

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Safeguarding, the intentional protection of the vulnerable, especially children and adults at risk, from abuse, neglect, and exploitation, is rooted deeply in the Anglican Church's commitment to uphold both biblical justice and pastoral care. While the formal structures of safeguarding policy have only developed in recent decades, the theological imperative to protect the vulnerable is ancient, integral to the Church's mission, and embedded in the Anglican Way.

This handbook has been prepared to support that sacred responsibility. It offers guidance rooted in Christian discipleship, practical wisdom, and the call to holiness that shapes our common life.

Our Province practices subsidiarity, the principle that the primary means of mission rests with dioceses and local congregations with the support and care of the Province. It affirms that mission should be planned, expressed, and carried out at the level closest to where it can be most effectively fulfilled. Higher levels of ecclesiastical structure support this work, but do not replace the responsibility and initiative of the local congregation in discerning and undertaking its mission.

Therefore, all ACNA Sample Safeguarding Resources are intentionally designed to be adaptable. Each parish, ministry, and local community possesses unique pastoral realities, cultural contexts, and patterns of relationship. The materials that follow—ranging from pastoral care for victims and survivors, to procedures for receiving and resolving reports of misconduct, to standards of conduct for clergy, staff, and volunteers—are meant to be prayerfully considered, discerned, and applied in ways that best serve the people entrusted to you. We encourage leaders to use this handbook as a framework rather than a rigid template, shaping its recommendations to meet local needs while remaining faithful to the safeguarding principles that safeguard the whole Church.

This handbook specifically flags when content is “Canonically Required” and provides further details in sections titled “Canonical Reference.” Beyond these markers, the handbook outlines best practices as drawn from diocesan safeguarding policy templates and the [Sample Protection Policy for Children and Adults](#).

This is a living Handbook, and additional samples will be added and updated as lessons are learned and applied.

Thank you for your commitment to this ministry. Please receive this handbook as a companion and support in the sacred work we share.

In Christ's peace and hope,

*The Provincial Safeguarding Office*

# **Building a Culture of Safety: A Handbook for Preventing, Investigating, and Addressing Instances of Misconduct and Abuse in Churches**

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## INTRODUCTION

Safeguarding is not just about administering discipline when misconduct or harm occurs. It is a comprehensive collection of behaviors, standards, and proactive practices that cultivate a culture of safety, prevention, and accountability. In the church, safeguarding is grounded in the biblical mandate to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God (Micah 6:8).

Included in this Handbook for churches and dioceses are best practice recommendations and guidelines for implementing canonical requirements in four key areas:

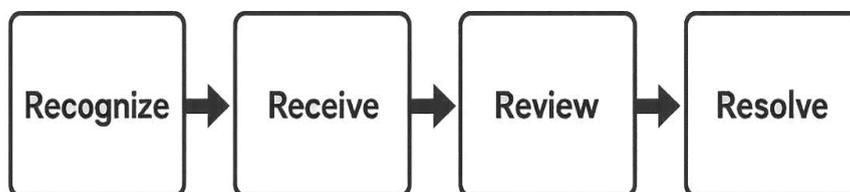
- Part I: **Recognize** Risk to Prevent Harm
- Part II: **Receive** Disclosures with Grace
- Part III: **Review** Concerns Thoroughly
- Part IV: **Resolve** Concerns Faithfully

### Purpose

The following collection of guidelines were developed by the Anglican Church in North America (ACNA) to help its dioceses and churches nurture safe and healthy communities that foster spiritual wholeness. These guidelines provide specific direction about how to meaningfully implement canonical requirements pertaining to investigative and disciplinary procedures. They also identify and promote general safeguarding best practices for churches.

These guidelines are divided into four practice areas that are intended to help the Church: **Recognize** Risk, **Receive** disclosures with grace, **Review** concerns thoroughly, and **Resolve** them faithfully. Together these four areas outline how congregations and dioceses can establish the posture, procedures, and protocols necessary to prevent misconduct and abuse from occurring and to promptly and adequately address instances of harm when they occur.

Safeguarding begins and ends by shaping a culture that actively Recognizes risks, Receives disclosures with grace, Reviews concerns thoroughly, and Resolves them faithfully.



This process equips the Church—from the Province to the parish—to walk humbly with God while protecting His people from harm.

Drawing from the *Provincial Constitution and Canons* (particularly *Title IV* on ecclesiastical discipline) and the *Rules of Procedure of the Provincial Ecclesiastical Trial Courts and the Court for the Trial of a Bishop*, this model aligns canonical

integrity with safeguarding best practices. The goal is a healthy church that collectively reflects Christ's mercy and righteousness.

This guidance is intended to help dioceses understand how questions about safeguarding are answered. As safeguarding and misconduct are local and contextual, this guidance clearly specifies when procedures are canonically required (according to the ACNA Provincial Constitution and Canons) or suggested safeguarding best practices.

Each diocese is encouraged to adapt this guide for education and implementation alongside the ***Provincial Sample Policy for the Protection of Children and Adults***.

## Scope

Safeguarding begins locally but impacts the common good of the whole Province. The scope of this handbook is to help the Church recognize and prevent misconduct, as well as to train the Church on how to receive and respond to misconduct if it occurs. For the purposes of this training, misconduct is defined by ***Title IV, Canon 2***. This canon describes the nature of misconduct that may be presented against an Archbishop, a Bishop, a Presbyter, or a Deacon in this Church. However, this Sample Building a Culture of Safety Handbook widens the scope to help churches recognize, receive, review, and resolve harm from wherever it may arise.

It is the moral duty of the whole Church to pursue godly discipline when the safety of the people of God is jeopardized. Rectors have a heightened obligation to safeguard the local flock, but it is the duty of each diocesan Bishop to ensure that healthy processes are implemented across the diocese and to oversee the disciplinary process of clergy, deacons, and lay leaders. The Province provides safeguarding resources to the dioceses and the Archbishop oversees the disciplinary process against a Bishop. The Dean of the College of Bishops oversees the disciplinary process against the Archbishop. At all levels, it is our shared responsibility to act decisively when harm is suspected, and to care well for those affected. **Title I, Canon 5.9** of the Provincial Constitution and Canons affirms this duty:

*It is the moral duty of the whole Church—the Province, the dioceses, and local congregations and ministries—to ensure that those entrusted with leadership are subject to godly discipline as needed. As the primary level at which discipline is exercised, each diocese shall establish processes and procedures to respond to reports of misconduct by clergy and laypersons, and to facilitate care for those affected. It is the duty of each diocesan bishop—not the Province—to ensure that these processes are implemented within congregations, ministries, and diocesan structures, and to monitor and ensure compliance.*

## Roles and Responsibilities

These roles and responsibilities are referenced in the current ACNA Constitution and Canons. Title IV disciplinary Canons are currently under review, and updates to these roles and responsibilities will be made as those revisions are initiated.

- **Civil Authorities:** Conduct independent investigations when harm or criminal activity is reported.
- **Ecclesiastical Authority:** Depending on the report, the ecclesiastical authority is the one who exercises such authority over an ecclesial process. This person makes the final disciplinary decisions and may recuse themselves if impartiality is in question.
  - A report against a lay leader or volunteer – the Rector (in consultation with the diocesan bishop).
  - A report against clergy, deacon - the diocesan bishop.
  - A report against a bishop - the Archbishop
  - A report against the Archbishop - the Dean of the College of Bishops
- **Reports Receivers:** Receive and document reports. They may assist with the initial review or hand off the case to an investigation committee. See the **Review** section that gives further details concerning the differences between an initial inquiry, an investigation, a Board of Inquiry, and a Court for the Trial of Bishops or Clergy under ACNA's Title IV Canons.
- **Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee:** An investigative body to investigate all reports of misconduct by a presbyter or deacon referred to it according to Title I, Canon 5.9. Each diocese must have a Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee or a body of equal fairness, transparency, and integrity by December 31, 2025, per Canon.
- **Chancellor:** a provincial or diocesan representative who provides legal counsel but does not direct or receive reports. Bishops may seek their advice throughout the process.
- **Church Attorney:** May be appointed depending upon the results of the investigative report, and formal charges or a trial become necessary.

**Standing Committee / Parish Council:** May be consulted depending on diocesan policies.

## Approach

This guidance elevates a systems-based model—each report is not only about an individual event but a chance to examine our culture, structures, and oversight. Prevention is built into the process, and spiritual formation—grounded in Scripture and prayer—is essential.

## **Training**

It is a best practice that all bishops, clergy, lay leaders, safeguarding teams, and volunteers should be trained in this cycle and refreshed regularly—at least annually. A healthy safeguarding culture is one where people are alert, equipped, and courageous to act in love.

## RECOGNIZE

*Safeguarding begins with vision and vigilance. To recognize harm—or the potential for it—is to pay attention. The Church must be moved by both what is wrong and build a healthy structure for the health and safety of the people of God.*

### Cultivate a Culture of Prevention

Recognizing that misconduct and harm likes to thrive in the shadows, it is important to foster a culture of prevention. Prevention is the fruit of intentional formation and discipleship that cultivates good soil and plants healthy seeds. To support safeguarding from the Province to the parish, it is important to elevate safeguarding into general church staff training and leadership development. There are some canonically required safeguarding initiatives as well as general best practices to cultivating a culture of prevention:

#### ***Canonically Required:***

- Each diocese will have a Protection Policy for Children and Adults that is publicly available by June 30, 2025 (***Title I, Canon 5.8***).
- Each diocese will have two Reports Receivers by December 31, 2025 (***Title I, Canon 5.9***).

#### ***Best practices include:***

- Ongoing audits and policy reviews
- Annual safeguarding training
- Safe recruitment, vetting, and background checks
- Clear, enforced codes of conduct for church staff

### Key Practices for Recognition

Many of these practices are already reflected in the ACNA ***Sample Protection Policy for Children and Adults***. Sharing them here is not intended to add an additional burden where practices are already in place, but to put them in context within the safeguarding cycle.

- **Training and Education:** Every person in ministry—clergy, staff, and volunteers—should be trained to recognize signs of harm, both obvious and subtle, such as “grooming.”
- **Designated Safeguarding Roles:** Each diocese must appoint at least two Reports Receivers (***Title I, Canon 5.9***), ensuring accessibility and accountability.
- **Routine Audits:** It is recommended that dioceses review safeguarding compliance every two years—checking training records, volunteer screening, and policy adherence.

- **Embedding Safeguarding in Teaching:** Use teaching and prayer to elevate themes of lament, acting justly, and repentance.
- **Empowering the Congregation:** Foster a climate where people feel safe raising concerns. Encourage attentiveness to secrecy, manipulation, fear, or misuse of power. Treat the voices of children and the vulnerable not as disruptions, but as sacred insights.

By developing eyes to see and ears to hear, we make space for the Spirit to shine light before shadows take hold.

## RECEIVE

*After we recognize a concern, we must be ready to receive it. This means creating a culture where people are heard with compassion, their reports are taken seriously, and action begins. To receive well is both a legal duty and a spiritual one—it reflects the heart of the Good Shepherd who hears the cry of the wounded.*

### Responding to Disclosures

By December 31, 2025, every diocese is canonically required to have two Reports Receivers. Most dioceses have someone already serving in this role. However, there is always the chance that a reporter makes initial contact with someone they trust or believes to be a Reports Receiver. Therefore, all church leadership and staff should be trained to assist reporters in reporting to the designated Reports Receiver for the Diocese

Whomever receives, (a trusted individual with whom the reporter makes initial contact or the appointed Reports Receiver) a report that concerns sexual or physical abuse by a bishop, clergy person, deacon, lay leader, or volunteer, should immediately call 911 and make a report directly to local law enforcement or child protective services if the abuse involves a minor. It is the scope of civil authorities to inquire into reports of sexual or physical abuse, not the church.

Nevertheless, after ensuring the reporting of the abuse to local authorities or child protective services, the Reports Receiver should work with their immediate ecclesiastical authority so that they are aware of how to care for persons involved and take appropriate action to respond within the church.

If the report involves other forms of misconduct as defined by the ACNA's Constitution and Canons (Title IV, Canon 2), the Reports Receiver will differentiate if a report needs an administrative review or an initial inquiry with the advice of their ecclesiastical authority.

Key principles when receiving a report of misconduct:

- **Ensure safety:** If the individual is in immediate danger, call emergency services without hesitation.
- **Listen well:** Find a private, safe space. Let the person speak in their own words. Offer calm reassurance: "Thank you for telling me. This was not your fault."
- **Support presence:** If possible, include a second trusted adult as a silent support—not as an interrogator.
- **Avoid leading questions:** Do not press for details or suggest answers. Use open-ended prompts: "Tell me more," or "What happened next?"
- **Document carefully:** Immediately record what was said, including the date, time, setting, and exact words as remembered. Use a standard report form when available.

- **Maintain confidentiality:** Share only with those directly responsible for safeguarding. Do not gossip or speculate. Honor the trust that has been given.
- **Report promptly:** Inform civil authorities and church leadership as required. If the report involves clergy or serious misconduct, notify the bishop or designated provincial contact without delay.

Disclosures are sacred moments. How we receive them matters deeply. Our response can either begin the road to healing—or deepen the wound.

## **Initial Triage – Discernment and Documentation**

A Reports Receiver should document the facts of all reports as presented by the reporter and provide an initial summary to their ecclesiastical authority

Some level of inquiry will be conducted for each report received to determine next steps. The next section for **Review** will give further details concerning the differences between an initial inquiry, an investigation, a Board of Inquiry, and a Court for the Trial of Bishops or Clergy under ACNA’s Title IV Canons.

In the initial triage phase, the ecclesiastical authority, in cooperation with the Reports Receiver, will engage every report with pastoral presence and practical discernment.

- **Frivolous or unfounded concerns:** An initial review should assess if a report is clearly incoherent, malicious, or unrelated to misconduct, in which case after careful review and with documentation of the report and determination, it may be dismissed.
- **Credible concerns:** If the issue appears to involve misconduct as described by **Title IV, Canon 2**, proceed to the Review phase. As appropriate, notify the person named in the report, including the nature of the concern and, when safe, the identity of the reporter.
- **Pastoral intervention:** For non-abusive interpersonal issues, a pastoral conversation may lead to reconciliation. But if serious misconduct is involved, or the issue remains unresolved, formal investigation is warranted.

## **Mandatory Civil Reporting**

Church leaders and volunteers who work with children, youth, or vulnerable adults are mandatory reporters in most states. Any known or suspected harm must be reported to civil authorities within a specific timeframe—regardless of internal assessments or preferences. Check timelines and requirements in your specific state. Church investigations do not replace law enforcement but might proceed alongside them to ensure the safety of all throughout a civil and ecclesiastical process.

## **Ecclesiastical Response**

- **Immediate steps:** The bishop or ecclesiastical authority must determine whether to impose a temporary restriction (inhibition) on a clergy person during the investigation. This protects all involved while maintaining the presumption of innocence.
- **Lay involvement:** Similar prudence applies for lay staff and volunteers—such as being relieved of duties temporarily while facts are gathered.

## **Receiving a Report – Practical Channels**

Reports may come in any form—conversation, email, phone call, or anonymous submission. It is recommended to inform reporters that if they report anonymously, it may be difficult to confirm a report. One value of anonymous reporting is that multiple anonymous emails may build a case against someone accused of misconduct and can lead to further inquiry. Regardless, every report should be documented clearly and submitted through the proper diocesan form or reporting system. If a report concerns a bishop, it must be sent directly to the Province (e.g., [misconduct@acna.org](mailto:misconduct@acna.org)).

## **Written and Signed Notices**

Wherever possible, reporters should submit written, signed notices. This protects both parties and ensures clarity. If the report is verbal, the receiver should document the key facts on their behalf.

## **Acknowledgment and Documentation**

- Acknowledge receipt within two business days.
- Log each report securely and track all related actions.
- Avoid duplicate reporting—add to the existing case file as more information emerges.

Every report initiates a sacred trust. It deserves careful attention, prayerful action, and detailed records.

## **Initial Safety Measures**

If the report describes someone in immediate danger, respond urgently: notify law enforcement, remove alleged offenders from ministry access, and offer protection to the reporter. Alert church insurers as required. Assign a support advocate where needed.

## **Pastoral Care at Intake**

This is a moment of soul care. Offer prayer; connect individuals to chaplains or counselors, and affirm the Church’s commitment to stand with them. Intake is not just administrative—it is spiritual triage.

***Pastoral and Crisis-Response Focus:***

- When a complaint is first received, pastoral care teams may be activated to care for the complainant, the respondent (accused cleric), and the congregation.
  - ***The ACNA Sample Pastoral Care Guidelines and Forms*** articulates the scope and composition of a pastoral care team.
- The bishop’s initial role includes not only canonical discernment but also pastoral oversight to ensure the reporters and respondents are both cared for throughout the process of inquiry.
- Crisis care may involve:
  - Listening and spiritual support for the person making the complaint.
  - Immediate safety or safeguarding measures if harm or abuse is alleged.
  - Initial pastoral contact with the respondent to ensure spiritual and emotional support, without interfering with fact-finding.

***Goal:*** Ensure that the process begins in a spirit of truth-seeking and pastoral sensitivity, not adversarial hostility.

**Confidentiality**

It is the task of the Church to safeguard sensitive information, the disclosure of which could jeopardize the reporter or the respondent while reports are being assessed or investigated.

***General Principle:*** Guard confidentiality rigorously. Only those who need to know should have access to details. Use confidentiality agreements where appropriate. This protects everyone—reporters, respondents, witnesses, and the process itself.

***During an Investigation:*** Investigation Teams can use an investigation planning sheet to help track relevant information concerning the investigation.

- Depending on the sensitive nature of a report, all records and reports related to an investigation to be shared for investigation purposes outside of an investigation team may be anonymous via the removal of names and the substitution of “Reporter A,” “Subject A,” “Subject B,” “Witness A,” “Witness B,” etc. ***All investigations involving information of minors should be confidential.***

- An Investigation Planning Sheet that contains the full identity of the complainant, the accused, and witnesses may only be shared among the investigation team.
- Therefore, there may be two Investigation Planning Sheets – one with anonymous personal information that may be shared in the event that information needs to be disclosed, and another containing full information for those that need to know only.

***Post-Investigation:*** Once an inquiry or investigation is completed, refer to the section “Community Follow-Up and System Reform” under “Resolve” for external communications guidance.

Clear, compassionate receiving is the bridge between awareness and action. The Church’s credibility and care are revealed in how we listen, record, and respond.

## REVIEW

*To review a report is to seek the truth with integrity and care. In the ACNA, there is a well-defined canonical process for handling accusations of misconduct or offenses by clergy. This process moves through distinct stages — each with increasing formality and authority — depending on the seriousness and evidence of the alleged offense.*

Here's a clear breakdown of the **differences** between an **initial inquiry**, an **investigation**, a **Board of Inquiry**, and a **Court for the Trial of Bishops or Clergy** under ACNA's **Title IV Canons (Ecclesiastical Discipline)**

### Initial Inquiry

**Purpose:** To determine whether a formal complaint or allegation against a clergy person has enough credibility to warrant further investigation.

**Authority:** Usually handled by the **Intake Officer** or **Ecclesiastical Authority (bishop)** of the diocese.

### Key Features:

- It is preliminary and informal, often referred to as a “triage” stage.
- This phase is a determination of whether the complaint deserves further canonical process.
- The goal is fact-finding — to see if the alleged misconduct, if true, would constitute an ecclesiastical offense under Title IV.
- The person making the allegation (the Complainant) provides initial information.
- The bishop may decide to dismiss the matter, attempt pastoral resolution, or order an investigation.

### Canonical Reference:

- **Concerning Accusations Against Presbyters and Deacons: Canon 3.1.1** — Upon receiving information that any Presbyter or Deacon may have committed an Offense, the Bishop shall make inquiry to determine whether or not there is reason to believe that an Offense may have been committed.
- **Concerning Accusations Against Bishops, including the Archbishop: Canon 4.1** — The canon on accusations against a bishop is silent concerning an initial assessment of accusations short of an official Presentment brought by three Bishops of this Church with jurisdiction, or by not fewer than ten Presbyters, Deacons, or adult baptized members of this Church in good standing, of whom at least two shall be Presbyters. Accusations against the Archbishop are submitted to the Dean of the College of Bishops.

- In each case of initial assessment, the ecclesiastical authority may dismiss the matter, attempt reconciliation, or move toward further canonical disciplinary action.

***This stage is informal, fact-finding, and discretionary.***

## **Investigation**

***Purpose:*** To gather evidence and establish whether there is probable cause to believe that an ecclesiastical offense has occurred.

***Authority:*** Conducted under the supervision of the ecclesiastical authority.

### ***Key Features:***

- More formal than the initial inquiry.
- Includes interviews, document review, and other fact-gathering.
- The results determine if further canonical discipline is warranted or not.
- The accused is typically notified and given an opportunity to respond.
- This is still not a trial, but evidence is actively gathered.

### ***Canonical Reference:***

- **Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee Title I, Canon 5.9.6-9** — by December 31, 2025, each Diocese shall have a Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee to investigate all reports of misconduct by a presbyter or deacon referred to it under this Canon.
- **Provincial Investigation Bench** — in order to investigate allegations fairly, a similar model is used at the Provincial level as detailed in **Title I, Canon 5.9.6-9** for a Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee. However, the Provincial Investigation Bench is only a fact-finding body with no authority to bring ecclesiastical discipline against a bishop. An Investigation Team from among the Bench will make a recommendation to the Archbishop based on the facts of the allegations and evidence provided.

***This stage is overseen by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority to substantiate the facts of the allegations.***

### **Guidance for a Diocesan Reports Investigation Committee**

#### **Launching an Investigation**

The scope and complexity of an investigation should match the severity and complexity of the allegations. While this section offers guidance for a Diocesan Reports Investigation

Committee, the bishop initiating the investigation may determine the appropriate scope of the review at the outset, based on the particular situation.

When a report warrants further investigation, the bishop (or parish clergy in consultation with the bishop) initiates a formal inquiry.

This internal process runs parallel to any civil investigation but does not replace it. It is an ecclesiastical inquiry focused on truth, care, and accountability within the Church.

### ***Notification and Confidentiality***

#### ***Key Features:***

- **Confidentiality is paramount** during initial inquiries and investigations to protect both the complainant and the respondent. All involved parties—including the investigation team—must agree to maintain confidentiality throughout the process. It is up to the diocese whether they use a confidentiality form or a non-disclosure agreement.
- **Notification is usually limited** to those with canonical responsibility or pastoral oversight, typically the bishop, diocesan chancellor, or designated safe church officer.
- **Standing Committees** and **Church Wardens** may be notified only when there is a diocesan need for institutional awareness or action, such as pastoral care, safeguarding congregational operations, or canonical compliance.

#### ***Suggested Practices:***

##### ***Notification of the Standing Committee***

- Typically after the bishop has decided that a formal investigation will proceed.
- Before or at the point of Board of Inquiry, if the matter may lead to a Presentment or trial.
- In cases of serious misconduct that affects the diocese broadly (e.g., financial impropriety, sexual misconduct, abuse), the Standing Committee should be made aware to provide oversight.

##### ***Notification of Church Wardens (or Lay Leaders of the Parish)***

- Usually only when necessary to protect the congregation or ensure proper pastoral care.
- Commonly after a serious allegation has been substantiated enough to require action (e.g., suspension, temporary removal from duties, or safeguarding measures).
- Sometimes after formal presentment if the cleric is to be removed or restricted in ministry within the parish.

## **Advocates and Pastoral Support**

Both complainant and respondent should be offered pastoral care and practical support—such as access to counseling, spiritual direction, or legal guidance. This support does not influence the investigation but ensures that all are treated with dignity. Offer each party the opportunity to have a support person or advocate. See the ***ACNA Sample Pastoral Care Guidelines and Forms***.

## **Conflict of Interest**

Anyone involved who may have a personal stake in the case must disclose it and, if necessary, step aside. Recusal safeguards the process and reinforces trust.

## **Investigation Planning and Timeline<sup>1</sup>**

The investigation team should:

- Establish a clear plan—who will be interviewed, what evidence is needed, and by when.
- Aim for timeliness. The investigation team should not make promises on a specific timeline, but they should endeavor to set specific goals for key deliverables in the investigation of a report.

## **Gathering Evidence**

- Interview complainants with two members of the Team and respondents with compassion, clarity, and respect.
- Interview witnesses and anyone with relevant context or insight.
- Collect documentation: emails, texts, photos, church records, or anything directly related to the concern.
- Record everything: Maintain a secure, dated log of interviews, findings, and actions.
- Witness statements should be provided to witnesses for confirmation.

## **Assessing Church Systems**

Investigators should also note any systemic issues that contributed to the situation—gaps in training, unclear policies, or lax oversight—all indicative of areas to improve or cultivate safeguarding more proactively in the church's culture. These observations will guide future reform.

## **Interim Actions and Communication**

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A for an Investigation Planning and Timeline Sheet

During the initial review, leadership may take precautionary steps—such as temporary suspension from ministry—if continued involvement poses risk. Communication with both complainant and respondent should be consistent and transparent throughout, especially if delays occur.

## **Evaluating Findings**

The role of the investigation team is an evaluation of facts. Then, there is a separate assessment of the meaning of those facts, e.g., if the facts amount to misconduct that aligns with an ecclesiastical offense, etc. Considering the evidence, the investigation team will recommend to the ecclesiastical authority if the allegation is:

- **Substantiated:** There is sufficient evidence that misconduct occurred.
- **Unsubstantiated:** The evidence does not support the allegation.
- **Partially substantiated:** Some concerns are supported, others are not.

This discernment must be rooted in facts, not assumptions or pressure. The guiding standard for ecclesiastical trials is “clear and convincing evidence.” Regardless of the outcome, parties must be informed in a direct, pastoral, and respectful manner. See further guidance on these findings below in “Resolve.”

## **Board of Inquiry**

**Purpose:** To determine whether probable cause exists that an accused bishop has committed an ecclesiastical offense and should be formally tried.

**Authority:** A Board of Inquiry (BOI) is an ecclesiastical body appointed by the Archbishop (Title IV, Canon 4.3).

### **Key Features:**

- A BOI only applies to bishops after a Presentment has been delivered to the Archbishop.
- This phase is a formal inquiry that recommends whether an ecclesiastical trial should take place or not.
- The BOI reviews evidence and may hear preliminary testimony.
- If probable cause is not found, the Presentment is dismissed.
- If in the judgment of two-thirds of the Board of Inquiry there is probable cause to present the accused Bishop for trial for violation of Title IV, Canon 2, it shall make a public declaration to that effect and the case shall proceed to the Court for the Trial of a Bishop.

### **Canonical Reference:**

- **Concerning a BOI of Bishops, including the Archbishop: Title I, Canon 4.3-6** — A Presentment of a bishop that contains grounds of accusations set forth with reasonable certainty of time, place and circumstance shall be referred to the Board of Inquiry.

***The BOI recommends whether a Presentment goes to the Court for the Trial of a Bishop.***

## **Court for the Trial of Bishops or Clergy**

***Purpose:*** To bring and adjudicate presentment charges formally.

### **A Note on Purpose**

The goal of ecclesiastical trials is never retribution, but repentance, healing, and the protection of people, Christ's Church. When conducted rightly, trials uphold the integrity of ordained ministry and the holiness to which we are all called. As stewards of God's household, we engage this process in humility, seeking to act justly with mercy, truth, and grace.

***Authority:*** A Court for the Trial of a bishop or clergy is convened according to Title IV, Canon 5. Each diocese shall have an ecclesiastical Trial Court for the trial of any Presbyter or Deacon (5.1). The Province shall have a Court for the Trial of a Bishop, whose jurisdiction shall be limited to proceedings against a Bishop of this Church, including the Archbishop, arising under the ACNA Constitution and Canons (Canon 5.2).

### ***Key Features:***

- This is the formal trial stage.
- There are canonical rules of procedure, witnesses, evidence, and defense representation.
- The court examines the allegations of the Presentment and recommends a sentence (e.g., dismissal, suspension, deposition from ministry).
- Appeals may be taken to the Provincial Tribunal.

### ***Canonical Reference:***

- **Concerning Courts for the Trial of a Presbyter or a Deacon: Canon 5.1** — Each Diocese there shall be a Court for the Trial of a Presbyter or Deacon governed by their own canons.
- **Concerning Courts for the Trial of a Bishop, including the Archbishop: Canon 5.2–4.6** — The members of the Court for the Trial of a Bishop shall be elected by the Provincial Council (5.2.2).

- **Concerning the Court of Extraordinary Jurisdiction, the Provincial Tribunal, Appeals and Procedures: Canon 5.3-7.**

### **Canonical Guidance for an Ecclesiastical Trial**

*This guidance is drawn from the ACNA Constitution and Canons and the Rules of Procedures of the Provincial Trial Courts and the Court for the Trial of a Bishop.*

#### ***Articles of Presentment***

When the Bishop (or other ecclesiastical authority) concludes that a formal trial is necessary, charges—called *Articles of Presentment*—are drawn up. These must clearly state the offenses alleged, including supporting facts (who, what, when, where) and cite the specific canons violated (Canon IV.3.4; Rule 5(a)). The articles are then served to the Respondent (the accused clergy), initiating the formal trial process (Rule 2).

#### ***Summons and Response***

A summons accompanies the Presentment and gives the Respondent 30 days to file an Answer (Rule 3(c)). This response must admit or deny each charge and may include any defense (Rule 3(c)(1)). Both the Church and the Respondent may be represented by canonical or legal counsel during the proceedings (Title IV, Canon 3.3.3).

#### ***Discovery and Disclosure***

In keeping with Christian fairness and integrity, both sides exchange relevant information in advance—witnesses, documents, and testimony—so the trial is transparent and not adversarial in tone. This phase is governed by the *Rules of Procedure* (Rule 8), and aims to prevent surprises, ensuring both parties are prepared and that the truth can be discerned in love.

#### ***Conduct of the Trial***

Trials are formal but spiritual in nature. They are held before either a diocesan court (for presbyters or deacons) or the Provincial Court (for bishops), with members drawn from both clergy and laity (Canon IV.5.1–2). The court hears opening statements, witness testimony, and closing arguments. All testimony is taken under solemn oath, affirming a commitment to truth before God (Rule 9).

The Church's burden is to show each charge is supported by **clear and convincing evidence**—a high standard that reflects both the seriousness of ecclesiastical discipline and the presumption of innocence (Rule 1; Rule 11(d)).

## ***Judgment and Sentencing***

After the hearing, the court privately deliberates and issues a written judgment. A majority vote of the judges is required to determine whether each charge is proved (Rule 12(a)). The final decision must be delivered in writing within 60 days (Canon IV.5.1.3; Rule 12(b)). If guilt is found, the court may impose appropriate discipline as outlined in Canon IV.8, ranging from admonition to deposition from holy orders.

## ***Right to Appeal***

The Respondent may appeal the judgment if there is reason to believe there was error in law or process (Canon IV.5.5–6). The appellate process ensures accountability not only for the accused but also for the Church’s handling of the case.

## **Independent or External Review**

In high-profile or sensitive cases, external reviewers may be appointed to ensure neutrality. Dioceses can also partner to share trained investigators and avoid conflicts of interest.

## **Final Pastoral Conversation (Optional)**

Before a decision is finalized, a bishop might offer a final, prayerful meeting with the accused—an opportunity to hear the findings, respond, and, if possible, begin a path to repentance. This is not a trial but a pastoral encounter. A facilitator may guide the conversation with sensitivity and grace.

## **Final Report**

The investigation team prepares a Final Report outlining:

- Allegations and process followed
- Key findings and supporting evidence
- Recommended outcome (e.g., trial, dismissal, or remedial discipline)

The ecclesiastical authority reviews this report and makes a final determination. This outcome is then communicated respectfully to all parties.

## **Documentation and Continuity**

All case records—including interviews, emails, and outcomes—must be stored securely and retained in accordance with canonical and diocesan policy. These records ensure continuity, accountability, and the protection of others in the future.

## **Cooperation Between Dioceses**

Where helpful, dioceses may collaborate to share resources, training, or investigators. Title I, Canon 5.9.8 permits such partnerships to strengthen safeguarding across the province.

## RESOLVE

*The “Resolve” phase implements outcomes—disciplinary, pastoral, and systemic—so that the Church may respond wisely to what was revealed and begin the work of discipleship, healing and, where needed, godly discipline. Resolution is never merely procedural; it is a sacred duty rooted in the pursuit of truth and mercy.*

### **Timeliness and Accountability**

Once findings are determined, actions must follow without undue delay. In less complex cases, resolution may be swift. In more serious matters, the Church should still aim to communicate the outcome within a reasonable timeframe—weeks or months, not years. Unresolved cases erode trust and delay healing.

### **If the Allegation is SUBSTANTIATED**

#### **Informing the Parties and the Church Community**

- Clearly and kindly notify both the complainant and the respondent of the findings. The ecclesiastical authority will ensure that the Pastoral Care Team per the **ACNA *Sample Pastoral Care Guidelines and Forms*** continues for all parties.
- Inform the Standing Committee of additional information necessary that may not have already been disclosed during the Review phase. See above.
- Inform the Church Wardens if the cleric is to be removed or restricted in ministry within the parish.
- The Vicar and the Church Wardens should inform the church community in language that is honest yet discreet. For example: “Following a report and investigation, appropriate action has been taken, and the individual is no longer serving in their previous role.” Avoid unnecessary details or public speculation. Only share publicly available information.

#### **Disciplinary response**

The bishop implements discipline in line with the canons. This may include:

- Formal admonition
- Required counseling or supervision
- Suspension or removal from ministry (deposition)
- Other disciplinary measures with the intention to encourage repentance and safeguard the soul (1 Cor 5:5).

Severity depends on the nature of the offense, the level of repentance, and the potential risk to others.

## **Redemptive care**

- **For reporters:** Even after the initial reception of the report as detailed earlier, the church can connect them with counseling, prayer, and a path of healing.
- **For respondents** (when appropriate): The ecclesiastical authority will provide pastoral support and terms of restoration and discipline, not for restoration to ministry position, but to relationship with Christ and His Church.

## **Civil and external follow-through**

If the conduct involves a criminal offense or civil liability, ensure proper coordination with legal authorities and insurers. All civil and criminal offenses should be reported to the Provincial office for the purposes of awareness and informed support of dioceses. It is better for the Provincial Office to be aware of a criminal or civil liability unfolding in a diocesan parish than to hear about it from news outlets and reporters.

## **If the Allegation is UNSUBSTANTIATED**

### **Communicate respectfully**

The respondent should be cleared and, if removed temporarily, restored. The reporter should be thanked for raising concerns—even if unproven—reminded that it was right to speak up. Some possible responses include, “The facts of the report did not match witness accounts,” or “There wasn’t enough evidence to sufficiently conclude the report was valid.”

### **Address harm**

Both parties may carry wounds from the process. Offer space for reconciliation where possible but never force a meeting. Provide pastoral care or pastoral counseling as appropriate according to the ***ACNA Sample Pastoral Care Guidelines and Forms*** to help both sides process what has occurred.

### **Respond to false reports**

If a claim is determined to be intentionally false or malicious, and the reporter is a church leader or member, appropriate discipline may follow.

### **Reintegrate the accused**

If cleared, the accused should be publicly restored by the ecclesiastical authority (if their suspension was public) and welcomed back into ministry or community life with dignity.

## **Learning and Improvement**

Whether or not misconduct occurred, each case reveals something. Leaders should meet to review:

- What policies or systems failed or worked well?
- What new training, oversight, or reforms are needed?
- How can we prevent similar issues going forward?

This leads to lasting change—not just resolution of a single case.

### **Community Follow-Up and System Reform**

Leadership should:

- Implement policy or process changes based on findings.
- Communicate reforms to appropriate stakeholders (e.g., new volunteer requirements or reporting procedures).
- Offer spiritual care to the wider community, if impacted. A service of lament or a pastoral letter may bring closure.

### **Post-Investigation Review**

Once a case concludes, conduct a formal internal review:

- Did we follow the process with integrity?
- Were actions timely and clear?
- What needs to be improved in this Sample Building a Culture of Safety Handbook itself?

Close the loop by following up with those who initiated a report, respondents, and the church community. Safeguarding is not just a response—it's a culture we continue to build.

## CONCLUSION

*The Sample Building a Culture of Safety Handbook—**Recognize, Receive, Review, Resolve**—is not a checklist, but a spiritual rhythm. It shapes how we care for the vulnerable, respond to harm, and act justly in the life of the Church.*

By following this pattern faithfully:

- We protect the dignity of every person made in God’s image.
- We hold leaders accountable with truth and mercy.
- We cultivate trust through transparency and wise action.
- We learn, grow, and reform so that what is broken may be made whole.

Safeguarding is not a task for specialists alone. It belongs to the whole Church—from vestry to bishop, from parishioner to pastor. As we walk this path together, we become not only a safer Church, but a more Christlike one.

“He has told you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”

—Micah 6:8

Let this scripture be our standard, our prayer, and our commitment.

# SAFEGUARDING CASE STUDY

Case Study: *“The Youth Retreat Concern”*

## Objective

To show how a church responds when a safeguarding concern arises, highlighting the distinct yet collaborative roles of pastoral care, canonical discipline, and legal compliance.

## Scenario Summary

A 17-year-old student shares with her small group leader at a diocesan youth retreat that one of the adult volunteers, Mr. D, made her feel uncomfortable. She says he kept finding excuses to be alone with her, texted her at night, and once brushed her back while she was walking away, making her feel “uncomfortable.” She says, “I don’t think it’s serious, but I don’t want to come to youth group if he’s there.”

## Debrief Discussion

- What would you do as a youth leader hearing this?
- What would your role be as a vestry member, parent, or bishop?
- How do we ensure the student is not forgotten in the process?
- How do we care for Mr. D while also maintaining safety and integrity?

## Workshop Walkthrough

### ***1. Safeguarding Lead or Reports Receiver Response***

- The student’s disclosure is the report. It must be received seriously.
- First responders: Listen non-judgmentally, thank her, and clarify that her well-being is the priority.
- Immediate pastoral care: offer support from a female leader or counselor.
- Recommend removing Mr. D from active ministry pending review (precautionary, not punitive).
- Record the report in writing with date, time, people present, and exact language if possible.
- Initiate safeguarding flow: Recognize → Receive → Review → Resolve.

***“We honor the student’s courage and create a safe space. Even if this isn’t ‘provable’ abuse, it is a boundary violation. Her safety is our call to action.”***

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### ***2. Canonical Response – (Title IV)***

- Determine status: Is Mr. D ordained or a lay volunteer?
- If lay, diocesan safeguarding policy applies; if clergy, Title IV applies.
- Diocesan Bishop (or appointed Reports Receivers - Dec 31, 2025) receives the formal report.

- Bishop may impose an inhibition or suspension pending investigation.
- A BOI or Investigation Committee evaluates if a formal presentment is warranted.
- Emphasize principles of due process *and* presumption of innocence.

***"Our canons ensure that the process is fair and protective—both for the person raising concern and for the accused."***

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### **3. Chancellor Response – Civil Reporting Lens**

- The student is 17, so still a minor in most jurisdictions. This triggers mandatory reporting.
- Most state laws require reporting of reasonable suspicion.
- A report must be made to Child Protective Services or Law Enforcement.
- Legal risk exists if the church fails to report.
- Clergy privilege usually does not cover third-party disclosures.
- Check for prior allegations that may indicate a pattern - this is one reason why even confidential reports should be received.

***"Even if it seems borderline, it's better to over-report than under-report. The law protects those who report in good faith."***

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## FAQs

### **What is the ultimate goal of the Sample Building a Culture of Safety Handbook?**

The goal is both truth-seeking (determining whether harm or misconduct occurred) and mercy-centered (ensuring safety, healing, accountability, and long-term trust in the Church's integrity).

### **How does the investigation team ensure objectivity?**

By including trained, diverse members with expertise in safeguarding, pastoral care, and legal matters. External reviewers may be engaged if necessary to avoid conflicts of interest.

### **Can a person report if they are not 100% sure abuse or harm occurred?**

Yes. It is better to report suspicions than to risk silence. Investigators will evaluate credibility and evidence. Reporting in good faith is generally protected.

### **What does "clear and convincing evidence" mean?**

It is a high standard of proof requiring that the evidence presented is highly and substantially more likely to be true than untrue. This standard helps balance justice for both the accuser and accused.

### **How does the Church guard against false accusations?**

All reports are carefully reviewed with documented evidence, impartial investigations, and confidentiality. The process includes safeguards such as conflict of interest disclosures and the right of the accused to respond.

### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

Confidentiality is maintained through restricted information sharing, secure documentation, and confidentiality agreements. Anonymous identifiers (e.g. "Reporter A") may be used during some stages of review.

### **What happens if a report is substantiated?**

The ecclesiastical authority will implement appropriate discipline, which may include removal from ministry, counseling requirements, or canonical trial depending on severity.

### **What happens if a report is unsubstantiated?**

Both the reporter and respondent are informed with respect and pastoral care. If the accused was removed temporarily, they may be reinstated publicly to restore their reputation.

### **What support is offered to victims?**

Pastoral care, counseling, spiritual direction, and ongoing support are offered to help victims heal spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

### **What if the reporter is harmed by retaliation?**

Retaliation is a distinct form of misconduct. Any form of retaliation should be reported immediately and will be addressed as a serious safeguarding concern itself.

**How does the Church ensure that patterns of misconduct do not go unnoticed?**

Even anonymous or seemingly minor reports are logged and monitored over time. Patterns may emerge that warrant investigation.

**What training should be provided to prevent harm?**

Annual safeguarding training, leadership development, background checks, and embedding safeguarding principles into the church culture are all part of ongoing prevention efforts.

**How does this process contribute to the health of the Church?**

By fostering transparency, accountability, and pastoral care, the Sample Building a Culture of Safety Handbook seeks to build trust, strengthen leadership integrity, and promote healing in the body of Christ.

**Why does the Church take reports seriously even when there is limited evidence?**

Because silence or inaction can enable harm to continue. Every report deserves careful, respectful, and confidential review to discern the truth and protect the vulnerable.

**What if new evidence arises after a case is resolved?**

The ecclesiastical authority may reopen the case if significant new, credible evidence emerges that could alter the original findings.

## **Appendix A: Investigation Planning and Timeline Sheet**

[These phases suggest reasonable timelines that can be adjusted according to logistical and pastoral care considerations in consultation with the diocesan bishop]

### **Phase 1 – Intake & Authorization (Days 0–14)**

**Purpose:** Determine whether the allegation merits investigation.

**Key Actions:**

- The Reports Receiver receives written or verbal complaint.
- Bishop reviews credibility and jurisdiction.
- If warranted, Bishop issues written authorization for investigation and appoints a Diocesan Investigation Committee.
- Immediate pastoral response initiated per the ***ACNA Sample Pastoral Care Guidelines and Forms***.

**Deliverable:** *Bishop's Authorization to Investigate* (with scope and charge).

### **Phase 2 – Investigation Planning (Days 15–21)**

**Purpose:** Clarify scope, method, and confidentiality procedures.

**Key Actions:**

- Committee meets (in person or virtual).
- Establish investigation plan: witnesses, evidence sources, schedule.
- Confirm roles (lead investigator, recorder, liaison to Bishop).
- Review safeguarding and pastoral considerations.

**Deliverable:** *Investigation Plan* (approved by Bishop)

### **Phase 3 – Evidence Gathering (Days 22–60)**

**Purpose:** Collect facts impartially and confidentially.

**Key Actions:**

- Conduct interviews with complainant, respondent, witnesses.
- Collect written statements, documents, and digital evidence.
- Maintain accurate notes and chain of custody for all materials.
- Provide pastoral updates (through Bishop's office) without breaching confidentiality.

**Deliverable:** *Summary of Evidence*.

### **Phase 4 – Committee Deliberation (Days 61–75)**

**Purpose:** Evaluate findings; determine probable cause.

**Key Actions:**

- Review all evidence and testimonies collectively.

- Assess whether the facts, if true, could constitute an offense under Title IV.
- Prepare written findings and recommendation to Bishop.

**Deliverable:** *Investigation Report* (includes summary, analysis, and recommendation: dismiss, pastoral resolution, or Board of Inquiry referral).

## **Phase 5 – Bishop’s Determination (Days 76–90)**

**Canonical Basis:** Title IV §2.8

**Purpose:** Decide next canonical step.

**Key Actions:**

- Bishop reviews Investigation Report.
- Bishop may:
  - Dismiss the matter,
  - Seek pastoral resolution, or
  - Forward to **Board of Inquiry** if probable cause exists.

**Deliverable:** *Bishop’s Decision Memorandum* (with instructions to relevant parties).

## **Phase 6 – Communication & Closure (Days 91–100)**

**Purpose:** Ensure pastoral and procedural follow-through.

**Key Actions:**

- Notify complainant and respondent of outcome (within confidentiality limits).
- Ensure pastoral care continues for all affected persons.
- Securely archive investigation materials in the Bishop’s confidential file.

**Deliverable:** *Final Case Summary and Archive Record*.

**Total Duration: 90–100 days (approx. 3 months)**

This timeline allows for due diligence, fairness, and pastoral care while preventing undue delay.

If the case is complex or involves multiple witnesses, the Bishop may extend deadlines with written notice.