

Teamwork to Prevent Abuse

Key Issues, Risks, Challenges, and Approaches + Practical Steps

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1-2

- **Shepherds**
 - Responsible to care for the flock
 - “Lay aside the sin” – “put away”, “cast off”
 - Individual exhortation + Shepherds guide the church away from sin, toward Christ and righteous living

- **Types of relationships in churches where abuse occurs**
 - Supervisor/subordinate
 - Pastor/member
 - Pastor/counselee
 - Youth minister/teenager
 - Lay leader/member/child
 - Prior background
 - Within families

- **Other Risk Categories**
 - Harm to members, attendees, and Christian witness
 - Loss of moral authority
 - Crisis communication
 - Insurance coverage

- Legal risk

- **Legal Risk Categories**
 - Abuse itself – tort, criminal risk
 - Negligent supervision
 - Negligent hiring
 - Mandatory reporting

- **Challenges**
 - Methodical decision-making in churches
 - Multi-layered relationships
 - Difficult to believe when people are lying
 - Fact-finding is challenging – who will do it?

- **Legal complexity**
 - Mandatory reporting
 - Criminal reporting
 - Social services reporting
 - Clergy privilege

What can you do? Approaches + Practical Steps

- **Tone-setting**
- **Thoughtful policies + consistent implementation**
- **Accountability + consequences for policy violations**
- **Learn from other cases – Boy Scouts, US Youth Soccer, other churches**
- **Training**
- **Background checks**
- **Reference checks**

Our Experience

Michael Best has the depth and experience to help religious and faith-based organizations. We've served as general counsel to hundreds of such organizations across the country, including churches, church-affiliated hospitals and senior living facilities, religious nonprofits, religious schools, denominations, religious and educational camps, foster and adoption agencies, rescue missions, schools and universities, synagogues, missionary foundations and conferences, and social services entities.

Beyond being excellent legal professionals, we are known for being both proactive and price predictable. Our approach has been well received by clients across the country—resulting in a growing client base for our firm and, in turn, long-term viability and sustainability for our clients. It is a privilege to partner with our religious and faith-based clients.



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