veracity of the allegations.

...from my perspective at the time, the minister wasn't a Don Juan; he was a flawed man who engaged with a teenager searching for affection and he absolutely knew better... This is a college minister involved in "heavy petting, short of intercourse" with a consenting 18-year-old that (as was told to me by several people with knowledge of this ministry area at the time) was highly flirtatious and looking for attention from anyone she could get it from. Both were adults and both were aware what they did was wrong and expressed remorse.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> W1 Tr. at 3.

<sup>174</sup> W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>175</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. "Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior." *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>176</sup> Robert J. Peters. "Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse." In "Handbook of Interpersonal Violence Across the Lifespan," edited by Robert Geffner, et. al. Springer, 2022. (Citing Jason D. Spraitz & Kendra N. Bowen. "Examination of a Nascent Taxonomy of Priest Sexual Grooming." *Sexual Abuse*, Volume 31, Issue 6, p. 707-728, 2019.)

<sup>177</sup> Email to GRACE from a FL5 FBCBA leader, 6/20/2024. The leader's apparent inability to comprehend the relevant power dynamics, and his leveling of Kennedy's and RV's behavior is deeply concerning.

So grooming, oftentimes you're grooming the gatekeeper, right? You're not only grooming the victim but the gatekeepers... Yet he was always literally perfect as far as willing to help, willing to be a part of, willing to lead, very gregarious, and so I wouldn't look back and say, man, I could have seen that... I wish we had pushed in a little bit more on some of the holes that I saw.<sup>178</sup>

## 5. Desensitization to Sexual Content

An additional grooming dynamic identified by Winters, et al., is the offender strategy to “desensitize the minor to sexual content and physical contact.”<sup>179</sup> Relevant literature describes this category of behavior as “Certain behaviors that are more concerning and are thus more indicative of sexual grooming (i.e. more *severe* or “*red flag*” behaviors). This would likely include behaviors found in the desensitization to sexual content and physical contact stage...”<sup>180</sup> In one study, researchers found:

...behaviors in the desensitization to sexual content and physical touch stage were four to 34 times more likely to be present in cases of [child sexual abuse]. This is the stage likely to immediately precede the actual CSA and the one in which the individual who perpetrates the abuse is pushing the physical comfort and sexual content limits of the child, testing whether they will be able to engage in the abuse without the child reporting it. Importantly, these boundary violation behaviors are significant regardless of the relationship between the child and the male adult. As such, any... discussion of sexual behaviors should be considered red flags and investigated immediately.<sup>181</sup>

RV alleged actions by Matthew Kennedy, perpetrated while she was a minor, that constituted desensitization to sexual content. This dynamic was reportedly reflected in the “accountability” process described in the previous section. In this context, RV relayed, “I don't have any sense of or memory of him ever shutting down, steering away... I think everything felt like fair game and I never got any sort of boundary setting.”<sup>182</sup> According to RV, one example of this was the use of profane or inappropriate humor:

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<sup>178</sup> FS2 Tr. at 15-16.

<sup>179</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic. “Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, Deviant Behavior.” *Deviant Behavior*, Volume 43, Issue 8, 2022.

<sup>180</sup> Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Georgia M. Winters, & Benjamin N. Johnson, Identification of Red Flag Child Sexual Grooming Behaviors, 136 *Child Abuse & Neglect* 105998 (2023).

<sup>181</sup> *Id.*

<sup>182</sup> RV Tr. at 25.

I remember he would make a dirty joke, and it'd be like, Oh, he's cool. He is not uppity or so... ..I remember that feeling of, at some point, that was a part of the conversation for me to be like, "He's a cool guy." And I had that a little bit of, every kid, you have a rebellious thing. I had that for the churchiest church girl you could have I was like, "Oh, I want to be a little bit taboo and ha-ha" type of thing. But I did say that's where it worked.<sup>183</sup>

In a resource on grooming behaviors, the U.S. Department of Justice provided 13 examples of "[a]ctivities that can be sexually arousing to adults who have a sexual interest" in minors.<sup>184</sup> Some of these behaviors include: "[discussing] sexual development, discussing sexually explicit information under the guise of education, [and telling] sexually explicit jokes."<sup>185</sup>

RV reported possibly criminal behavior<sup>186</sup> on the part of Kennedy during these accountability sessions, including his deeply concerning responses to RV's "almost confessing of [her] struggles... with these feelings and hormones and not knowing what to do" at the age of 17:<sup>187</sup>

And he said, "Well, no one here at the church is going to tell you this, but what you should really do is masturbate or get a vibrator. That's what you should do." And I think in my head at the time, it was very, What? It was a word... and words that were very difficult for me to even verbalize and say... and I recall it being really bizarre.<sup>188</sup>

RV disclosed AO's guidance regarding a vibrator to a witness at the time of the incident in 2006,<sup>189</sup> and this witness corroborated RV's recollection to GRACE.<sup>190</sup> In hindsight, RV interpreted AO's discussion of masturbation and the use of sex toys as a critical juncture in their interactions:

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<sup>183</sup> RV Tr. at 13.

<sup>184</sup> See Daniel Pollack & Andrea Maclver. "Understanding Sexual Grooming in Child Abuse Cases." Child Law Practice Today, Volume 34, 2015. Available at [americanbar.org](http://americanbar.org).

<sup>185</sup> See Daniel Pollack & Andrea Maclver. "Understanding Sexual Grooming in Child Abuse Cases." Child Law Practice Today, Volume 34, 2015. Available at [americanbar.org](http://americanbar.org).

<sup>186</sup> See Section III(G), "Registry Analysis," *infra*.

<sup>187</sup> RV Tr. at 15.

<sup>188</sup> RV Tr. at 15.

<sup>189</sup> RV (RV Tr. at 15) stated that she told the witness, "Seems weird, right? She's like, 'Yeah, it's a little weird.' And neither of us knew what to do with it." See also, W6 Tr. at 4.

<sup>190</sup> W6 Tr. at 4: "This would've been probably when she was 17. It was definitely before she was 18... He had encouraged her to buy a vibrator in response to that conversation. I think looking back at the time, that's probably something I should have told someone, but I was also [a minor] and naive and unsure of what the implications of that were." Also, *Id*: "It seemed almost like, of course this is all in hindsight, she was gut checking, 'This is weird, right, that I had this conversation with someone and this is what they said?' and just wanting affirmation that this was off."

That was him really gauging what I was going to do with it. And I did exactly what I think he hoped I would do, which was not storm off and not tell him, "Whoa, you can't do this." So I feel like... I was being groomed from this point. And I think this was one of those points when he was like, "I can get away with whatever it is that I want from this person."<sup>191</sup>

## F. Determination of Credibility of Allegations

As noted *infra*, the Federal Rules of Evidence and state law equivalents allow for prior consistent and inconsistent statements to be used in the determination of the credibility of testimony, particularly to defend against "implied charge[s] against the witness of recent fabrication or improper influence or motive." RV was criticized for allegedly distorting her story of the allegations over the years,<sup>192</sup> as an email from a former leader characterizing RV's post as a "false and extortionary claim" demonstrated:

"I leave you with this: Truth is Truth and it is timeless and unwavering like the word of God. It does not distort or morph itself over time for the prospects of financial gain."<sup>193</sup>

Contrary to this representation, RV's testimony regarding specific sexual actions, including grooming behaviors, was substantively consistent with the testimony of other witnesses who received disclosures from her near the time of the incident. The graphic details relayed by RV to select individuals in 2006 and 2008 are the same details that she disclosed in 2021 and 2024.

RV's series of prior consistent statements included a near-immediate disclosure of AO's sexual activity and degrading language to W1 on the night of the incident. It also included a contemporaneous disclosure of AO's encouragement to use a vibrator while she was a minor. This disclosure predated even disclosures of AO's physical sexual actions. Critically, these early disclosures establish RV's lack of consent to AO's behavior, either through her status as a minor during grooming stages and exposure to sexual topics, or through her "lack of agency" and surrounding circumstances relating to the physical acts.<sup>194</sup>

RV framed AO's actions as a kiss in her early partial disclosure to FL3, an approach that catalyzed criticism and revealed the ignorance of some witnesses to the common dynamic of progressive abuse disclosures, in which survivors may understandably not immediately convey the entirety of their experience to others, especially authority

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<sup>191</sup> RV Tr. at 15-16.

<sup>192</sup> Discussions of RV's truthfulness consistent with this section are separately discussed in the analysis of church knowledge and response.

<sup>193</sup> Email to GRACE from FBCBA former leader, June 20, 2024.

<sup>194</sup> See e.g., W1 Tr. at 4.

figures.<sup>195</sup> It is notable that of RV's earliest disclosures, only the disclosures to authority figures did not contain more explicit or sexual details or references.

Several other disclosures referenced in Section III(C) were also made and corroborated within 1-2 years of AO's alleged actions, and RV has made consistent disclosures in the intervening years. In legal parlance, RV's disclosures to several individuals occurred before any alleged motivation for fabrication. It is unreasonable to conclude that in 2006 or 2008, a 17-18 year old reporting victim would have been motivated by events in 2021 or 2024. Evidence from this investigation may indeed suggest that some individuals appeared to "distort or morph" the truth.<sup>196</sup> RV was not one of them.

In contrast, the statements attributed to AO throughout this report fail to meet GRACE's evidentiary standards for credibility. Common themes within AO's reported statements that undermine credibility include inconsistency, minimization (a form of deception), and outright dishonesty.

AO's responses to the allegations in 2006 and 2024 reveal significant inconsistencies. In 2006, during a meeting with leadership, AO is reported to have said that he and RV engaged "in consensual kissing and heavy petting, short of intercourse."<sup>197</sup> However, while framing the allegations to a loved one, AO claimed that a recent high school graduate had visited him at home while he was alone, asserting that the allegations were solely about the impropriety of her presence, stating "no sex" occurred and "that was it."<sup>198</sup> In 2024, AO again acknowledged some of the allegations, admitting to more than "a single kiss," but denied RV's claims about "the extent of their physical contact."<sup>199</sup> While AO consistently denied having sexual intercourse, his varying accounts—ranging from kissing to "heavy petting" to nothing at all—reveal a pattern of minimization and blatant deception.

Additional reports of AO's deceptive tendencies are noted elsewhere in this report. These include observations that AO was "different at home than he was at church,"<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Common barriers to disclosure include an inability to recognize the conduct as sexual abuse, an inability to articulate that they have been abused, a lack of opportunities to disclose abuse, and the possibility that they will not be believed if they do disclose. See [childusa.org](http://childusa.org). The fear of not being believed is often compounded by a spiritual leader's positive reputation within the community, and the resulting inclination by others to believe the offender would never commit abuse.

<sup>196</sup> See e.g., Section IV.C.3., Church Knowledge and Response: 2006-2011, for discussion of a former FBCBA leader whose testimony contradicted multiple witnesses, as well as accounts of his prior statements.

<sup>197</sup> FL5 notes from 7/29/06, provided to FBCBA 2/9/24.

<sup>198</sup> W4 Tr. at 10.

<sup>199</sup> L5 Tr. at 13.

<sup>200</sup> W9 Tr. at 19.

"manipulative,"<sup>201</sup> viewed pornography on a coworker's computer, lied to a loved one about infidelity, and made inaccurate statements to *The Oklahoman* claiming he was not contacted by FBCBA and that he had tried to reach out to RV. Furthermore, AO's alleged online alias "Deviant Man," as commonly defined, suggests a departure from socially acceptable conduct and additional concerns given the sexual context in which the alias was reportedly used.

The consistent reports of AO's deception highlight a clear pattern of dishonesty. His behavior appeared to align with a strong motivation to lie, a common credibility risk factor. AO had compelling reasons to lie, including potential damage to his reputation, loss of employment, legal and criminal repercussions, and further deterioration of already strained relationships with loved ones. Reports received suggested that AO's deception towards one loved one was so frequent that he could not be trusted or believed.<sup>202</sup>

AO, viewed by some as approachable and fun-loving, may have garnered sympathy due to personal traits and perceived repentant behavior. For instance, after his dismissal in 2006, AO reportedly told a witness that he was let go because he was "caught doing some things that he shouldn't have been doing and he really messed up."<sup>203</sup> AO's acknowledgment that "he really messed up" and his "sad and distraught"<sup>204</sup> appearance may have evoked empathy and forgiveness from others, as these are often seen as signs of remorse and repentance. However, outward displays of sorrow should be carefully contextualized to avoid conflation of the common saying "He's sorry because he got caught" with demonstrated indicia of authentic repentance. Authentic repentance should be assessed in connection to the benchmarks outlined in Scripture, that a repentant person takes ownership of sin without minimization (James 1); is appalled by sin (Isaiah 6:5); makes amends (Luke 19:1-10); accepts consequences (Luke 23:40-43); does not expect or demand forgiveness (Genesis 32); feels the depth of the pain they've caused (Isaiah 64:6); changes behavior (Acts 9); and grants space to heal (Galatians 5:22).

While each of these benchmarks appeared to be lacking in statements attributed to AO, of particular note is AO's 2006 confession to "consensual kissing and heavy petting." Professor Diana Garland noted that when a spiritual leader commits sexual abuse against a congregant and then allows the congregant to "carry the blame for their sexual

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<sup>201</sup> W9 Tr. at 18: An example of controlling behavior was provided by a witness, who reported meeting in an accountability group with other women that "walked through Bible studies together, and [AO] hated that I was in that group, because he felt like I was sharing stuff that I shouldn't be sharing. And he felt like I was always saying things that were... I mean, he blamed things on me that, then when you look back, you're like, That wasn't my fault."

<sup>202</sup> *Id.* at 23-24.

<sup>203</sup> L3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>204</sup> *Id.*



involvement,” the spiritual leader commits an additional abuse of power.<sup>205</sup> Genuine repentance requires a sincere and full confession. AO's confession, however, shifted responsibility onto RV by describing the abusive behaviors as "consensual," highlighting a lack of true repentance.

Consistent with grooming behaviors earlier described, AO held a position of power over RV, endeavored to gain the trust of RV, and used that position of power and trust to erode boundaries, not limited to arranging isolated encounters with RV and introducing sexual topics when RV was a minor. The reported act of encouraging RV to use a vibrator while she was a minor meets the definition of sexual abuse of a minor as behavior that is verbal or virtual, and pertaining to sexual activity. A minor is considered unable to consent due to developmental immaturity and an inability to understand sexual behavior. Further, as Patricia Liberty wrote, “It is assumed that because two people are adults that there is consent. In reality, consent is far more complex. In order for two people to give authentic consent to sexual activity there must be equal power.”<sup>206</sup> AO's reported reference to the allegations as “consensual,” while he had substantially more power than RV, in similar circumstances is commonly viewed as an additional grooming tactic, to convince victims that they share equal responsibility for the abuse and potentially shaming them into silence.

Accordingly, GRACE finds the allegations of sexual abuse of a minor and sexual misconduct, including grooming behavior to be credible.

## G. Registry Analysis

During the investigative process, the possibility of case evaluation for the purposes of potential inclusion within SBC's Ministry Check was briefly discussed. GRACE's analysis in this case was truncated due to a seismic but underreported<sup>207</sup> shift in the SBC's approach to an online database of known sexual offenders in 2024.

As the website for the SBC Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force indicates, “Coming soon, Ministry Check will provide leaders with the ability to search for information about individuals who have been convicted, found liable, or confessed to abuse.”<sup>208</sup> The

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<sup>205</sup> See Diana Garland, *When Wolves Wear Shepherds' Clothing: Helping Women Survive Sexual Abuse*, 33 SOCIAL WORK & CHRISTIANITY 1, 11-12 (Spring 2006), [www.nacsw.org/Publications/GarlandArticle.pdf](http://www.nacsw.org/Publications/GarlandArticle.pdf).

<sup>206</sup> [www.advocatweb.org/publications/articles-2/clergy/affair/](http://www.advocatweb.org/publications/articles-2/clergy/affair/).

<sup>207</sup> Media underreporting of SBC database considerations is not a new phenomenon. See e.g., Laura Fitzpatrick, “Top 10 Underreported News Stories: Southern Baptists decide against pedophilia database,” Time Magazine (2008). [content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1855948\\_1861760\\_1862212,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1855948_1861760_1862212,00.html) (accessed 8/8/2024).

<sup>208</sup> “SBC Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force.” Ministry Check, 2024, [sbcabuseprevention.com](http://sbcabuseprevention.com) (accessed 8/8/2024).

practical reality of this shift is that only “two categories of sexual offenders associated with Southern Baptist churches or entities, individuals: [1] Convicted of sexual abuse in criminal court [and] [2] Found liable for sexual abuse in civil court” are eligible for “the initial version of the Ministry Check website.”<sup>209</sup> Since a mere fraction of credible abuse allegations result in criminal convictions or civil liabilities, this shift by the SBC in 2024 effectively excluded the vast majority of known, credible sexual abuse cases from its “online database of known sexual offenders.”<sup>210</sup> This shift has implications for the immediate case, as the new structure provides no pathway to the database, where, as the MinistryCheck website previously stated, “a qualified, independent third-party, commissioned by the appropriate local church or SBC entity, determines... that the person is credibly accused, following a properly-conducted independent inquiry.”<sup>211</sup>

The fact that an individual can be credibly accused of sexual abuse of a minor and sexual misconduct, including exhibiting peer-reviewed red flag grooming behaviors,<sup>212</sup> but not be listed in the MinistryCheck database, reveals that the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation’s largest Protestant denomination, has chosen significantly lower moral standards than secular institutions. As Victor Vieth noted in “Lessons From the SBC Sexual Abuse Crisis,” the most important and needed policy reform is indeed theological reform.<sup>213</sup>

While Kennedy does not appear to have been fully investigated by law enforcement, charged, or convicted of a crime in relation to his interactions with RV, Kennedy has reportedly made admissions. Although these admissions do not bear indicia of a full confession as discussed *supra*, they do constitute partial admissions to sexual misconduct.

Importantly, RV’s allegations against Kennedy raise concerns for the possible prior commission of crimes recognized in Oklahoma, pending an analysis of relevant case law, the applicability of criminal statutes of limitation, and a broader focus to consider not just the physical sexual activity shortly following RV’s 18th birthday, but also the potentially criminal behavior preceding RV’s 18th birthday.

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<sup>209</sup> “The Future of Abuse Reform in the SBC: The ARITF’s 2024 Report and Recommendations,” [sbcabuseprevention.com/the-aritfs-2024-report-and-recommendations](https://sbcabuseprevention.com/the-aritfs-2024-report-and-recommendations) (last accessed August 8, 2024).

<sup>210</sup> *Id.*

<sup>211</sup> “SBC Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force.” Ministry Check, 2023 (accessed 9/19/2023).

<sup>212</sup> Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Georgia M. Winters, & Benjamin N. Johnson, *Identification of Red Flag Child Sexual Grooming Behaviors*, 136 Child Abuse & Neglect 105998 (2023).

<sup>213</sup> Victor I. Vieth, *Lessons From the SBC Sexual Abuse Crisis*, 61 Fam. & Intimate Partner Violence Q. 61 (2023).

## IV. Church Policies, Biblical Analysis, and Church Response

The following reflects a synopsis of relevant policies and procedures at FBCBA, the development and expansion of the church's expectations and efforts towards safeguarding those in their care, and recommendations moving ahead.

### A. Prior Policy Implications for Prevention and Initial Church Response

Witness interviews of staff members or former staff members throughout the investigation reflected a consensus around an expectation of adherence to the "Billy Graham Rule,"<sup>214</sup> the belief that men should avoid being alone with women who are not their wives. (It is clear that Kennedy did not comply with this expectation.)<sup>215</sup> Specific policies or training were vaguely referenced by some witnesses. Actions taken by FBCBA following the alleged misconduct by Kennedy were largely understood to be installing windows in doors and receiving group consultation from the church's HR attorney.<sup>216</sup> However, there were some policies in place as early as 1995.<sup>217</sup>

For this report, GRACE reviewed three past policies: a document dated July 21, 1995, titled "Pastoral Expectations"; a document last revised on April 24, 1998, titled "A Plan for Reducing the Risk: Worker Screening and Child Protection Policies"; and an Operations Manual presented as being from 2006.

Prior to the alleged incident, FBCBA leadership thought through what the church would do if faced with such a situation.<sup>218</sup> This led to the development of some formalized policies and procedures for preventing and responding to abuse in structured ministry settings. Though policy limitations and concerns related to response are discussed below, this forethought is especially commendable in an era when many churches lacked any such policies. The tragic reality of limited resources for churches in 2006 was acknowledged by the former senior pastor around the time of the allegations: "These are the kinds of things

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<sup>214</sup> L6 Tr. at 6.

<sup>215</sup> See e.g., Section III(E), "Analysis of Potential Grooming Behavior."

<sup>216</sup> L3 Tr. at 7.

<sup>217</sup> "Pastoral Expectations." FBCBA, 1995.

<sup>218</sup> FL2 Tr. at 6: "We had policies because churches were going through times of, obviously, accusations and/or incidents that were certainly not what a church ought to be doing and not what a church would approve. So we had had some time as a church personnel team and was staffed to develop, if this were to happen at First Baptist Broken Arrow, what would we do?"

they don't teach in seminary."<sup>219</sup> In the intervening years, FBCBA has continued improving its child protection and abuse prevention policies.<sup>220</sup>

FBCBA's 1998 policy opened with a statement of purpose that acknowledged "the trust that parents/custodians extend in permitting FBC representatives the privilege and honor of caring for their minor children and conveying eternal truth to them."<sup>221</sup> It also affirmed FBCBA's commitment to providing a safe place for children. To that end, the policy required background and reference checks for "persons seeking to serve in child care and other areas involving minor children,"<sup>222</sup> including volunteer teachers. It also established supervision requirements for children's programs, including a mandate that two teachers be present at all times in most settings.

Additionally, the policy provided a basic definition of child sexual abuse<sup>223</sup> and acknowledged the need for ongoing training—both for leaders and "the church family."<sup>224</sup> The policy made special note of the need to educate parents and encourage their cooperation and mandated, "A parent handbook which will include an outline of policies and procedures of First Baptist Church will be made available to current members and subsequently through the new members class."<sup>225</sup> Though it is unclear whether this handbook was ever developed or distributed, the approach itself is commendable. The policy also called for "extensive training" for leadership and "continual training" for teachers "built into all programs that involve preschoolers, children, and youth."<sup>226</sup>

Despite these initial efforts, FBCBA's 2006 policies fell short in a few relevant ways, including in their focus and framing, their guidance on reporting and response, and their scope and clarity.

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<sup>219</sup> Email from FL2, November 16, 2006.

<sup>220</sup> See Sections IV(B), "Recommendations and Analysis of Current Policies," and IV(C)(4), "Since 2021."

<sup>221</sup> "A Plan for Reducing the Risk." FBCBA, 1998, at 1.

<sup>222</sup> The policy (*Id.* at 1-2) also required a screening form and personal interview, noting: "Decisions regarding Church personnel are not merely ministerial, but also ministerial and ecclesiastical. Therefore, on FBC's applications for personnel, inquiries will be made into the ministerial motivations for service in addition to background and reference checks."

<sup>223</sup> *Id.* at 5: "Child abuse includes, but is not limited to, physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse can be defined in two categories: touching and non-touching. Touching would be defined as, but not limited to: fondling; touching the child in an inappropriate place; inappropriate kissing. Non-touching would be defined as, but not limited to: inappropriate remarks; showing the child pornography; and watching any sexual activity. In addition, verbal abuse will include but not be limited to demeaning remarks, yelling, and foul or inappropriate language."

<sup>224</sup> *Id.* at 6: "The church family should be made aware and understand the risk of abuse in the church and the need to implement a protective plan."

<sup>225</sup> *Id.*

<sup>226</sup> *Id.*

## 1. Focus and Framing

The church policies prior to 2006 lacked a strong foundation in Biblical principles and a clear understanding of the Church's responsibility to protect children. They failed to connect the call to protect children with Biblical teachings and did not adequately address the power dynamics often present in abuse situations, particularly between clergy and congregants. The lack of clarity resulting from these omissions may have made it easier for a pastor to exploit his position of authority and engage in inappropriate interactions with a minor without raising significant concerns.

Where the prior church policy was framed as a way to “safeguard teachers” and “reduce the legal liability of our church”<sup>227</sup> in equal measure with protecting children, Scripture emphasizes protecting the vulnerable. Section V, “Responding to Allegations of Abuse,” further demonstrates a misplaced focus by encouraging leaders to investigate internally, report “immediately” to the church’s insurance company and attorney, only report to law enforcement if they judge that reasonable cause exists, and cooperate with civil authorities only with the guidance of the church’s attorney.<sup>228</sup>

The lack of emphasis on the sacred trust of those who hold power in the church stands in contrast to the responsibility that the church’s policies placed on parents. Section I began with the statement that “[p]arents/custodians must be the first line of defense in preventing child abuse. In essence, monitoring and early detection must begin and end with them.”<sup>229</sup> This is a concerning statement in a policy meant to outline how the church will protect the children when they are under the direct care and responsibility of the church. It is also a naive stance that becomes especially problematic in the face of complicated family dynamics, such as those present in the reporting victim's life.

## 2. Reporting and Response

The reporting policies in 2006 were too narrow, focusing only on incidents occurring during church-sponsored functions and neglecting abuse in other contexts. They also largely overlook the possibility of a victim who was groomed as a minor and/or assaulted as a vulnerable adult. Though the 2006 Operations Manual does contain a sexual harassment policy, it only applies to harassment between employees of the church. The policy does not speak to harassment by an employee against a member/attendee or between members/attendees.

Furthermore, the responsibility of investigating abuse allegations was placed on

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<sup>227</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>228</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>229</sup> *Id.*

church leaders, who lack the expertise and impartiality needed for a thorough investigation. In a church setting, perpetrators of abuse often groom not only the victim but also their caregivers, church leaders, and the entire community on some level. This reality means that church leaders are often in the worst possible position to conduct an effective investigation.

Prioritizing internal reporting over immediate reporting to external authorities could delay necessary intervention and potentially expose victims to further harm—which is essentially what happened in RV’s case. It is important to note that this internal investigation was conducted by individuals without formal training or expertise in trauma-informed interviewing techniques, victim advocacy, or the law. As a result, the investigation may have lacked the thoroughness and sensitivity necessary to accurately assess the situation and protect RV. Additionally, the decision not to involve law enforcement could have deprived RV of crucial support and resources. Church leaders conducted a limited internal investigation, concluded that no actual crime had been committed, and based on that arguably flawed assessment, opted not to formally report the allegations to law enforcement.

### 3. Scope and Clarity

Prior church policies suffered from vagueness and a limited scope. The definition of child abuse was too narrow, failing to encompass grooming or abuse that might continue after a victim turns 18. The policies primarily addressed structured ministry settings, neglecting the potential for abuse in unstructured environments. While training was mentioned, the policy lacked specific requirements and implementation guidelines.

Overall, church policies provided few clear guidelines on appropriate interactions between adults and minors, leaving room for interpretation and potential misconduct. For instance, the policy that would have applied to the missions trip referenced in Section III(A) of this report (“Allegations Against Matthew Kennedy”) does not list specific safeguards for interaction with students. It only has a general requirement to “seek to be above reproach in his/her actions and attitudes” and to submit to “behavioral guidelines” set by the leaders or missionary agency.

The lack of clear boundaries and guidelines likely contributed to Kennedy’s ability to engage in one-on-one meetings with a minor outside of his designated ministry group, blurring the lines of appropriate interaction. Church leaders and volunteers may not have been adequately trained to recognize potential signs of grooming or to raise concerns about inappropriate interactions they observed. The fact that many church members, including leaders, have engaged in victim-blaming narratives suggests a deeper, enduring cultural issue within the church that may have been fostered by unclear policies and

inadequate training.

## B. Recommendations and Analysis of Current Policies

The evolution of FBCBA's policies reflects a proactive effort to adapt and improve safeguarding measures. For instance, safeguarding policies now extend beyond structured ministry activities to include unstructured interactions, ensuring that staff and volunteer expectations for appropriate behavior are consistent across all contexts. The church has created a Safety Committee, and policies now define specific boundaries for safe behaviors and provide a clear mechanism for reporting policy violations.

The recommendations below aim to build upon the existing foundation, fostering a culture of safety, care, and accountability within the church community. These improvements to the clarity, scope, and Biblical integration of church policies will promote a more comprehensive and effective approach to abuse prevention and response.

### 1. Integrating a Biblical Foundation

- Integrate a strong Biblical and theological foundation into all child and student protection policies, emphasizing God's care for the vulnerable and Jesus' teachings on power dynamics.<sup>230</sup>
- Incorporate language that resonates with the Christian faith to foster a culture of care within the church community.
- Prioritize the care of survivors as a matter of Christian duty, urgency, and—in some cases—repentance, aligning with Jesus' teachings on loving our neighbors.

### 2. Establishing Clear and Comprehensive Definitions

- Define abuse broadly as the misuse of power and trust to violate or exploit someone more vulnerable.
- Incorporate specific definitions of abuse and neglect, drawing from legal and scholarly sources.

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<sup>230</sup>Church policies, while more thorough than previous versions, lack a strong Biblical and theological foundation for protecting the vulnerable. This absence is evident in prefaces, introductions, and the "Bright Lines" document, which fail to connect the church's Christian faith with its commitment to protecting the vulnerable.

- Acknowledge that abuse can occur between individuals of the same gender and implement policies that reflect this understanding.<sup>231</sup>
- Explicitly state that students who have turned 18 are still considered minors for all church policies, including reporting procedures.<sup>232</sup>

### 3. Broadening Policy Beyond Structured Ministry

- Expand policies to encompass the entire church community, not just staff and volunteers—including unstructured interactions both on and off church property.<sup>233</sup>
- Establish clear expectations for interactions with minors and vulnerable adults outside of formal ministry activities, including guidelines for touch, language, isolation, restroom use, and home interactions.
- Include safe behavior expectations for how minors and students interact with each other, particularly regarding peer-to-peer interactions.

### 4. Clarifying Boundaries and Reporting Requirements

- Make it mandatory for all adults to report child abuse, neglect, and vulnerable adult abuse to external authorities (including both child protective services and law enforcement) before reporting internally.
- Clearly distinguish between reporting policy violations and reporting abuse to encourage open communication about all safety concerns.<sup>234</sup>
- Revise the Staff Cultural Values document to mention specifically that Matthew 18 does not apply to potential abuse against a child or vulnerable adult, which should be reported to the proper authorities, then to leadership, as per policy.
- Require the full presence of a second adult during bathroom assistance

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<sup>231</sup> Policies primarily focus on preventing opposite-gender interactions, overlooking the prevalence of same-gender abuse.

<sup>232</sup> Current policies fail to address the vulnerability of 18-year-old students.

<sup>233</sup> Current policies have improved by extending staff and volunteer expectations to unstructured times. However, they do not set clear expectations for how other members and attendees should interact with minors and vulnerable adults at church or at home. This creates a significant gap in safeguarding efforts, as many abusers are not official staff or volunteers, and most child abuse occurs in homes.

<sup>234</sup> Current policies have improved by including specific boundaries for safe behaviors and a clear mechanism for reporting policy violations. However, nesting the policy for reporting policy violations under the section about reporting abuse may discourage reporting of less severe concerns due to its association with abuse allegations.



and diapering, not just proximity or an open door.

- Update the child policy to reflect the "two-adult rule" for transportation outlined in the student policy.

## 5. Proactive Team Approach

- Expand the role of the Safety Committee to oversee the implementation of broader safety policies and collaborate with other leaders to promote awareness and training. While the establishment of a Safety Committee is a positive step, its current focus is limited to protecting minors within structured ministry programs. This narrow scope overlooks the potential for abuse in other areas of church life and may not adequately address the needs of the broader congregation.
- Offer and encourage training for all members, integrating a Christian faith perspective with evidence-based information to create a comprehensive understanding of abuse prevention and response.
- Create a culture of accountability where all members understand their responsibility to report concerns about potential abuse to both external authorities and church leadership.
- Identify and address any barriers that may hinder broader congregational participation in learning and implementing safety policies.
- Establish regular safety talks for minors and students to reinforce safe behavior expectations and foster a culture of awareness and responsibility.

## 6. Screening Practices

- Incorporate social media and internet screenings into the existing process to gain a more comprehensive understanding of applicants' online behavior.
- Ensure that screening practices align with evidence-based best practices and focus on factors that directly correlate with the risk of abuse. FBCBA has established some good screening practices for staff and volunteers, but the current screening application still includes irrelevant questions. More specifically, GRACE recommends removing questions about personal experiences with abuse, as they are irrelevant to the risk of future harm and can discourage survivors from seeking support.

- Revise interview questions to focus on how well candidates understand power dynamics, appropriate boundaries, signs of abuse, and the church's commitment to protecting the vulnerable.
- Invest in training and resources for those conducting screenings to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to effectively assess potential risks and identify individuals who are a good fit to work with children.

## 7. Post-Allegation Protocols and Trauma-Informed Care

- Develop detailed post-allegation protocols based on trauma-informed principles, outlining steps for assessing safety, setting boundaries, and providing care for survivors and their families.<sup>235</sup>
- Incorporate options for independent consultation or investigation in cases where factual clarity is needed or when the church's objectivity may be compromised.
- Train leaders on the importance of these protocols and how to effectively implement them in a compassionate and trauma-informed manner.
- Develop training for leaders on trauma-informed care to ensure they are equipped to provide appropriate support and resources for survivors.

## 8. Expanding Safeguarding Beyond Child Protection

- Develop policies that address abuse against adults and name and define other common forms of abuse, including intimate partner violence, stalking, sexual assault, elder abuse, spiritual abuse, and harassment.
- Develop policies that address if, when, and how known sex offenders and others with a history of abuse or violence are allowed to participate in the congregation.

## C. Church Knowledge & Response

In considering the church's knowledge and response, it is helpful to differentiate between four distinct phases: mid-1990s, 2003-2006, 2006-2011, and since 2021. Significant and weighty challenges faced by FBCBA leadership in the period leading up to the initial allegations may have influenced their knowledge and response. Additionally, it should be

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<sup>235</sup> Current post-allegation protocols focus primarily on suspending individuals who work with children, which is an important step. However, they lack detailed guidance on other facets of a trauma-informed response.

acknowledged that people often act with good intentions, and several witnesses testified to that dynamic at FBCBA throughout these phases. Despite positive motivations, however, actions can still unintentionally cause harm or negative consequences to others. This tension highlights the importance of reflecting not just the intentions behind actions but also their actual outcomes. It encourages empathy, self-reflection, and learning from mistakes, emphasizing that good intentions alone are not enough—understanding and mitigating potential harm is equally crucial. As Romans 7:18 states, “For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.”<sup>236</sup>

## 1. Mid-1990s

RV’s family moved to Broken Arrow in the mid-1990s from the East Coast. The move was prompted by a traumatic experience of abuse that another member of the family suffered at the hands of a pastor in a large Baptist church. One witness shared:

I just brought the kids out to Tulsa trying to heal and reestablish it. So as a matter of fact, before joining the First Baptist Church [in Broken Arrow] I had a lunch with [Former Senior Pastor’s Name Redacted] to kind of briefly explain what we had been through and asked him specifically, “What do you do here to protect against sexual abuse?”<sup>237</sup>

When asked how the former senior pastor responded, the witness explained, “I think he gave me a satisfactory answer, but I can’t remember exactly what words were spoken.”<sup>238</sup> GRACE investigators asked the former senior pastor about this conversation. He told the GRACE investigators that he had no memory of it and no physical record of where the conversation took place.<sup>239</sup> However, another witness recalled hearing about the conversation:

I vaguely remember him [W2] saying that he had a conversation with [Former Senior Pastor’s Name Redacted] when he first went to First Baptist of Broken Arrow about [Role Redacted] and the challenges... And I believe I recall him saying he talked to [Former Senior Pastor’s Name Redacted] about that more or less as a reassurance that that stuff wasn’t going to happen here.<sup>240</sup>

FBCBA staff and volunteer leadership at the time displayed a measure of negligence

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<sup>236</sup> Romans 7:18 (NIV).

<sup>237</sup> W2 Tr. at 3

<sup>238</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>239</sup> FL2 Tr. at 7.

<sup>240</sup> W3 Tr. at 10.

in protecting a vulnerable family who had made known to church leadership that they were wounded and looking for a spiritual home in which to heal. Multiple witnesses articulated an impression that RV was “from a very difficult home”<sup>241</sup> and “looking for attention and affection.”<sup>242</sup> Two witnesses described her as “vulnerable,”<sup>243</sup> and several others remarked upon the instability in her home life and the problems they believed it caused.<sup>244</sup> These were apparently well-known dynamics and her intense involvement, one witness shared, “And she always was in the middle of it. She just was. It was just her personality. She's loud and she was just always in the middle of stuff. And she wanted to be involved, and this is where she came to do that.”<sup>245</sup> Another shared, “She was part of the student ministry and super involved, part of a praise team, would come to Bible studies super faithfully—not just the ones on Wednesdays and Sundays, but also even, I can't remember if it was Tuesday morning, we had another one that was early in the morning that she would come to as well.”<sup>246</sup> A former youth group participant shared:

I just felt very disappointed, because in the same way that I feel like [RV1] has talked about it was like her family, that was my family too. And so it just feels like that's who you're expecting to protect you and lead you and watch over you. And it feels like it taints a little bit some of the memories there. It didn't happen to me, of course, but it's just concerning because it's like those are the people that are supposed to be looking out for your best interest, and maybe it wasn't as safe an environment as you thought it was.<sup>247</sup>

## 2. 2003-2006

Over the course of the investigation, witnesses recalled that the youth ministry and pastoral staff faced significant challenges due to a lack of stability in staffing in addition to other issues. A leader at the time confirmed that “there was a lot of turnover, both of students... and youth ministers,”<sup>248</sup> though he framed it as a failure of youth ministers to

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<sup>241</sup> FL1 Tr. at 4.

<sup>242</sup> FS2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>243</sup> *Id.*; W3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>244</sup> L7 Tr. at 6; FL3 Tr. at 5; FL1 Tr. at 4; FS2 Tr. at 3-4.

<sup>245</sup> L7 Tr. at 6

<sup>246</sup> FS2 Tr. at 3:

<sup>247</sup> FY1 Tr. at 6

<sup>248</sup> FL2 Tr. at 5.

anticipate and adapt to the dynamics of a large church<sup>249</sup> where the youth group is “always in transition.”<sup>250</sup> However, a former staff member believed many other factors contributed to the high turnover, including high expectations, long hours, and very little time off.<sup>251</sup>

These constant changes in leadership led to feelings of instability and broken trust among the youth, making it difficult for them to form lasting connections with their spiritual leaders.<sup>252</sup> One former youth shared:

I think in the time that I was in six to 12, we had five different leaders. And so that's an emotional roller coaster when you're that age, too, when you're trying to find people that you can trust and rely on—or you think you can trust and rely on—and you form these bonds with people, and then they're like, “Bye.” It was tough.<sup>253</sup>

Organizational stability is essential for providing effective pastoral support, as it fosters trust, consistency, and a sense of security both externally for youth and internally for individual staff members and the staff as a team. It also creates the space for role clarity and specialization. High turnover often provides cover for staff performance issues due to the inherent chaos that changes and transitions create.

Additionally, the lack of organizational stability at FBCBA hindered the establishment of strong connections between Kennedy and other pastoral staff.<sup>254</sup> It also contributed to blurred boundaries regarding Kennedy's role, allowing him to consistently operate outside

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<sup>249</sup> *Id.* at 4-5: “I mean, first of all, youth people can come and go. They think it's going to be one thing, find out something, not what they thought as far as the job, and then they get discouraged. The struggle with a fast growing and dynamic community is it is not stable. Meaning you've got one group that may be your core group today, and in six months it's a different group that's moved in and there's stronger personalities or something. So the previous group kind of disseminates. And so I think for a youth leader that's been in a smaller community, smaller church where you've got the same group every Wednesday night, Sunday, this one was somewhat more challenging because you had to really be constantly engrafting the new people, integrating new people.”

<sup>250</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>251</sup> FS2 Tr. at 3: “I was a student pastor there and was only there for two and a half years. However, I was one of the longer-tenured youth pastors there, [FBCBA] just is a place that went through quite a few people... there were many dynamics [that contributed to the high turnover]. I think that there was a high expectation. I think that there was very little time off. I've heard that they have changed since I've been there, but at the time I worked six months and didn't have a single day off. It was not abnormal to work 80 to 90 hours a week during that timeframe.” *The portion of this statement about hours worked fell outside the scope of the investigation and was therefore uninvestigated. However others interviewed who worked for FBCBA at the time expressed similar concerns.*

<sup>252</sup> FL1 Tr. at 11 and RV Tr. at 12.

<sup>253</sup> FY1 Tr. at 14.

<sup>254</sup> FS2 Tr. at 4; FS1 Tr. at 5.

his designated responsibilities.<sup>255</sup> According to witness accounts, Kennedy engaging outside of college ministry was not an anomaly.<sup>256</sup> One witness recalled a friend, who had scrapbooked during their time in FBCBA's youth group, finding Kennedy "very present and visible" as she looked back at photos from their senior year camp and:

I recall we had talked about everything with each other after everything came out. And she had gone back and looked at her scrapbook from our senior year camp, and she was like, "In hindsight, Matthew was in a lot of those photos." She's like, "I guess hindsight is 20/20," but she felt very much like he had inserted himself...<sup>257</sup>

Regardless of whether his involvement with the youth group was self-guided, at the request of the church, or a combination of the two, Kennedy regularly operated outside his own role as the college/young adult/singles pastor without meaningful oversight.

Not only did Kennedy's engagement with the youth group fall outside his official role and occur without meaningful oversight, but at times it also violated the church's cultural expectation that pastors should not meet privately with congregants of the opposite sex. When asked whether it would have been acceptable within the culture of FBCBA for a male pastor to meet individually with a female congregant to discuss sexual temptations, one former leader stated that during his tenure, that would not have been allowed or accepted: "As an [role redacted], I wouldn't have allowed that. If I would've heard that, I would've confronted that."<sup>258</sup> Other witnesses corroborated this understanding of church culture,<sup>259</sup> though their recollections differed on whether this was a formal policy or an informal expectation.

As mentioned previously in Section III, the investigation also uncovered allegations of a concerning lack of accountability related to a performance issue with Matthew Kennedy. The particular issue articulated was the inappropriate use of church computers on church property during working hours. A former staff member stated that FBCBA leadership was notified about this issue at the time but did not act on it:

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<sup>255</sup> From a volunteer youth leader at the time FL3 Tr. at 17): "Matt, I did not know well because he was actually our singles pastor at the time, so he was over our singles group, but he would come to some of our events as well, I think, just to help out the guys... he was over the singles group, so he, on Sundays, would meet with all of the college students who were trying to find their way, they didn't belong in the youth, but they didn't want to be in some of the classes that had older people, so he was involved participating with them." *Also*, L7 Tr. at 5. When asked about their understanding of Matthew's duties, this leader shared: "It would've been to get to know the college kids, find out not only the ones that were local, but the ones that were from our church going out to college campuses out from the Tulsa area and really ministering to them and finding ways to minister to them."

<sup>256</sup> RV Tr. at 16.

<sup>257</sup> FY1 Tr. at 5.

<sup>258</sup> FS1 Tr. at 10.

<sup>259</sup> FL2 Tr. at 10-11; L7 Tr. at 10-11; FL3 Tr. at 13; FL4 Tr. at 7; L1 Tr. at 15.

...one time I was about to go to lunch, and Matt said, “Hey, my computer's messed up, can I use yours?” So I said, “Sure.”

Back then, I don't know if you all are familiar with old computers, how it was, but you'd sit down with Google, and you'd get ready to type in your search stuff, and there would be a dropdown of what had recently been searched, and whenever I came back that day, in the dropdown menu there was a request for pornography, and so I was upset about that.

And I know, Hey, they can track this stuff, and so I went to my supervisor and said, “Hey, this is a problem. This is what happened. I want you to timestamp that so you know that it was not me and what was going on.” And it was kind of written off as no way to prove it and so just go on, right? No confrontation about it, and that's always bothered me.<sup>260</sup>

According to details shared by W4 in Section III, near the time of Kennedy's termination, he admitted to frequent pornography use at work—so frequent that there were weeks when he could not complete his work tasks and would seek additional help and work on the weekends.<sup>261</sup> In interviews with former FBCBA leadership, no one was aware of a corrective action plan or efforts to address this behavior.<sup>262</sup>

### 3. 2006 - 2011

Section III of this report provides a comprehensive explanation of the allegations, disclosures and individual testimonies. The primary allegation revolved around a meeting on or about June 21, 2006, shortly following RV's eighteenth birthday but while she was still a participant in youth activities.<sup>263</sup> The following sequence of events was outlined by a former leader at FBCBA active in the church's response to the primary allegation at the time.<sup>264</sup>

- **July 27, 2006:** FS1 notified FL5 of “potential misconduct by one of our ministers,”<sup>265</sup> which FS1 was investigating.
- **July 28, 2006:** FS1 and FL5 met in FS1's office, where FS1 relayed the following:
  - A youth worker had approached FS1 a couple days earlier to express

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<sup>260</sup> FS2 Tr. at 8.

<sup>261</sup> W4 Tr. at 10.

<sup>262</sup> FS1 Tr. at 9-10; FS2 Tr. at 8.

<sup>263</sup> RV Tr. at 22

<sup>264</sup> Letter delivered via email from FL5 to L5, 2/14/24; Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24.

<sup>265</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24.

concerns after “she learned directly from a student in the youth ministry that the young lady had participated in consensual inappropriate physical contact with a married minister.”<sup>266</sup>

- FS1 investigated it by speaking with RV in the presence of a female staff member.<sup>267</sup> FS1 said RV described “consensual heavy petting, but not intercourse” and “expressed remorse as she knew he was married, but said he was a nice guy, and she didn't want him to get in any trouble.”<sup>268</sup> RV was offered counseling and a female staff member was assigned to act as a liaison to coordinate support.<sup>269</sup>
- FS1 reviewed the situation with FBCBA's HR/legal rep and someone from the Broken Arrow Police Department.<sup>270</sup> FS1 believed that due to “her age of 18 and expression of consent,” the incident did not need to be reported to police, though it was certainly “wrongdoing in the eyes of God.”<sup>271</sup>
- FS1 planned to speak to the then-Deacon Chairman about the issue, but had not yet.<sup>272</sup>
- **July 29, 2006:** FS1 scheduled a meeting with Kennedy, himself, *[Name Redacted]*, and FL5 at the church office. FS1 shared the allegations with Kennedy ahead of time, and Kennedy asked to bring *[role redacted]* to the meeting.<sup>273</sup>
- **July 30, 2006:** FL5 scheduled a special personnel committee meeting for Sunday morning to discuss “ending the minister's employment

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<sup>266</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24; corroborated by FL3 Tr. at 5-6.

<sup>267</sup> FL5 could not recall who the female witness was.

<sup>268</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24. Note that in contrast to this account, RV recalls being told, “You don't need to tell us what happened. We already know what happened.” (RV Tr. at 41) She further recalled: “I was very concerned about being in trouble. But I do know they did not ask me what happened. They did not have any questions for me.” (RV Tr. at 41) It is important to reiterate that RV did not recall speaking. RV remembers them saying we've spoken to Matt.

<sup>269</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24; L7 Tr. at 8; RV Tr. at 41. FL2 corroborates this and offers further insight into how this might have been handled: “And so what we would do is work with Christian Counseling Group to say, ‘Here's a matter. Can you all help us—either you or somebody?’ And that way we felt like we were trying to get the victim the very best help possible, and we would cover the cost because it was somebody within our flock.” (FL2 Tr. at 16)

<sup>270</sup> FL5 noted that this was “probably one of our security guards who was still active on the local force.” It is unclear whether a formal report was made or simply consultation with a security guard who may have been employed at a local law enforcement agency.

<sup>271</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24.

<sup>272</sup> *Id.*

<sup>273</sup> *Id.*



immediately,” providing severance to support Kennedy’s wife and child, and offering counseling for RV.<sup>274</sup> According to witness testimony and church correspondence in 2006, RV completed 1-2 counseling visits.<sup>275</sup>

- **Other Key Events:** Kennedy was excused from his duties in late July.<sup>276</sup>
- **August 1, 2006:** FBCBA records indicate that Kennedy resigned. Severance pay was initiated.<sup>277</sup>
- **September 17, 2006:** The issue and actions taken were communicated at a deacon’s meeting “with about 25 deacons present.”<sup>278</sup> This information was also shared with other select leaders around this time but was not communicated church-wide.<sup>279</sup>
- **October, 2006:** Severance pay ended.
- **Other Activities:** Meetings with church staff and lay workers on Kennedy’s support team were referenced, though no specific dates were established. The church also added windows to “every single” office door and held “quite a few very serious training meetings after this and on a regular basis after this happened.”<sup>280</sup>

Three notable issues emerged with the record of events: convoluted accounts of how the allegations arrived at the church, conflicting accounts regarding who was responsible for and managed the response for FBCBA, and the length of time it took the church to sever the employment relationship. In particular, GRACE found significant discrepancies between the account of one particular former staff member (FS1) and the accounts of other former staff and leaders regarding how the church became aware of the interaction at Matthew Kennedy’s house with RV.

FS1 claimed he couldn’t remember how he became aware of the situation: “I know it was in that timeframe that we’re talking about, but I don’t know how I heard about it. I don’t know. I can say with clarity it didn’t come from any staff because I had no staff interactions, and I had no authority in the situation.”<sup>281</sup> However, this account is contradicted by other former leaders—one of whom recalled directly telling the

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<sup>274</sup> *Id.*

<sup>275</sup> Email correspondence including L6 and/or FL2, September 15-November 29, 2006.

<sup>276</sup> W4 Tr. at 10.

<sup>277</sup> Church document and employee records.

<sup>278</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24.

<sup>279</sup> Letter delivered via email from FL5 to L5, 2/14/24.

<sup>280</sup> L3 Tr. at 7. Although L3 did not provide specific dates, he notes that the windows were added “almost immediately after.”

<sup>281</sup> FS1 Tr. at 7.

aforementioned staff member about the allegations<sup>282</sup> and one of whom recalled being told of the allegations by the aforementioned staff member.<sup>283</sup> The latter witness quoted the staff member as saying, "It's now a personnel matter, and we will take care of it,"<sup>284</sup> suggesting not only awareness of the incident but also a possible role in addressing it.

In notes shared with GRACE investigators from a conversation with FBCBA leadership, Kennedy reflected on his memory of engaging with church leadership at the time, noting that "he and his then-wife met with church leaders (he could not recall names), which led to his dismissal, and that he was not aware of any further response or actions by the church after his departure, as he had no further contact with FBCBA."<sup>285</sup> Another witness who was in that meeting corroborated the basics of Kennedy's account in a GRACE interview, saying, "So we went and talked to the pastor, and that's what they brought up, and they dismissed Matt and allowed [redacted] three months of severance with benefits."<sup>286</sup>

When describing her intersection with FBCBA's internal investigation in 2006, RV recalled a meeting with the aforementioned former staff member and another leader:

I was working at a daycare and I got a call from [former staff member, Name Redacted] who said, "I need you to come to the office. We need to talk." And I was like, "Okay." And went to the offices after work, I left work and went into his office, and [Former Leader's, Name Redacted] was in the office with him, and they said something to the effect or verbatim, "You don't need to tell us what happened. We already know what happened." And I said, "Are you going to tell my parents?" "No." And they said... they might have told me he was let go or something, but they were like, "We already talked about it; he told us what happened," and I was very concerned about being in trouble. But I do know they did not ask me what happened. They did not have any questions for me. They had no intention of calling anybody in my family or anybody that I was living with at the time.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> FL3 Tr. at 6: "So it was either the next day, I can't remember if this was on a Friday or a Thursday, but I went the next day or on Monday, and I reported it to [Name Redacted], and I believe [Name Redacted], was in the room, I think, and just I said, 'I feel as a leader, I have to report this.' And I told him that [RV] told me that Matt kissed her, and they were just shocked, couldn't believe it."

<sup>283</sup> FL1 Tr. at 5: "So then not very long after this, I'm at church maybe within a week. The kids are getting ready to go to camp. My kiddo's going, my two kiddos are going. And there's a wonderful pastor named [Name Redacted]. And [Name Redacted] stops me and brings me into his office and he's very upset, not crying or anything, but just you can tell this is an upset man. And I'm like, 'What's going on?' He goes, "[Name Redacted], I need to tell you something.' He said... 'Matt and [RV] kissed.'"

<sup>284</sup> FL1 Tr. at 9.

<sup>285</sup> Notes from phone conversation with Matthew Kennedy, 1/2/24.

<sup>286</sup> W4 Tr. at 10.

<sup>287</sup> RV Tr. at 41.

The former staff member recounted the same meeting in a phone conversation with FBCBA leaders in 2023. A current staff member took notes during that conversation:

*[Name Redacted]* and a female (maybe *Name Redacted*) sat down with RV, said that Matt had tried to kiss her. *[Name Redacted]* told the senior pastor, then personnel team, and determined to end his employment. He can't remember if she had someone with her, maybe her mother.<sup>288</sup>

The investigation revealed no family member that was contacted to accompany RV to a meeting with the church or was made aware of the situation at the time.

During GRACE's investigation, GRACE identified significant discrepancies between the aforementioned former staff member's interview with GRACE and his own previous statements—as well as the accounts of other former staff and former leaders regarding which staff member handled FBCBA's internal investigation and the conversations with Matthew Kennedy and RV.

When asked by GRACE if he took any actions or had any conversations about the situation at the time, FS1 claimed, "I heard from one of my staff that something had happened, and that it was being dealt with. I said my staff, because I just said I don't have any authority—I had an administrative assistant that she reported to me, even though I didn't do any work for the church, really."<sup>289</sup> He also denied being given any information about Kennedy's behavior, ever gaining clarity on what the allegations were, or ever having a conversation with either Kennedy or RV.<sup>290</sup> When asked about his understanding of who was dealing with the situation, the FS1 replied:

I had no idea who was dealing with it. My assumptions went back to somebody has taken my role to deal with staff, and I don't know who that was because I wasn't in any staff meetings. I didn't know whose role was what, but I just assumed somebody was taking care of it.<sup>291</sup>

Conversely, multiple other witnesses—including former staff and former leaders—characterized FS1 as actively involved in the church's response. Another former church leader, who was on a missions trip at the time, recalled FS1 calling him to explain "here's what we know and here's what we're doing."<sup>292</sup> According to a former senior leader, the church personnel team had already outlined procedures for handling a situation like

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<sup>288</sup> Notes from phone conversation, 8/31/23.

<sup>289</sup> FS1 Tr. at 7.

<sup>290</sup> *Id.*

<sup>291</sup> *Id.*

<sup>292</sup> FL2 Tr. at 6.

this, and that FS1 “was very, very good to follow those,” working “hand-in-hand” with FL5.<sup>293</sup> Similarly, FL5 recalls being contacted by FS1 on July 27, 2006: “He told me that he had been alerted of potential misconduct by one of our ministers and was investigating the situation but needed to speak with me soon.”<sup>294</sup> In a letter to the church dated 2/9/24 from [Redacted], he praised the former staff leader’s handling of the situation.<sup>295</sup>

While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact date that FBCBA became aware of an interaction between Matthew Kennedy and RV, testimonial evidence by former leaders, former staff and RV consistently reflect an early to mid-July timeframe.<sup>296</sup> Kennedy’s employment ended with his resignation on August 1, 2006. Documentation at the time indicates that the broader Deacon Board was not formally made aware of the issue until several days after Kennedy’s termination.<sup>297</sup> One former staff member described changes in the office from their perspective after this time:

Before this incident, the office doors didn't have any windows in them, so individuals didn't have any windows in their office or in their office doors. I mean, I don't remember the exact timing, but almost immediately after they added windows to every single person's door just as a safety measure. I mean all the time we went through predator training, we went through sexual harassment training, we went through all sorts of trainings that this is what to look for with predators in the church. This is our responsibility as a church. They brought the church lawyer in to say, "This is what will happen to the church if something like this happens under your watch." Basically, the lawyers will go after not only the church organization, but every single person in leadership that had any single purview anywhere near that person. We had quite a few very serious training meetings after this and on a regular basis after this happened.<sup>298</sup>

The church dismissed Kennedy relatively quickly and decisively. This effort should be commended and was a decision that may have provided protection by limiting his formal access to RV and potentially others. However, the majority of FBCBA’s response at the time was marked by strategic ignorance, selective engagement, willful innocence, a lack of communication and transparency with relevant individuals, a posture of institutional

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<sup>293</sup> *Id.* Also: “And so he and (FL5), hand in hand, walked through this, stayed in very close contact, and obviously from everything I think was done both at the time and what we’ve done looked at and looked at it after it happened when our returned, I mean, they did exactly what we would’ve asked them to do and followed the procedures very, very well.”

<sup>294</sup> Letter from FL5 to FBCBA, 2/9/24.

<sup>295</sup> *Id.*

<sup>296</sup> Letter delivered via email from FL5 to L5, 2/14/24; FL3 Tr. at 11; RV Tr. at 27.

<sup>297</sup> Letter delivered via email from FL5 to L5, 2/14/24.

<sup>298</sup> L3 Tr. at 5-6.

protection, negligence in caring for RV, and allowing a narrative of victim-blaming to flourish.

The GRACE investigation revealed that FBCBA leaders at the time engaged in three components (see footnotes):

- Strategic ignorance, or choosing to remain unaware of certain information or complexities, even when it's available. This is often done to maintain simplicity, avoid unnecessary stress, or protect a specific goal. Referring to the meeting with FS1 in 2006, RV reflected, "I think the lack of wanting to know what happened... they did not care about the truth. They just accepted this man's account of whatever that was. I was never told what he said. They didn't even tell me that, so they're not giving me a chance to confirm or deny. They did not care what I had to say. I don't feel like I spoke a lot in that interaction, other than me voicing being worried I was going to get in trouble."<sup>299</sup>
- Selective engagement, or consciously choosing to engage with information or perspectives that align with one's existing beliefs while avoiding or dismissing those that challenge them. This can lead to a reinforcement of biases and a limited understanding of different viewpoints. "When we fired Matt, I wasn't on personnel, and all I knew is he got fired. I never bothered to ask why we didn't announce why, so it just never came up before." Also, W2 Tr. at 6: "I wanted to get together with [Former Senior Pastor, Name Redacted] because I respected him. He's a good man, he was a good preacher, but I wanted to know what he was going to do to encourage [RV], let her know this was not her fault... And I wanted to know what he had done to prevent Matt from going to somewhere else. And he declined to meet with me. He said it was a personnel matter. I was very disappointed in him... to this day, I don't know what he did or didn't do to anybody."<sup>300</sup>
- Willful innocence, or a deliberate choice to maintain a sense of innocence, even in the face of difficult or unpleasant realities.<sup>301</sup> This dynamic may have been reflected in choices to "casually" collect information from third

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<sup>299</sup> RV Transcript at 45.

<sup>300</sup> L1 Tr. at 6.

<sup>301</sup> FS2 Tr. at 12: "An adult and a minister should have known that's not acceptable, should have never taken advantage of that. To be honest with you, she was kind of flirty with me at times. That doesn't matter. So I think she was struggling through fault, and I'm like, that doesn't matter, there needed to be somebody who was responsible, who took responsibility for that and didn't take advantage of that."

parties and maintain a safe distance from RV, rather than more fully and directly engaging with her.<sup>302</sup>

If leaders had acted courageously—by asking reasonable questions—further damage could have been avoided, safety promoted, and dignity saved. These dynamics undermine the strongest policies and best-equipped teams, but can be redeemed in the power of God, the example of Jesus, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the accompaniment of fellow trusted believers. Leaders can honor God and those for whom they are responsible by protecting the vulnerable, even at the cost of awkwardness and risk to themselves.

Church leadership typically holds critical informational power. While it takes incredible discernment to craft communication in situations as sensitive as the ones discussed in this report, the pursuit of transparency remains essential. Limited communication and a lack of openness can compound the harm already inflicted.

FBCBA leadership was not transparent with the congregation or staff in the aftermath of the initial allegations—and even invited silence. One former leader shared: “If I were the church back then, I would have been more communicative to us as leaders about the situation and been more transparent and then educated us better how to handle things like this.”<sup>303</sup> When she would bring up the topic, she got the impression that church leadership “wanted to shut it down, get it under the rug and move on” instead of letting it “be a teachable moment for all of us to learn what we could do.”<sup>304</sup>

One current leader recalled at least one former lay leader repeatedly expressing his belief that if current leadership were faced with the same situation at the same time, they would have made the same decisions.<sup>305</sup> Although the current leader acknowledged that “it’s hard for me to say what I would’ve done in 2006 under these circumstances,” he disagreed: “I don’t necessarily accept that even in 2006 that a consideration for transparency to the congregation would not have still been something that would’ve been appropriately and necessarily considered.”<sup>306</sup>

The world’s invitation to “circle the wagons” or unite in a defensive posture, when institutions or those employed by them fail is understandable, but there is no place for this in churches that claim to follow Jesus faithfully. Regarding the tension that churches find themselves in when dealing with their response to abuse, Wade Mullen writes:

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<sup>302</sup> See e.g., directives such as “Without telling him everything you know, you might just ask him if he has heard anything... And, has he seen [RV] lately? How is she doing? If she is here, who does she ‘get with’? Questions like that....maybe we can determine how much is really fact and what is fiction.” FL2 email dated November 14, 2006.

<sup>303</sup> FL1 Tr. at 11.

<sup>304</sup> FL1 Tr. at 11.

<sup>305</sup> L5 Tr. at 18.

<sup>306</sup> *Id.*

This is really what it comes down to when abuse is exposed, when darkness is brought to light: Who will do whatever it takes to overcome a scandal, and who will do all they must to pursue what is right? Those who are governed by integrity will do whatever it takes to establish the truth and correct wrongs, even if it means giving up their power. Those governed by power will do only what is necessary to prevent or quell scandal so as to not risk losing that power. They are crisis managers, first and foremost, not truth seekers.<sup>307</sup>

When FBCBA found itself facing that tension in the late summer of 2006, it demonstrated a distinct lack of appetite for pursuing what was right when doing so might threaten the harmony and well-being of the church. One witness recalled a conversation with RV's father, who said that when he went to a former leader about the incident, he was told "they just needed to pray about it."<sup>308</sup> Throughout her interview, RV reflected on the church's "damaging" response, noting that the church did not reach out to anyone else in her life or do anything to indicate she wasn't at fault:

I feel like they had an opportunity to course-correct the damage that had been done, and they chose to sweep it under the rug. They chose to ignore it... They did not want it to affect their profits.<sup>309</sup>

I don't know at what age you can justify not trying to reach out to someone else in that person's life, but I don't know how they wouldn't. I feel like maybe you didn't know me since I was in third grade, but people in that place did. I mean, there's a lot of people there. I'm not saying I'm VIP at that church at all, but I was around for a long time. I feel like... I don't know. I can't imagine people's fear of their reputation being tarnished or whatever getting in the way of their compassion of one of their own.<sup>310</sup>

FBCBA offered to connect RV to counseling in the summer of 2006, and there is evidence that she attended for 1-2 sessions,<sup>311</sup> but GRACE uncovered no other attempts by the church to provide support prior to 2021. One leader recalled being instructed to check in on RV and "make sure that she knows we want to help her go to counseling."<sup>312</sup> She described conversations with RV as "polite" but "very short" and "awkward," possibly due to her being "the mom of friends."<sup>313</sup> She went on to reflect, "I don't think that's what she was

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<sup>307</sup> Wade Mullen. "Something's Not Right: Decoding the Hidden Tactics of Abuse—and Freeing Yourself from Its Power." Tyndale Momentum, 2020.

<sup>308</sup> W3 Tr. at 4.

<sup>309</sup> RV Tr at 43.

<sup>310</sup> RV Tr. at 47.

<sup>311</sup> Email from L6 to FL2, November 29, 2006.

<sup>312</sup> L7 Tr. at 8.

<sup>313</sup> *Id.*

interested in at the time. And I understand that.”<sup>314</sup>

The absence of additional follow-up with RV is significant, given awareness within FBCBA upper leadership of RV’s concerns a few months later:

...I got word from [redacted] that [RV] was back and has been talking about her situation with [redacted] and has expressed that ‘...she has major problems because of this situation.’ That is all I have, but [redacted] was concerned about the situation and the fact that she just turned 18 earlier this year. I wanted to get this to you so that if there is some action we need to take we can do so quickly.<sup>315</sup>

[Redacted] confirmed that... [RV] did state that she has major problems because of this.<sup>316</sup>

In reflecting on the care she received from FBCBA at the time, RV repeatedly expressed disappointment in the lack of compassion she felt in the church’s response:

I feel like they were mitigating consequences. I feel like it was irresponsible. I feel like it was... it lacked compassion. I felt like they... I don't know the adjective, but they did absolutely nothing to tell me what happened was wrong.<sup>317</sup>

I wish they had done anything even to say in that moment, “We're so sorry. This should never happened.” There was no compassion. There was no foresight. They were grown up people... I don't know, I just feel so let down by people whose homes I've been in, you know?<sup>318</sup>

The subsequent distance between FBCBA and RV may have made it easier to build stories that blamed RV for her victimization. Victim-blaming and disparaging language were common themes that emerged in the investigation - specifically, that she's known to be untruthful and that she was promiscuous. One former leader told GRACE investigators:

I'm going to be totally honest. When I read the letter, the first thing I thought of was, “[RV]’s at it again. She's back to her old ways.” [RV] was a very troubled girl. She had a really rough past, really rough past. She was known for hanging on to guys, just desperate for attention, and was an attention grabber. She just was desperate for some kind of attention. In fact, none of

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<sup>314</sup> *Id.*

<sup>315</sup> Email from L6 to FL2, November 13, 2006. Additional context in these email exchanges included whether counseling had been offered to RV.

<sup>316</sup> Email from L6 to FL2, November 15, 2006.

<sup>317</sup> RV Tr. at 43.

<sup>318</sup> RV Tr. at 50-51.



our youth guys liked her because she would just run up to them, and she's a very loud, very loud girl.<sup>319</sup>

When asked whether they had ever known RV to lie about something significant, another leader said:

We could never believe what was going on with [RV]. I don't have specific examples right now because it's been too long ago. But we never knew what she was talking about from her life at home, her life at school. We just could never figure out what was real and what wasn't. But we also knew she was so broken and hurting that we just needed to try to love her.<sup>320</sup>

One of the things that was very challenging about [RV]—and I absolutely hate to hear myself talk this way, but it's just what happened—I think she was so broken and so hurting and so in need, she flailed herself at young youth-pastory types. Regular guys in the youth group really wouldn't want to have anything to do with her. She was very loud, very... acted out all the time, was a hard kid to be around.<sup>321</sup>

No witnesses that characterized RV as being untruthful provided a specific example to support these claims, even when prompted. Other witnesses leaned into narratives that painted RV as promiscuous. While it is important to note unwanted sexual acts can be perpetrated on someone with a long history of sexual activity, there was no evidence of that being the case for RV. RV's description of her sexual experience up to that date undercut other narratives:

The most I had done was [redacted]. But that experience with Matt, it was all very new and very confusing and very alarming. And I mean, it's a lot of information, but it is something that does not go over well to this day. I think when I think about it happening, it's like, again, not objectively, but I did not understand it. It was not something I had experienced. It was very bizarre interaction and very uncomfortable, and I think novice and not the way that that should be explored. Not someone's like introduction to that.<sup>322</sup>

This account is in stark contrast to some of the narratives<sup>323</sup> that witnesses familiar with this case shared, though in one instance the witness became curious about his own narrative over the course of the interview. At the beginning of the interview, L1 recounted

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<sup>319</sup> FL3 Tr. at 5.

<sup>320</sup> FL1 Tr. at 12.

<sup>321</sup> *Id.* at 4.

<sup>322</sup> RV Tr. at 35.

<sup>323</sup> L2 Tr. at 7 and W8 Tr. at 6.

something that he'd heard in a FBCBA context, "She called her not a nice name, because her reputation was kind of the mattress if you want."<sup>324</sup> Later in the interview, this witness reflected, "Did Matt have a hand in causing some promiscuity on her part or was it already there? Timing-wise, I just don't know, and if he did, God help us all because that's far worse than what my original thought was. If he had a hand in driving her that way—oh my gosh, that's terrible."<sup>325</sup>

Forming and spreading negative judgments about RV without articulable substantiation was a common theme in witness interviews. Seven of the twenty-three individuals GRACE interviewed articulated these beliefs themselves.<sup>326</sup> Four of the twenty-three individuals reflected beliefs about RV's promiscuity they heard from others.<sup>327</sup> Eleven of the twenty-three witnesses either had heard disparaging language or used this type of language themselves.

RV described similar themes in active outreach she experienced in 2011 from people connected to FBCBA. During her first year at college, a friend called to discuss things she had heard from women in the church who had children RV's age: "They had said I was flirting and that they would see us [*RV and Kennedy*] together alone a lot."<sup>328</sup> RV could not recall if they had specifically used the word "seduced" but said the language her friend described made it very clear that these women considered RV to be the instigator of the incident: "There was no language that was used that was, *Oh my God, I heard something happened to you. It was, I heard a rumor of something you did.*"<sup>329</sup>

RV also described a Facebook message she received in 2011 that referenced Kennedy and said, "I just heard that you had an affair with a married man... I can't believe you're a homewrecker, that you would do this."<sup>330</sup>

RV did not feel she really knew the sender, nor did she remember talking to him while she was in high school. She knew him only as a camp counselor at FBCBA's summer day camp, which she attended through at least eighth grade.<sup>331</sup> She described the message's tone as, "*Homewrecker, you've had an affair, you did this to a married man, shame, shame, shame, and okay, bye.*"<sup>332</sup> (See screenshot below.)

A former staff member recalled RV's sense of betrayal at the time, saying:

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<sup>324</sup> L1 Tr. at 4.

<sup>325</sup> L1 Tr. at 10.

<sup>326</sup> L1 Tr. at 4, FL1 Tr. at 4, FS2 Tr. at 12, W8 Tr. at 6, FL2 Tr. at 9, FL3 Tr. at 5 and Email from FL5 to L5, 2/14/24.

<sup>327</sup> L5 Tr. at 11, RV Tr. at 38, W3 Tr. at 6 and L1 Tr. at 4.

<sup>328</sup> RV Tr. at 37.

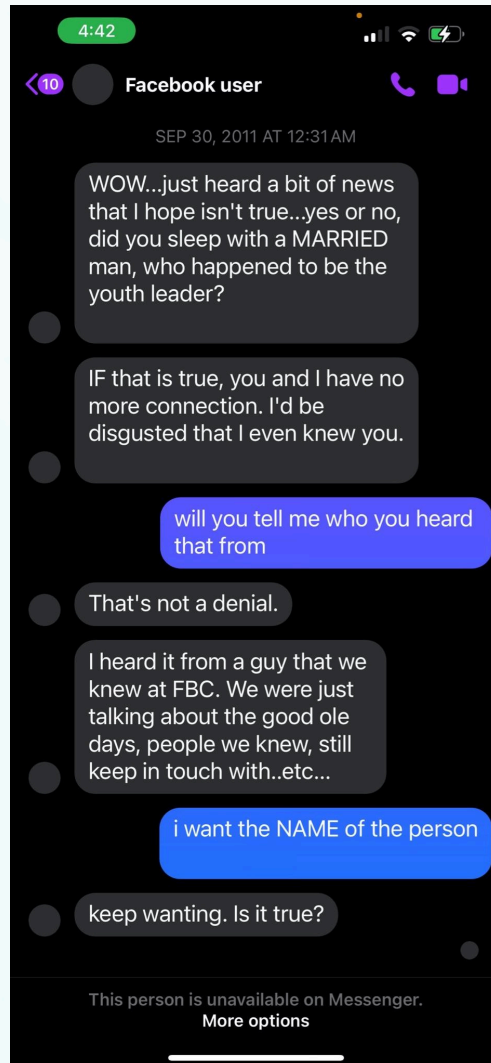
<sup>329</sup> *Id.*

<sup>330</sup> RV Tr. at 38.

<sup>331</sup> *Id.*

<sup>332</sup> *Id.*

“She felt like the church was kind of vilifying her, making her feel like she had done it, and like I said—she was flirtatious, and she was in need—but I think that they then just said, Well, it's kind of your fault, and I've never agreed with that stance, nor have I ever wanted her to believe that either.”<sup>333</sup>



When asked if he felt RV’s concerns were valid, the witness said, “Being familiar with the culture, yes. And knowing who she was, I could see why people would love to blame it on her.”<sup>334</sup> He went on to say:

This was not a place where anybody wanted to hear that there was a problem. If there was a problem, it would've been much easier to point that out as being somebody else's fault, and I think that that's how she was made to feel. She did tell me that somebody specifically had said it was her fault

<sup>333</sup> FS2 Tr. at 7.

<sup>334</sup> FS2 Tr. at 8.

and had been upset with her tempting Matt... Now I'm not for sure who that was, but that was the culture that it was her fault.<sup>335</sup>

These narratives and judgments only served to distance witnesses from personal and corporate responsibility while reinforcing and reflecting the narrative conveyed by the perpetrator during the sexual assault itself: "And he also called me a slut and told me to say that I was a slut. So I do remember saying that out loud."<sup>336</sup> This is also the exact narrative that RV connected to her attempt to end her life, as discussed in Section III(D)(3).

Furthermore, this talk did not remain isolated to FBCBA community members. It seems there was enough disparaging communication about RV that it even reached outside the FBCBA community. One witness who did not attend FBCBA recounted an interaction with a lady in her small group whose son knew RV:

I just remember she came up to me one night, and she said, "Didn't that girl that has all the problems live with you?" And I said—I was shocked that she would say that. And I said, "Well, RV lived with me, and she's the girl who has a lot of people in her life who have let her down. She's not the problem."<sup>337</sup>

The impulse to blame victims is sadly not uncommon, especially in cases of sexual abuse. However, it is crucial to understand that victims are never to blame for the harm inflicted upon them. As therapist and trauma specialist Diane Langberg aptly stated, "It is always the responsibility of the person with power to maintain the integrity of the relationship." In this case, the power lay with Kennedy—not with RV.

Shifting blame onto the victim creates a hostile environment that further traumatizes survivors and discourages them from coming forward and seeking help. Victims are often targeted due to their vulnerability, not because they are somehow "asking for it." There is ample evidence in this case that Kennedy groomed RV for years (see Section III(E), Analysis of Potential Grooming Behavior), manipulating her and making her feel responsible or complicit in their interactions. When bystanders or authority figures engage in victim-blaming, they echo Kennedy's manipulative tactics and reinforce harmful distortions that impede healing.

In contrast to these narratives, peer witnesses shared their memories and perspectives of RV and the deep connection they shared to FBCBA:

I've literally known [RV] since I was 11 years old, I think... And we did everything together. That was our core friend group. We were in different school districts, but our youth group, that's where all of my core formative

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<sup>335</sup> *Id.*

<sup>336</sup> RV Tr. at 30.

<sup>337</sup> W3 Tr. at 6.

memories are, and she's a part of that. From Wednesday to Sunday to church choir to missions trips to all the subsequent youth camps that we have. And I just always remember it was really our home away from home. And I look back on all of that time very fondly. Those people at church really were my closest friends. Like I mentioned, we were in different school districts, but literally our prom nights were the same. We went over to [RV]'s house to get ready for the prom. And my prom pictures are at her house with her and all of the girls.<sup>338</sup>

Another peer witness shared, "She's super outgoing, friendly. Everyone knew who she was. RV wanted to be very involved in church and youth group. She was very involved."<sup>339</sup>

The church's failure—both corporately and individually—to offer meaningful support at the time of disclosure and the subsequent spreading of harmful rumors demonstrated a profound lack of understanding and compassion towards RV.

In contrast, a response could have centered on the question Jesus asked His followers, "Who is my neighbor?" This could have demonstrated leadership that:

- Compassionately sought to understand RV's experience, leading to informed and impactful action.
- Included specialized voices in consultation with law enforcement and therapists.
- Prompted proactive outreach to RV's father and provided pastoral or therapeutic support for the family walking another traumatic path.
- Informed the congregation about the nature of Kennedy's actions, empowering them to protect vulnerable individuals and replace speculation and uncertainty with wisdom and guidance.

In short, this could have been restorative.

## 4. Since 2021

FBCBA reengaged with RV in September 2021<sup>340</sup> following notification that the church had been tagged in the Facebook post outlined earlier under "Allegations Against Matthew Kennedy." One FBCBA leader recalled immediate considerations about what to

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<sup>338</sup> FY1 Tr. at 4-5.

<sup>339</sup> W6 Tr. at 5.

<sup>340</sup> L5 Tr. at 3: "When we first became aware of the allegation, it was through her social media post that she did not directly alert us to, but rather simply tagged us in it. So our communications director here, who of course monitors our social media accounts, saw that pretty quickly, saw that immediately that we had been tagged..."

do, saying, “We acknowledged that we needed to do something. We couldn't just ignore it. We didn't feel like that that was the right thing to do.”<sup>341</sup> Another FBCBA leader shared, “We were horrified by these allegations, heartbroken by these allegations, but we didn't want to run from them. We wanted to run right at them, and we wanted to shine a light. We wanted to make a difference. We wanted to honor Christ.”<sup>342</sup>

The church reported the allegations to law enforcement.<sup>343</sup> After “prayerful consideration” and counsel from the SBC’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, which provides policy and resource support to Southern Baptists, FBCBA reached out to RV to see if she was willing to meet.<sup>344</sup> One church leader explained:

I think due to some of the strong convictions about past leadership and positional authority, I wanted to be careful that, as [role redacted] here, that I wasn't imposing unintentionally or intentionally my authority on any conversation.<sup>345</sup>

RV responded that she would be in town for Christmas and would be interested in meeting at that time. Another leader shared that the meeting was about an hour long and took place at an offsite location that they felt “would be conducive to having conversation without interruption.”<sup>346</sup> Accounts from FBCBA leadership,<sup>347</sup> RV, and another witness<sup>348</sup> who attended the December meeting all reflect that the meeting was positive and productive. RV shared the following thoughts and recollections:

I was surprised, I guess, ultimately—and still am a little bit. I've racked my brain to try to think, Am I being naïve somehow to trust this? I have been a little bit uncertain about how I feel.<sup>349</sup>

I just basically said, “No one asked me what happened, and I'm going to make you listen to what happened.”<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> L5 Tr. at 3.

<sup>342</sup> L4 Tr. at 4.

<sup>343</sup> “Addressing Our Past.” FBCBA, 2024, [www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast](http://www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast).

<sup>344</sup> L5 Tr. at 3.

<sup>345</sup> L4 Tr. at 5.

<sup>346</sup> L5 Tr. at. 4.

<sup>347</sup> L5 Tr. at 4: “We mostly just listened. I would estimate that during the course of that one hour meeting, [RV] probably did 95% of the talking and we did 5% of the talking. And so that was our goal. Our goal was just simply to hear from her, to hear her story, to hear her perspective on what had happened to her and to offer our compassion and our listening ear and that sort of thing.”

<sup>348</sup> W3 Tr. at 4: “They were very, I would say very kind, very willing to listen. The male pastor, and I can't remember his name, was genuinely very moved by what happened. It was like, ‘You want us to launch an investigation? What do you want us to do? We're willing to do anything...’ And they were very, I think, genuinely receptive. When I talked to [RV], she felt like she had been heard.”

<sup>349</sup> RV Tr. at 48.

<sup>350</sup> *Id.*

I felt like [Name Redacted] responded in a very genuine way of in sadness and with compassion... I felt like he is hearing me out. They took the time. They just want to try to do the right thing.<sup>351</sup>

RV recalled the meeting ending with FBCBA leadership saying, “Well, you let us know if there's something you need from us.”<sup>352</sup>

In August of 2023, RV reached back out to FBCBA expressing gratitude for the meeting in 2021 and making three requests: (1) That Mr. Kennedy be reported to the Southern Baptist Convention; (2) That FBCBA’s current policies and procedures for abuse prevention and response be analyzed and accounted for; and (3) That FBCBA provide some tangible consideration for the suffering she has experienced.<sup>353</sup>

The church connected RV with a professional advocate with expertise in sexual abuse within institutions and collaborated with RV and her advocate closely.<sup>354</sup> FBCBA provided funding for trauma-focused therapy to RV for one year beginning September 2023, ending September 2024.<sup>355</sup> In late 2023, FBCBA began the process of engaging GRACE as a third-party, independent entity to conduct an investigation. The execution of an Engagement Agreement between FBCBA and GRACE occurred on January 3, 2024.<sup>356</sup> FBCBA leadership connected by phone with Matthew Kennedy on January 2, 2024 and another individual who was close to Kennedy at the time of the allegations to make them aware of the investigation.<sup>357</sup>

At the end of the Sunday service on January 14, 2024, FBCBA’s Senior Pastor told the congregation:

As your Pastor, I pray and ask the Lord that I would honor and glorify him during this time, that I would speak remorsefully but clearly in regard to the alleged incident that took place in the early 2000s in our church. Church family, your church leadership needs to share a matter of great importance with you. Despite its sensitivity, it's necessary to bring this to your attention.<sup>358</sup>

He went on to share about the church’s actions, encouraged those with knowledge of the incident to reach out to GRACE Investigators, acknowledged the range of emotions likely felt by those in the room, and ended by encouraging the congregation: “May we never

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<sup>351</sup> *Id.*

<sup>352</sup> *Id.*

<sup>353</sup> "Addressing Our Past." FBCBA, 2024, [www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast](http://www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast).

<sup>354</sup> RV Tr. at 49.

<sup>355</sup> RV Tr. at 49.

<sup>356</sup> FBCBA and GRACE Engagement Agreement, 1/3/24.

<sup>357</sup> Notes from phone call with Matt, 1/2/24; W4 Tr. at 25.

<sup>358</sup> Transcript from sermon 1/14/24. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgBa-aXyG8o>. Accessed 7/15/24.

think responding with compassion, unconditional care, and love, and seeking truth and restoration is a distraction to our church's mission but rather a vital part of our mission of reaching BA and beyond."<sup>359</sup> An easy-to-access webpage titled "Addressing Our Past" was also created to document this message and the actions taken by FBCBA.<sup>360</sup>

When asked about her thoughts on how it's been handled and monitored in the last few years, RV voiced a "cautious optimism,"<sup>361</sup> saying it was "very empowering to feel like my ask and my voice had any sort of effect."<sup>362</sup> She went on to say:

I'm not going to say this restores my faith in anybody or any institution, but I will say, it is good to know that human beings exist that want to do right by another human, and I want to think that's the type of person [Name Redacted] and [Name Redacted] are... they have responded to me in a way that has made me feel like my pain matters, I guess. I think I told them I just don't want to carry this any more alone, and that's what I've had to do. I think they have responded in a way that feels like they are carrying some of that, and if that follows through, I guess I have a lot of gratitude for that.<sup>363</sup>

The investigation did not reveal any major procedural or substantive missteps on FBCBA's part since 2021. Biblical and trauma-informed practices were followed, RV was kept involved, the broader church was alerted with sensitivity and transparency, experts were engaged, action steps were decisive but carefully considered, and hearts seemed to remain malleable and trusting in God's directives.<sup>364</sup> We encourage FBCBA to continue to commit itself to grace, faithfulness, and confidence in God's goodness in the days ahead. This is holy and important work.

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<sup>359</sup> *Id.*

<sup>360</sup> "Addressing Our Past." FBCBA.org, 2024, [www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast](http://www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast).

<sup>361</sup> RV Tr. 49.

<sup>362</sup> *Id.*

<sup>363</sup> *Id.*

<sup>364</sup> L5 Tr. at 17 & 21. *Also*, L4 Tr. at 4: "It became very, very clear that the Lord had placed on my heart intentional engagements. We were horrified by these allegations, heartbroken by these allegations, but we didn't want to run from them. We wanted to run right at them, and we wanted to shine a light, we wanted to make a difference, we wanted to honor Christ."



## V. Trauma-Informed Practice and Recommendations

The scope of FBCBA's Engagement Agreement<sup>365</sup> clearly reflected the request<sup>366</sup> of RV to assess current policies and procedures. This assessment and recommendations are covered in the previous section. In addition to those, the following analysis considers the six principles of trauma-informed practice articulated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): Safety; Trustworthiness and Transparency; Peer Support; Collaboration and Mutuality; Empowerment, Voice, and Choice; and Cultural, Historical, and Gender Factors.<sup>367</sup> The distinctive features of these also naturally align with Biblical principles.<sup>368</sup>

### A. Safety

Establishing a secure church environment involves guaranteeing the physical and psychological safety of both staff and congregation members, irrespective of age. This encompasses maintaining a physically secure space and nurturing interpersonal relationships that cultivate a sincere feeling of safety. Prioritizing safety, as defined by the individuals being served, holds paramount significance.<sup>369</sup> GRACE recommends the following:

- Consider the facilitation of a service of lament related to the pain addressed by this investigative report. A service of lament can be an opportunity for prayer, fellowship, collective understanding, and honoring RV, who came forward to share her experiences, through a prominent apology. Engaging with "A Church Called Tov" by Scott

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<sup>365</sup> FBCBA and GRACE Engagement Agreement, 1/3/2024: "GRACE shall assess FBCBA's present environment and culture pertaining to its response to the alleged abuse and recommend any changes or additions to policies, practices, and protocols designed to prevent and respond to sexual abuse in the church."

<sup>366</sup> "Addressing Our Past." FBCBA.org, 2024, [www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast](http://www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast): "That FBCBA's current policies and procedures for abuse prevention and response be analyzed and accounted for."

<sup>367</sup> See generally "SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach." SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

<sup>368</sup> See generally Pete Singer. "Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church: Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse." *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Volume 51, Issue 1, p. 62–76, 2024; Andrea D. Clements. "The Trauma Informed Church: Walking With Others Toward Flourishing." Uplift Press, 2023; Jennifer Baldwin. "Trauma-Sensitive Theology: Thinking Theologically in the Era of Trauma." Cascade Books, 2018.

<sup>369</sup> "SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach." SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

McKnight could support FBCBA leaders as they consider this recommendation.

- Continued development of a robust understanding of restitution for trauma survivors by FBCBA Leaders and Deacons. The book “Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice” by Judith Herman, MD, could provide support in this endeavor.
- Continued collaboration with RV to provide practical support in the manner requested by her to address Kennedy’s imposition of harm.
- Offer regular training to staff and leaders on grooming dynamics,<sup>370</sup> misuses of power, abuse and other forms of misconduct, internal and external reporting protocols, bystander intervention, and trauma-informed leadership, by an organization like Trauma Informed Churches<sup>371</sup> or GRACE. Additionally, the Zero Abuse Project provides “Keeping Faith,” a semiannual training that focuses on the intersection of abuse and faith. This training is offered remotely.
- Consider additional ways to address spiritual, physical, and psychological safety.<sup>372</sup>
- Assign an employee to periodically check in with youth and parents to make sure they are comfortable with a particular group leader/volunteer and that there are no violations of the policies. This will give youth and parents an opportunity to discuss any concerns. It may also be a means by which to grow the skills of the group leader or to detect leaders who are particularly strong.
- No church is prepared or equipped to serve every family/individual that encounters them, all of the time. Consider how to appropriately and transparently share relevant challenges that the church body is facing with potential congregants/participants and know local churches well-enough to make informed referrals to individualized ministry

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<sup>370</sup> Examples of organizations that provide this type of training include Darkness to Light [see Darkness to Light, <https://www.d2l.org/>] and Rainn [see RAINN, <https://www.rainn.org/>]. Training should include increasing an understanding of the dynamics of clergy abuse. See also Diana R. Garland & Christen Argueta. “How Clergy Sexual Misconduct Happens: A Qualitative Study of First-Hand Accounts.” *Social Work & Christianity*, Volume 37, 2010.

<sup>371</sup> Trauma Informed Churches, <https://www.traumainformedchurches.org/>.

<sup>372</sup> Pete Singer. “Toward a More Trauma-Informed Church: Equipping Faith Communities to Prevent and Respond to Abuse.” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, Volume 51, Issue 1, p. 62-76, 2024. Available at <https://www.currentsjournal.org/index.php/currents/article/view/444/483>.

contexts when appropriate.

## B. Trustworthiness and Transparency

In a culture characterized by trustworthiness and transparency, organizational operations and decisions are carried out with the aim of establishing and preserving trust among congregants, staff, and other stakeholders in the organization.<sup>373</sup> GRACE recommends the following:

- Share relevant and appropriate information from this report directly with other organizations where Matthew Kennedy would have had any type of position of authority over children or others who are vulnerable.<sup>374</sup>
- Provide training to leaders on indications of true repentance.
- Consider resources available through the Center for Courage and Renewal.<sup>375</sup>
- Consider naming the key individuals involved in and overseeing the response in 2006.
- Develop whistleblower policies that are developmentally appropriate and share them across the church in settings that promote understanding about them (e.g., Deacon Meetings, Staff Meetings, Youth Group, and Small Groups).

## C. Peer Support

Peer support and mutual self-help are essential elements in nurturing safety and hope, building trust, promoting collaboration, and drawing upon individual stories and lived experiences to advance the processes of recovery and healing.<sup>376</sup> Peers have also been referred to as “trauma survivors.”<sup>377</sup>

Current FBCBA leadership offered peer support to RV through listening to her experience, believing her experience, and quickly acting to respond to the harm caused. FBCBA should also consider the following possible actions to promote peer support:

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<sup>373</sup> “SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.” SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

<sup>374</sup> See Section IV.B.

<sup>375</sup> Center for Courage and Renewal, <https://couragerenewal.org/partner-with-center-for-courage-renewal/>.

<sup>376</sup> “SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.” SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

<sup>377</sup> *Id.*

- Leadership and staff training on common dynamics relating to the disclosure and perpetration of sexual harassment, assault, and abuse, with an emphasis on the dynamics of clergy sexual abuse against both children and adults.
- Prepare pastors, staff, and volunteers to recognize indications that a person may be experiencing abuse by a church person outside of the church, or by an abuser in another environment, such as a parental figure, teacher, relative, coach, doctor, peer, etc.
- Connect with peer support groups such as Empower Survivors (child sexual abuse) and Restored Voices Collective (adult clergy sexual abuse) to include survivor perspectives and lived experiences in decision-making processes.

## D. Collaboration and Mutuality

At the heart of partnership lies collaboration and mutual respect, which serve to equalize power dynamics within both the staff and congregation, as well as across all levels of organizational staff. This approach recognizes that healing thrives within relational contexts and through the equitable distribution of power, fostering active participation in decision-making processes.<sup>378</sup>

FBCBA has taken significant steps to collaborate with others after receiving the allegations including, law enforcement, SBC governance, RV and her advocate, and the media. FBCBA can further demonstrate collaboration and mutuality through the following proposed measures:

- Promote equitable accountability to policies, shared values, and decisions regardless of role or association.
- Proactively grow a list of trusted community resources for collaboration and referral. One option may be to collaborate with local child advocacy centers and several licensed professional counselors who specialize in trauma.

## E. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice

Empowerment, voice, and choice reflect churches that recognize the significance of power imbalances, acknowledging historical instances where members had limited voice

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<sup>378</sup> *Id.*

and choice and were subjected to coercive treatment.<sup>379</sup> The role of staff and leadership is to facilitate recovery rather than exert control over it. Staff are empowered to do their work as well as possible by adequate organizational support. This mutual process emphasizes the importance of ensuring that staff members, like those receiving services, feel a sense of safety.<sup>380</sup>

Since 2021, FBCBA empowered RV by hearing her story, taking immediate action to both uncover the truth and notify others, to connect RV to a professional advocate, and to pay for RV's counseling for one year beginning September 2023, ending September 2024. Empowerment, Voice, and Choice can be further enhanced at FBCBA through the implementation of a Safeguarding team, as discussed in Section IV, which would provide multiple avenues to report boundary crossing behavior and assurance that the whistleblower will not be retaliated against for disclosing the behavior. FBCBA can further empower those within its community by:

- Collaborating with the reporting victim to determine the best ways to communicate this report.
- Investing in radical candor for all staff and volunteer leadership. Receiving training in communicating “personal care and speaking directly.”<sup>381</sup>
- Developing guidelines for managing power differentials in pastoral and other counseling or discipleship interactions that staff and volunteers may have.

## F. Cultural, Historical, and Gender Factors

Cultural, historical, and gender considerations are characterized by the church actively transcending cultural stereotypes, providing fair access to responsive services. This includes implementing policies, protocols, and processes that address the specific needs of individuals served, while also acknowledging and addressing historical trauma.<sup>382</sup> GRACE recommends the following:

- Examining strategies to mitigate the potential risks associated with predominantly male leadership, aiming to prevent inadvertent failure to consider crucial gender-related dynamics and to involve women in meaningful roles at FBCBA, within its denominational polity.

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<sup>379</sup> *Id.*

<sup>380</sup> *Id.*

<sup>381</sup> Kim Scott. “Radical Candor.” St. Martin's Press, 2019.

<sup>382</sup>“SAMHSA’s Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach.” SAMHSA, 2014, [store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf).

- Committing to accountability at all leadership levels.
- Seeking consultation and exploring the ways in which the philosophy and teachings of “purity culture” causes harm to survivors of abuse.

## VI. Conclusion

GRACE commends RV, who came forward to speak about her harmful experiences and fought to sustain her own well-being despite the consequences of abuse and institutional betrayal. GRACE wants to acknowledge the moral courage, loving sacrifice, and integrity demonstrated by RV. First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow owes a debt of gratitude to her as she attempted to bring truth into the light.

GRACE also commends First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow for its commitment to truth and light through their response since 2021 and the initiation of this independent investigation. By continuing to respond to this report with truth and compassion, First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow has the opportunity to demonstrate the transformative love of Jesus, which is able to liberate and heal the individuals who have been affected by these matters and the greater body of Christ at First Baptist Church of Broken Arrow as a whole.

Additionally, as one of the largest congregations in the Southern Baptist Convention, FBCBA leadership could be a powerful catalyst for godly responses to the issues of misconduct and abuse in the denomination and indeed the country, just as RV has undoubtedly catalyzed safety and healing for other vulnerable individuals. As FBCBA leadership has affirmed before, “May we never think responding with compassion, unconditional care, and love, and seeking truth and restoration is a distraction to our church’s mission but rather a vital part of our mission”—this is gospel work.<sup>383</sup> We hope for continued faithfulness, and an example that will inspire other churches to take action to protect the vulnerable.

Respectfully Submitted,  
GRACE

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<sup>383</sup> Addressing Our Past." FBCBA.org, 2024, [www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast](http://www.fbcba.org/addressingourpast).

# Appendix A

*The following text is from a photo shared by RV in a Facebook post dated September 15, 2021.*

## **i think of you.**

i have thought of you nearly every day since june 2006.

For months i thought about the secret we shared . i thought about your wife and your son . i thought about what people would think of me and the sin i committed . i just let it happen. i thought about how bitter you tasted, the glass of water you handed me and how you hugged me afterward . you begged me not to tell anyone what we did.

i thought of what you said to me and what you made me say out loud , “i’m a slut” and i believed it . and i thought of you every time i said it to myself . honestly to this day, i still wonder if it’s true . i thought of you when i went home that night to write about the shame i felt . and how i threw that journal away because the weight of it was too heavy to pack in any box.

i thought about you ... until i had to talk about you and i defended you when they told me you were to blame because, of course, it had to be my fault . mine. the seductress , the woman . but actually the girl . the girl who just froze as she watched you use her body in the reflection of the french doors .

i thought about you when they brought me in to tell my side of the story. but i didn’t speak . they spoke. and they told me you had already told the story. what did you say ? did you tell them how you told me you had wanted me for such a long time . we met when i was maybe 15, on a trip to mexico, you asked me to stay up late and teach you how to throw a softball. did you tell them you said you wanted to \*\*\*\* me but you held back because you knew i was a virgin . or did you tell them i flirted with you. that i wanted it too. i might never know . they didn’t need to me tell anyone my story. i had turned 18 ten days before you entered me. as an adult, i could take responsibility for my own actions and for yours. lucky you.

i thought about how i trusted you. i think i was even attracted to you . you noticed me and it made me trust you . you were safe. untouchable you, the pastor .

i thought of you when the staring started. i thought of you when you slipped

away and no one cared to say anything out loud, they whispered though. i thought of you when i tried to move on and start my life . when instead of going to class i slept for several days at a time .

i thought of you when i tried to take back control of my body. i started to use her on others . it made me feel like i could change something . i thought of you when i felt like the slut you christened me to be.

i thought of you when i felt foolish and embarrassed of who i was. i thought of how i couldn't bare to swallow what you put in my mouth but i easily swallowed two bottles of pills to punish myself . i thought of you amidst white walls and accompanied showers . i thought of you when i watched my father's heart sink realizing how helpless he was and how id forever resent him for it. i thought of you when i realized no one was gonna fight for me . when five years later someone went out of their way to message me to tell me how much of a home wrecker i was .

i thought of you when every man who loved me told me they wanted to kill you. i thought of you every time i felt their pity and didn't understand their anger.

i thought of you every time someone tried to give me pleasure. it was your face looking up at me when i looked down. i'd see your \*\*\*\*\* desperate face. i thought of you every time my husband opened my legs. every time. it feels the same that it did that night. red wine helps whiskey helps more.

i thought of you every time someone told me to forgive you. every time someone told me to forget about you . i thought of you seven years later when i finally believed i was a victim . i waited too long to do anything about it. i count the thousands of dollars i've spent on therapy and prescriptions and self help books trying to stop thinking about you.

but it's been 14 years and still i think about you .

have you thought about me ? because i want you to. i want you to know what you did wasn't just one night. i want you to think about everything you stole from me. i want you think about how you infiltrated my nervous system. i want you to think of the pain you caused my friends and family. i want you to picture my face when you feel like believing you're a good person. i want you to think of me the rest of your life .

so that maybe then, i can finally stop thinking about you .

—written 2020



## Appendix B - Timeline

*A timeline of key events from 2004–2024, based on witness testimony and provided documentation.*

### **Summer 2004**

- Initial interactions between Matthew Kennedy and RV occurred during a mission trip to Sonora, Mexico.

### **2005 - 2006 Academic School Year**

- Matthew Kennedy repeatedly met one-on-one with RV at FBCBA for “accountability” conversations.
- RV participated in weekly youth music ministry that Kennedy supported.
- Various additional interactions between Kennedy and RV occurred, analyzed in Section III(E), “Analysis of Potential Grooming Behavior”, including Kennedy’s encouragement to RV (then aged 17) to “masturbate or get a vibrator.”
- RV disclosed Kennedy’s instruction regarding a vibrator and masturbation to a peer.

### **June 2006**

- On or about June 21, the incident at Matthew Kennedy’s house that resulted in primary allegations occurred.
- On or about June 21, RV gave her initial disclosure of the event to a peer. Two additional witnesses corroborated RV’s early disclosure.
- Late June, RV made a second disclosure of the events to another peer and separately, to an adult volunteer church leader.

### **July 2006**

- On or about July 26, a youth worker informed a former FBCBA staff member of the incident after receiving a partial disclosure from RV.
- On July 27, the former FBCBA staff member notified another church leader of potential misconduct by one of the ministers.
- On or about July 27, RV was called to meet with the former FBCBA staff member and a female employee of the church. RV was offered

counseling. The former staff member met with the church's HR/legal rep and someone from the Broken Arrow Police department.

- On July 28, the former FBCBA staff member and a former non-staff leader met to share information and plan.
- On July 29, the FBCBA former staff member and former non-staff leader scheduled a meeting with Kennedy at the church office. They talked about the allegations against Kennedy.
- On July 30, former non-staff leader scheduled a special personnel committee meeting for Sunday morning to discuss ending the minister's employment immediately.

### **August 2006**

- Severance pay for Matthew Kennedy began.

### **October 2006**

- Severance pay for Matthew Kennedy ended.

### **Late 2006 - 2008**

- RV disclosed to a third peer related to FBCBA.
- RV disclosed to a former FBCBA staff member.
- RV disclosed to her father.
- RV disclosed to a fourth peer related to FBCBA.
- RV attempted suicide.
- RV disclosed to supportive individuals.

### **2013**

- RV shared her testimony in a video where she referenced being raped.

### **September - December 2021**

- On September 15, RV shared allegations in a public Facebook post. FBCBA is tagged in the post.
- FBCBA staff began internal formal engagement.
- FBCBA staff reported the allegations to law enforcement.
- FBCBA staff sought counsel from the SBC's Ethics and Religious Liberties Commission.
- FBCBA staff reached out to RV to see if she was willing to meet with them.

- Near Christmas RV, a support person and two FBCBA staff members (male and female) met at an off-site location. The meeting was perceived as positive by all parties in attendance. FBCBA invited RV to reach out again as she was willing.

### **August - December 2023**

- RV reached out to FBCBA and made three requests: (1) That Mr. Kennedy be reported to the Southern Baptist Convention; (2) That FBCBA's current policies and procedures for abuse prevention and response be analyzed and accounted for; and (3) That FBCBA provide some tangible consideration for the suffering she has experienced.
- FBCBA connected RV with a professional advocate with expertise in sexual abuse within institutions.
- FBCBA provided funding for trauma-focused therapy for one year, beginning September 2023 and ending September 2024, for RV.
- Within a few days of connecting with RV, FBCBA connected in person or via phone with the former senior pastor, a former staff member they understood to have had a role in the response in 2006, and a former church leader who also engaged in the 2006 response.
- In late 2023, FBCBA began the process of engaging GRACE as a third-party, independent entity to conduct an investigation.

### **January 2024**

- On January 2, FBCBA staff communicated with Matthew Kennedy and another individual who was close to Kennedy at the time of the allegations to make them aware of the investigation.
- On January 3, an Engagement Agreement between FBCBA and GRACE was executed.
- On January 14, the allegations and investigation were announced at the end of the morning service, which was recorded and made publicly available along with the launch of a webpage on FBCBA's website, "Addressing Our Past."