

A SUMMARY OF THE GRACE REPORT TO CHBC

PREFACE

On November 4, 2022 GRACE delivered their Final Report and Recommendations to the CHBC elders. The report is 64 pages long. What follows is a summary of their report.

After releasing the full report to 47 CHBC leaders, a meeting was held Wednesday night, November 9, to discuss how to best further release the report to our church. After listening carefully to the wisdom of the group, the elders met later that evening and voted to provide a summary, coupled with a response, instead of releasing the full GRACE report. This is for 2 main reasons:

1. The report deals with numerous employment/HR situations that are described in detail. This is protected information and policy does not allow us to make these details public. A summary can pass along the report's findings while appropriately not disclosing private HR information.
2. Though quotes in the report have been assigned designations such as E-5 and FS-3, the report surprisingly reveals many details about individuals, making it easy to determine identities in many cases. Congregants and leaders did not make these statements to GRACE with the understanding that their identity would be tied to their remarks in a public way, nor did they give permission for the release of their statements to the public. An example (not real): A former Deacon chair said X. Her husband, an elder, said Y. These two details will disclose identities. A summary can address this weakness.

In some places we've summarized and in other places copied-and-pasted directly, but every effort has been made to capture the tone and content of GRACE's report. Challenging as this has been, we are confident this summary will serve God's people and God's purposes at CHBC.

Here is an outline of the GRACE report, taken from their bold headlines. Our summary will follow their outline:

I. INTRODUCTION

II. METHODOLOGY

- A. Scope
- B. Survey
- C. Interviews
- D. Documentation Information

III. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

- A. Safety
 1. Training, Prevention and Awareness of Abuse Dynamics
 2. CHBC Policies and Procedures
 - a. CHBC Bylaws and Constitution, Structure, and Governance
 - b. CHBC Employment Policies and Procedures Regarding Misconduct
 - c. CHBC Child Safety Policies and Procedures

B. Trustworthiness and transparency of church leadership with the broader congregation

1. Handling of ministry changes
 - a. Discovery Ministry
 - b. Chinese Ministry
 - c. Sonlight Choir
2. Handling of Staff Departures
 - a. Departure of Staff Member 1
 - b. Departure of Staff Member 2
 - c. Departure of Staff Member 3
 - d. Departure of Staff Member 4
3. Use of Separation Agreements

C. Peer Support

D. Collaboration and Mutuality

E. Empowerment, Voice and Choice

F. Gender, Cultural and Historical Issues

1. Gender Implications: Treatment of Women
2. Historical Implications: Reported Issues of Race
3. Cultural Implications: Workplace Treatment & Organizational Culture
 - a. Power Dynamics
 - b. Forgiveness and Apologies
 - i. To Specific Individuals
 - Apology to a former minister and elder
 - Apology to Those Interviewed for Executive Pastor Investigation
 - Apology to Former Staff Member
 - Apology to Former Minister
 - ii. To the Congregation
 - Apology to Congregation Following the Executive Pastor's Resignation
 - iii. Analysis

IV. IMPACT

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of GRACE’s assessment is “To assist CHBC in creating a safer environment for employees, team members, congregants, and individuals who have contact with the organization. The assessment by GRACE took slightly over one year to complete.”

GRACE was engaged in September of 2021 to address concerns that had surfaced in the wake of the resignation of the Executive Pastor (who resigned in April 2021). As communication to the congregation announcing his resignation stated, “Due to formal complaints concerning a problematic work environment involving [the] Executive Pastor, the Elders recently commissioned an independent, external review.... People in various roles on staff and serving as volunteers felt hurt or wounded by [issues that were investigated in the external review], and by the lack of engagement when concerns were raised.” GRACE was engaged in response to the broader concerns raised by these issues.

Over 18 months passed between the first phone call from CHBC to GRACE and when CHBC received this report.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. SCOPE

Here is the scope of assessment as stated by GRACE, and outlined in the engagement agreement with CHBC:

1. Trustworthiness and transparency of church leadership with the broader congregation.
2. Care for those who are hurting, whether the source of pain was at CHBC or elsewhere.
3. Level of training and awareness of leadership regarding trauma, trauma-informed practice, and responding to complaints and concerns.
4. Adequacy of policies and procedures with regards to preventing misconduct and responding to misconduct and reports of misconduct.
5. Additional areas of need identified during the course of this assessment.

GRACE conducted their assessment through the lens of Scriptural principles and the SAMHSA’s Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Care (TIC). To summarize, here are the six principles:

Six Principles of TIC:

- **Safety-** Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe.
- **Trustworthiness and Transparency–** Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among staff, clients, and family members of those receiving services.
- **Peer Support-** These are integral to the organizational and service delivery approach and are understood as a key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment.

- **Mutuality and Collaboration-** There is recognition that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. One does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.
- **Empowerment, Voice and Choice** - Organization aims to strengthen the staff, client, and family members' experience of choice, and recognizes that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach. This builds on what clients, staff, and communities have to offer, rather than responding to perceived deficits.
- **Gender, Cultural and Historical Issues-** The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases, offers culturally responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

In sum: GRACE pursued the 5 goals in the engagement agreement above, through the lens of the 6 principles of Trauma Informed Care (TIC). Here is a link to learn more about SAMHSA (The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a Division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services): <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>

B. SURVEY

GRACE distributed a confidential and voluntary survey to all current CHBC members, staff and board members. The survey received 482 responses. Individuals who were willing to speak to GRACE were able to provide contact information.

C. INTERVIEWS

GRACE conducted 63 interviews. Interviewees included current and former board members, pastors and ministry leaders, staff, church members and attendees. GRACE did not speak with all elders, deacons, or staff employees.

GRACE used a qualitative statistical analysis tool to organize and analyze qualitative data and to identify themes.

D. DOCUMENTATION INFORMATION

“GRACE also obtained documents and other non-testimonial information through interviewees, CHBC leadership, and targeted internet searches. Types of documents included, but were not limited to, relevant policies, church governance documents, church statements, meeting records, personal correspondence, and online content.”

III. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

[ed. Note: Each of the 6 headings below, A-F, represent one of the 6 principles of TIC]

A. SAFETY

GRACE noted that components of safety may be physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Being free of physical harm is the basic element of safety. However, even when physical safety is not threatened, emotional, psychological or spiritual safety may be at risk. Situations that can compromise feeling safe could include: Dismissing attitudes, cultural and gender bias or insensitivity, unexpected significant change and chaos, insecurity and uncertainty, unclear or inappropriate boundaries, misuse of Scripture or spiritual authority to justify unwanted behavior or silence opposition and questioning. And, other more subtle factors can chip away at emotional, psychological and spiritual safety.

GRACE noted many individuals, including a current staff member, expressed trust in CHBC leadership. One survey respondent, for example, wrote "I have full trust in the leadership of CHBC ... I naturally tend to be a skeptical and distrusting person and have had questions myself, but after bringing these to leadership, my trust has been restored¹." GRACE's assessment, however, also found many congregants and employees of CHBC felt a loss of safety. One representative individual said "this wasn't a safe place anymore." Many of the responses expressing loss of safety pointed to the leadership's handling of staff departures, response to congregants concerns over the departures, and some interoffice communication. Those will be highlighted in more depth in the next section on Trustworthiness and Transparency of church leadership with the broader congregation.

GRACE stated, "One area that helps promote safety in an organization are clear policies and procedures about all forms of misconduct, clear reporting structures, and clarity for all employees regarding consequences for policy violations. Policies should have clauses that protect survivors, encourage reporting of wrongdoing, include retaliation language, and explore whistleblower protection. Additionally, institutions that prioritize safeguarding measures such as training, prevention, and awareness of abuse dynamics instill an environment of safety."

1. TRAINING, PREVENTION, & AWARENESS OF ABUSE DYNAMICS

GRACE found that "most pastors, elders and staff personnel had not received trauma-informed training or knew what the term meant." Some had read books or articles on the subject or had gone through sexual harassment training at one time or another. Several stated they would like to receive more related training.

GRACE stated, "CHBC should ensure it offers robust training by trauma-informed experts for all those in its church. Becoming a trauma-informed organization is ongoing and is not accomplished merely by a checklist, but through 'constant attention, caring awareness, and cultural change at the organizational level.' In so doing, CHBC is shepherding the wounded in its flock. By becoming more trauma-informed as a community, CHBC is living out its Biblical mandate to love thy neighbor as thyself and care for marginalized populations. In doing so they will become a safer environment for those inside and outside its walls."

¹ This was the only Survey Respondent, of 482 surveys, to be quoted in the report. The other quotations are from interviews, personal email correspondence, or documents provided by interviewees or church leadership.

2. CHBC POLICIES & PROCEDURES

A. CHBC BYLAWS & CONSTITUTION, STRUCTURE, & GOVERNANCE

GRACE noted they would not assess CHBC bylaws, constitution, structure, and governance as this was the role of LFM (Leighton Ford Ministries consulting group). GRACE noted that the positions of elders, pastors, and other leadership hold great responsibility, power and influence. GRACE quoted Dr. Diane Langberg,

“In Matthew 28:18-19, Jesus says, ‘All authority, all power is given to me; therefore go...’ Jesus holds all authority. That means any little bit of power you and I have is derivative; we are dispatched under his authority. Jesus does not give authority to us; he retains it. He is sending us out under his authority to carry out his enterprises in his ways. Every drop of power you and I hold is shared power, given to us by the One who holds it all. It is not ours. It is his. He has shared what is rightfully his with us...All power that you and I hold is God’s and has been given to us by him for the sole purpose of glorifying him and blessing others. If all power is derivative, then Christians should hold it with great humility².”

GRACE recommended “that CHBC bylaws and constitution should be amended as needed in order to consistently align with policies and practices related to misconduct. In addition, the structure and governance should be amended as needed to provide clarity on issues of reporting abuse, who will handle the allegations, and CHBC’s leadership response to abuse.”

B. CHBC EMPLOYMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES REGARDING MISCONDUCT

GRACE noted that the CHBC Employee Handbook currently lists ways to maintain a workplace free of harassment and sensitive to employees’ diverse experiences. GRACE recommended that CHBC policies more clearly define sexual harassment to provide clarity when a situation arises, which can serve as a guide for those investigating allegations to determine whether a policy violation has occurred. GRACE also stated, “CHBC’s policy should address other forms of misconduct, including but not limited to: gender misconduct, other forms of sexual misconduct (such as sexual assault), behavioral misconduct, abuse of power, and spiritual abuse.”

GRACE noted that more clarity surrounding the staff reporting structure would be helpful and recommended that CHBC more clearly define situations that may prompt law enforcement involvement. They recommended that the reporting structure include reporting to a safe person (such as a victim advocate or trauma-informed ombudsperson) and one who did not engage in the abusive behavior. They also recommended that:

“reporting policies include a robust whistleblower clause and clearly define retaliation and resulting consequences in the event reprisal occurs. The policy should also state what the response plan will be for allegations of abuse. For example, will there be an investigation? In what scenarios will there be an investigation? Will the investigation take place by an external third-party? Is there a timeline for response to the allegations? Clarifying these questions will reduce ambiguity in situations where abuse allegations arise in the future. Reducing ambiguity can increase safety.”

² Diane Langberg, *Redeeming Power: Understanding Authority and Abuse in the Church* (2020).

Providing a robust policy creates an environment of safety and clearly defines expectations of CHBC. GRACE concluded this section with the following recommendations:

“CHBC’s employee policy on misconduct must clearly state what the consequences will be for misconduct, what the process is of how the information will be communicated to the rest of the employees and congregation without naming victims, and what CHBC will do to provide care for all those impacted... Once implemented and the employees are adequately trained, these policies should be applied consistently over time and across all situations. Consistent application of policies and procedures can enhance real and perceived safety.”

C. CHBC CHILD SAFETY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

GRACE commended CHBC for having a Child Safety Policy but recommended adding wording that better defines abuse and describes how to respond to abuse. “As CHBC revises policies, they should ask questions such as:

- Is it safe to disagree with authority?
- Is it safe to report concerns?
- Is it safe to question one’s faith?
- Do we outline a safe response to reports of assault?
- Do we outline a safe response to threats or intimidation?”

GRACE recommended several improvements to the Child Safety Policies and Procedures:

- The policy should start with a theological framework for why abuse is not tolerated: “remind readers that these policies are not being done to avoid litigation or reduce our insurance rate—but because children are Christ’s representatives (Mark 9:36-37) and we intend to treat them with the respect due messengers of God.”
- The policy should list definitions for child abuse and neglect directly in the policy so it is clear which definitions CHBC is utilizing.
- The policy procedures should include specific numbers to call rather than the generic reference to “Department of Social Services.”
- The policy should “clearly describe mandatory reporting guidelines and reporting to appropriate law enforcement and provide policies pertaining to abuse between a church representative (volunteer, church leaders, pastor, etc.) and a minor, a parent/caregiver and a minor, and a minor and minor.”
- CHBC should hire outside counsel “(both legal and individuals with expertise in their fields, such as child maltreatment, employment law, misconduct, trauma, and church polity) to conduct a more robust audit of CHBC policies and procedures to ensure they comply with North Carolina law, Federal law, and best practices.”
- “CHBC should ensure that all policies are compiled in cohesive documents that are consistently drafted and applied and publicly available to all staff, employees, pastors, elders, deacons, volunteers and congregants.”

B. TRUSTWORTHINESS & TRANSPARENCY OF LEADERSHIP WITH BROADER CONGREGATION

"Safety rests on several things, and one of the most central is trustworthiness and transparency." GRACE found 3 areas that eroded trust in leadership: handling of ministry changes, handling of staff departures, and use of separation agreements. GRACE's assessment and analysis of all three will be summarized here in the order GRACE presented them in their report.

1. HANDLING OF MINISTRY CHANGES

GRACE was made aware that CHBC has experienced numerous changes in the past ten years. One type of change described to GRACE was a shift away from grassroots and congregant-led ministries toward ministries that are staff-led, which meet criteria determined by staff. The timing of these changes seemed to coincide with when the lead pastor and the executive pastor started their pastorates, as stated by one respondent. As GRACE said, "GRACE is not attempting to assess whether the changes are good or bad themselves. Rather, GRACE is assessing the transparency of leadership during the transitions and how that impacted church culture and the trustworthiness of the leaders." Discovery, the Chinese Ministry, and the Sonlight Choir were listed as examples. Participants who had been hurt by these transitions, as well as other leaders, were quoted in the report:

- A Discovery ministry leader described to GRACE that messaging regarding the designation of the ministry in the presence of elders "left the leadership of the ministry feeling confused and uncertain about the ministry's future."
- Leaders of the Chinese ministry described to GRACE how they felt CHBC "stopped supporting the ministry."
- A Sonlight leader recalled an email describing reducing support to the choir. "...it will still get some money to help you out but we're not going to help you out anymore. We're not going to make copies. You are not going to have an admin that you can talk to. You guys are on your own."

In GRACE's analysis of the handling of these lay-led ministries, they noted there are often legitimate reasons for bringing change to ministry. As GRACE stated: "the common thread[s] GRACE heard in these accounts and others [were] reasons not clearly communicated, leadership not honoring and listening to those who were deeply invested in these ministries, the timing of communication, mixed messages, poor follow through, and other related dynamics [that impaired] trustworthiness and transparency. The way in which changes were handled, and a lack of transparency regarding those changes, contributed to distrust."

2. HANDLING OF STAFF DEPARTURES

Concerns over staff departures were a key reason for CHBC hiring GRACE. In GRACE's report they clearly state that their analysis is "not an attempt to assess whether the staff departures were warranted or what caused them." Rather, the examples of staff departures shared with GRACE and listed in the report are to illustrate how they were handled in a way that eroded trust in leadership. GRACE stated that the departures, as described to them, revealed inconsistencies in the methods or policies followed.

GRACE summarized the details surrounding four staff departures, which occurred over the past decade, including the public resignation of the executive pastor in 2021. As GRACE noted, "The relevance [of the EP's departure] to this assessment is that when congregants compare CHBC's handling of the executive pastor's

departure with what they've been learning about the departure of other staff members they can't understand why other staff members received [apparently] worse treatment than an executive pastor who needed to be investigated and asked to resign for abusing power.”

As one congregant put it, “here's a guy [the executive pastor] with known problems, right? Creates very difficult work environment, abusive [ed: his word] towards employees for eight years, he gets all kinds of support, training, guidance, prayer. [A former employee] on the other hand, who is a problem employee for years, but people were afraid to speak up ... not a word ... and this person is not given an opportunity to grow, not an opportunity to go through training.”

Communication about some staff departures to the rest of the staff and church contained statements that were confusing to some. In their report, GRACE mentioned CHBC leadership's response to questions about two staff departures in the Listening Meeting of October 14, 2021, “They said both departures were handled professionally but acknowledged that it was hurtful for the employees and that ‘there are probably things we could do better’ and that ‘we don't want the last day of someone's employment to be a traumatic experience.’ They shared that they were reconsidering their current policy and how they could do better in the future.”

In some cases, GRACE found unclear communication between Deacons and Elders about policies around resignation and severance. In others, relational reconciliation and restoration have remained elusive, with injured parties still feeling deeply wounded. GRACE also remarked, “While the above accounts present concerns about trustworthiness and transparency, one administrative staff expressed hope and growing trust. She described the difference in the work environment in the past year: “I can't even really put into words how much has changed in such a positive way. And the team, from my perspective, it's just so much more united.”

A common thread running through each of the four accounts is the need for a clear, consistent policy concerning communication about staff departures, both to other staff and to the congregation. GRACE also highlighted the need for policies that foster care for departing employees since some staff felt deeply hurt by both the review and termination processes. One staff member described the review process as “one of the worst, most uncontextualized, demeaning and unprofessional experiences of my work life.”

3. USE OF SEPARATION AGREEMENTS

For some congregants, the frustration with staff departures is magnified due to the presence of separation agreements. The report states “GRACE was informed that CHBC utilized separation agreements that limited the ability to share information when some employees departed from CHBC.” Though several interviewees reported “knowing others that had separation and release agreements from CHBC, GRACE only spoke with two past employees that had been offered or were under such an agreement.” GRACE reported both these past employees' experiences, as well as CHBC leadership's explanation of the use of these agreements.

GRACE concluded “[t]hese agreements had the effect of silencing former employees and isolating them upon departure. In effect, these agreements were not transparent and gave the perception that CHBC was taking a posture of protecting the institution through use of these agreements.”

In a written reply, CHBC explained that the two separation agreements in question “were given in alignment with our policy and with the best intentions in mind. That being said, the Deacon Board will be reviewing the policies in conjunction with the review and recommendations of LFM.” A CHBC leader also explained, “So

anyone who loses their job at CHBC is not entitled to unemployment. So our goal, whenever possible, whenever we can is to offer a severance, [a] generous severance to help them through that.”

GRACE is particularly concerned about the use of limiting agreements in cases in which there is a power differential. They also warn that the use of such agreements “raise concerns when dealing with situations of sexual misconduct and may have the impact of silencing a victim. Failing to disclose abuse may also have the effect of covering up abusers and their misconduct,” though it should be noted that no instances of sexual misconduct were alleged by any of the witnesses surveyed or interviewed by GRACE. GRACE recommended that “CHBC evaluate to what extent and in what situations CHBC will use similar limiting agreements’.”

C. PEER SUPPORT

As GRACE noted, “In the scope, GRACE was asked to assess CHBC’s care for those who are hurting, whether the source of pain was at CHBC or elsewhere. A main way CHBC can care for those who are hurting is through pastoral care. If done well, pastoral care is an effective way CHBC can offer peer support.” In general, caring for others requires making the other party feel safe in the relationship, particularly when they have experienced recent trauma or past trauma. Caring certainly should not cause additional harm.

GRACE reported that they “heard multiple accounts from individuals who recalled witnessing or being the recipient of insults and name-calling by leadership.” Some instances of this type of communication occurred within hearing distance of congregants.

- One congregant recalled the lead pastor and some leaders speaking poorly of other staff who weren’t present and said, “the degree of harshness that I saw, it wasn’t biblical, it wasn’t loving, there was no grace shown.”
- A former staff member described experiences he had with the lead pastor “in which jokes and humor went too far to the point where the individual felt personally attacked.”
- “Another former staff member recalled an instance when she heard two pastors making fun of another staff person in that staff person’s absence immediately after a staff meeting in which the staff person had shared a certain theological view.”

GRACE noted that “much of this communication was couched in humor and innuendo. The communication left witnesses and recipients feeling confused and humiliated. Indirect, veiled, and subtle put-downs couched as jokes are sometimes used by others because it affords the communicator the ability to deny any ill intent or argue they are being misrepresented or misunderstood if others take offense. The communicator might say at that point, “It was just a joke!” They may also minimize any harm caused by the communication.”

They go on to state that “the descriptions of uncaring and hurtful insults, name-calling, and jokes shared with GRACE reveal that this form of hurtful communication has been experienced by staff members as early as 2012 and as recent as 2022, revealing a pattern of communication over time that has not been adequately addressed and reformed.” The person most often mentioned related to this form of speech was the Lead Pastor.

GRACE noted that this type of communication used by those with more power toward those who held less power can be particularly hurtful:

“A follower, such as a staff member, should not have to be put in a position where they are unsure of whether their leader is crossing boundaries, uncertain as to what their leader really thinks of them, and uncomfortable with the denigration of others in their absence. Followers should not have to be put in a position where they have to decide whether or not to say something about the appropriateness of their leader’s communication.

Name-calling, jokes, and insults fail to live up to the biblical standards of speech that ought to edify and build up. Paul told the believers at Ephesus to not let any unwholesome talk come out of their mouths, but only that which is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. Caring communication is wholesome and promotes the well-being of others. When pastoral care involves the awareness of and concern for the needs of those under the church’s care, then pastoral communication will be focused on that which promotes the building up of the body in accordance with the needs of the body. Additionally, edifying pastoral communication will serve the good of the whole group - those who listen will also benefit. The descriptions of the communication in this section describe a kind of speech that fails to meet these biblical standards, standards that apply not only to pastors but to all believers.”

D. COLLABORATION & MUTUALITY

Care from CHBC leadership should also extend to those congregants who partner with leadership in the planning and delivery of ministries to the broader church. As mentioned previously, CHBC has experienced numerous changes in ministry delivery over the past ten years. As GRACE noted, “the elder chair described a shift away from grassroots ministries toward a narrower focus on supporting ministries that met certain criteria. At the same time, CHBC experienced significant staff turnover. Participants expressed sadness and frustration with the way in which church leadership managed change, such as not giving clear reasons for changes or allowing key stakeholders to be a part of the conversation on how to support or better the ministries.”

GRACE also stated, “This report has previously referenced the dynamics associated with both ministry and staffing changes. Those dynamics illustrate a lack of collaboration and mutuality. GRACE recognizes that leadership of an organization does not need to gain approval before making programmatic and staffing changes. When these changes are made, however, leadership can act in a collaborative way by engaging with ministry leaders and participants to develop transition plans, communication strategies, and care for those who will be affected most. This collaborative process seemed to be lacking.”

E. EMPOWERMENT, VOICE & CHOICE

GRACE stated, “Trauma is an incredibly disempowering force... Too often, the formal and informal supports that are in place to help a person after trauma continue this pattern of disempowerment...An important aspect of empowerment, voice, and choice is control of the narrative. This does not mean that people and organizations must remain silent about decisions or in the face of inaccuracies. It does, however, involve conscious decisions to allow the voice of others who have been impacted by our actions to speak.” This introduction framed GRACE’s discussion of the voice and choice of hurt staff members, particularly those involved in situations of conflict or misconduct, and guided their recommendations around the ways in which those who are hurt are encouraged to pursue reconciliation.

As GRACE noted, Matthew 18 is often used to instruct people in conflict resolution, and is included in the CHBC Employee Handbook as part of conflict resolution protocols. GRACE found that some interviewees felt that the application of this principle was inappropriate for their situation, given the harm they felt they had experienced and the power differential that existed within the relationship. GRACE also noted that some CHBC leaders agreed that Matthew 18 cannot be applied to every situation.

GRACE stated that “CHBC must distinguish conflict from misconduct and determine if, and in what circumstances, Matthew 18 applies. In Matthew 18, Jesus prescribes three progressive steps for handling personal offenses within the local church: 1) a private confrontation, 2) a witnessed confrontation, and 3) a wider confrontation before the church. At each step, the goal is repentance by the offender as a basis for some form of reconciliation with the offended. If all three approaches are rebuffed, then the offender is no longer part of the fellowship. Finally, CHBC should consider power differentials in the application of this Scripture.”

F. GENDER, CULTURAL & HISTORICAL ISSUES

GRACE framed this section on gender, cultural, and historical issues in the context of their larger trauma-informed perspective. They noted, “Trauma has lasting effects on people and groups. At times, this occurs because specific groups are targeted, knowingly or unknowingly, with potentially traumatic actions. Slavery, genocide, overt disenfranchisement, and gender discrimination are some of the most easily recognized forms of this potential trauma. It has more subtle variants as well, including unconscious bias, systemic practices, stereotypes, and representation. These may not rise as obviously to the level of trauma, but they can still contribute to a traumatic group experience, especially when the experience and effects of the event are considered, rather than just the event itself. Just as safety forms the foundation of trauma-informed practice, historical, cultural, and gender factors are increasingly being recognized as an overarching theme that reaches into all elements of trauma-informed practice.”

1. GENDER IMPLICATIONS: TREATMENT OF WOMEN

As GRACE noted, CHBC holds to a complementarian position on the roles of men and women in church leadership. GRACE stated, “GRACE respects the sincere beliefs of CHBC and does not seek to offer an analysis of CHBC’s beliefs of complementarianism, but there can be benefit from understanding the effect these beliefs can have on a workplace and church environment composed of both males and females.”

GRACE cited interviewees who felt that complementarianism, particularly the form espoused by the former executive pastor, was at the root of many of the problems they had observed. They also cited instances in which both the lead pastor and elder chair had acknowledged that women had not felt “heard or listened to,” and some felt “confusion and hurt.”³

GRACE also noted, “In the annual congregational meeting on June 6, 2021, the elder chair addressed concerns with how women are treated and valued at CHBC as well as stating that women have not been treated well in the past. The creation of the advisory team is also a new endeavor to “create a platform for regular discussion (not just a ‘feedback’ loop addressing problems and crises) to allow for complementarian

³ In the June 6, 2021 congregational meeting the Lead Pastor said “I abdicated key leadership ... to the end that I lacked intentionality, clarity and shepherd in love in many situations. I am truly sorry, friends. To these ends, several parts of our beliefs and culture lack clarity, often creating confusion and hurt. Some of these include: our value for women, our value for relationships over organization.”

working of men and women in a cross-section of areas, including input on issues of governance and direction.” GRACE commended CHBC for being willing to look at these concerns. The advisory team will focus mainly on “care concerns,” “governance and directional input on presenting conversations,” and “similar themes as the elder charge: feeding, leading, protecting, caring.”

GRACE concluded, “How CHBC has lived out its stated values has at times been inconsistent with and undermine[d] the values CHBC claims to espouse. While the formation of the advisory committee and a stated apology are good first steps, CHBC must decide which values regarding women in ministry it will follow, and how those values will become part of the very DNA of CHBC.”

2. HISTORICAL IMPLICATIONS: REPORTED ISSUES OF RACE

GRACE noted that CHBC has a history of diversity that several people reported as a strength, but some respondents commented that diversity in the congregation and the leadership has lessened. One elder shared that CHBC leadership has been grappling with the issue of how the church should respond to the racial tensions in the US for some time, including a sabbatical study by the lead pastor on the issue. After the sabbatical the leadership adopted a strategic plan, formed a class (Race and Faith), hosted a CHBC podcast series on race, and published several CHBC blog articles covering the topic. However, the initiative has been plagued with challenges. For example, the elder position paper on race may not be finished. Four former elders resigned on February 12, 2021, for many reasons, including an observed decline in diversity and their perception that CHBC was failing to implement the strategic priority on ethnic diversity.

Like the rest of the nation, CHBC has been trying to figure out what is the best way to respond to social and political events. After the January 6th, 2021 Capitol Riot some congregants expressed concern about how leadership addressed the matter. During this tumultuous time a former elder reached out to people of color in the congregation asking them two questions: “What would you like for the elders and leaders of the church to know and what it’s like to be a person of color at CHBC?” and “What would you like for the elders and leaders of the church to know about the racial climate at CHBC?” This elder shared with GRACE that the response he received after sharing the findings during an elder meeting about the race issue was, “silence from the [lead pastor], other staff, and most of the elders.”

In their report, GRACE noted some of the responses from the congregants of color to the two-questions mentioned above:

- A black congregant expressed he wanted more humility from the leadership. He wanted a safe place to express what he is experiencing without being told how to appropriately frame discussions around current phrases in public discourse like ‘Black Lives Matter’: “How can you begin to disciple me in my walk with Christ if there are ground rules on how I can express myself?”
- An AAPI (Asian American Pacific Islander) member shared she felt unsafe in her neighborhood after friends had been accosted and “accused of bringing the CHINESE virus to this country,” and did not receive support from leadership. “The statement–‘we need to be tolerant of all views’ is one such very hurtful sentiment to the minority groups.”
- One person expressed frustration that when a congregant of color was hurt, “the minority person would go to the other person and say this is what you said. And the white person would say, ‘Well that’s not what I meant.’ Then it’s on the person who’s the minority to forgive them and move on.”

GRACE noted in their report that the lead pastor addressed his failure to lead well around the topic of race in a 2021 Congregational Meeting where he said, “I have allowed for lack of clarity and tussles over social theory to cloud our Biblical desires and actions. I am sorry.I want to grow in my leadership in bringing Biblical truth, clarity, and action to this very important fruit of the gospel.”

3. CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS: WORKPLACE TREATMENT & ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

A. POWER DYNAMICS

In this section, GRACE summarized some of Dr. Diane Langberg’s work on power which is elaborated in her book *Redeeming Power: Understanding Abuse and Power in the Church* (2020). Regarding CHBC, GRACE stated, “In an institution such as CHBC, the institution as well as those within the institution possess some form of power and influence. Those in positions of power should use their positions for the good of those whom they oversee.”

B. FORGIVENESS & APOLOGIES

GRACE stated: “GRACE received multiple accounts from individuals who shared their experience of receiving apologies from CHBC leadership. Apologies were delivered by CHBC leadership to both individuals and the larger congregation.”

I. TO SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS

In one instance the lead pastor and a former elder chair emailed an apology, “recognizing the hurt you have experienced,” expressing sorrow “for the pain this has caused,” and stating their “heart’s (sic) desire that we can reconcile by the power and the truth of the gospel.” The recipients questioned the timing of the correspondence, coming some two years after the employee’s departure. GRACE noted that this apology “did not contain any specific wrongs that were being confessed or acknowledged a need for repentance.” The elder chair at the time commented “the two parties were too far apart to attempt a reconciliation.” Similar examples were cited by other staff who questioned the timing and sincerity of apologies given.

GRACE noted that after the conclusion of the executive pastor investigation, “The lead pastor and the elder chair sent an email to those who were interviewed during the executive pastor’s review. The email included the findings in the report, a request to keep the findings within the church or with those involved, and an apology.” It also “offered an apology and limited counseling for those that felt that they needed services.”

II. TO THE CONGREGATION

GRACE reported that on April 18, 2021, the elder chair called a congregational meeting to discuss the executive pastor’s sudden resignation. At that meeting the elder chair, expressed appreciation for the executive pastor’s time and service at CHBC. As GRACE noted, “[h]e also stated that the executive pastor “had not served as well” and CHBC were [sic] in the process of hiring an organization to look into the structure of the organization, reporting avenues etc.” GRACE then reported that the lead pastor spoke after the elder chair and, rather than apologizing, explained why he had been unaware of the executive pastor’s behavior. GRACE noted that he highlighted the need for prayer and support for the executive pastor and his family, praying “for the executive pastor and his family, the staff and elders “who love [the executive pastor],” but not for those who were wounded by the executive pastor.

GRACE also noted that “at the Annual Congregational Meeting on June 6, 2021, the lead pastor read an apology that was only meant to be read and not disseminated...A congregant told GRACE that there wasn’t follow through regarding the apology and that there was significant distrust with CHBC leadership in the ways they pursued reconciliation.”

III. ANALYSIS

GRACE concluded, “Seeking forgiveness is a necessary step when leadership has wronged others. Confession and apologies need to be offered with sincerity and clarity. They benefit the well-being of those who have been harmed, the integrity of the offender, and open the door for trust to be restored. CHBC’s apologies fail to realize these benefits when they do not contain meaningful admissions of guilt, clear statements about the harm caused, and steps for how that harm will be repaired and conduct reformed. Apology statements given by CHBC leadership frequently questioned whether harm was really caused by framing it as merely a possibility. If there was still any question as to whether harm may or may not have been caused, CHBC leadership should have continued to assess the situation until there was clarity.”

IV. IMPACT/CONCLUSIONS

In this section, GRACE stated:

“The environment at CHBC has impacted stakeholders in a variety of ways. It is important that CHBC leadership consider these impacts, both positive and negative, as it attempts to make sense of what is true and what needs to change. Harm that occurs in a church environment has the effect of reducing the wounded person’s ability to rely upon that environment for healing and recovery. An environment that is supposed to be a place where wounds can be healed becomes a place where wounds are inflicted. The consequences of church harm and maltreatment vary but cause harm that can last for significant time even having eternal consequences. Some staff members spoke of the mental exhaustion of trying to decide who was telling the truth or continually hearing stories of hurt people. Witnesses also spoke of spiritual, mental, and physical impacts from harm directly caused by CHBC going back a decade up to the present. Ignoring the hurting and focusing on the future or a now improved working environment does the church a disservice by not allowing room for often difficult but beneficial space of lament, grief, and repentance.

GRACE noted some reported impacts such as: weight loss, anxiety, depression, PTSD, isolation from church community, and an “emotional roller coaster.”

As GRACE noted, “The mark left on many of those within the reach of CHBC has been indelible. Not only directly harmed [sic], but indirectly as others stand in support of their brothers and sisters. Many feel they have been alienated and dismissed and in turn have lost their community. This conflict has hindered the process of healing. Many people said they have been hurt at CHBC, and much remains unresolved. CHBC has begun the process of addressing that harm. We pray it continues.”

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHBC ADDRESSING THE PAST RESPONSE

1. GRACE recommends that CHBC reach out to those who have said they experienced harm to determine what assistance or support they may want.
2. GRACE recommends that the leadership of CHBC develop a comprehensive plan that demonstrates sincere repentance to the congregation, those individuals who say they were hurt by CHBC's actions, and that includes but is not limited to the shortcomings of leadership mentioned in this report and the effects caused by those shortcomings. These communications should be clear and transparent about harm and errors and be done in a way that is trauma-formed and consistent with an understanding of dynamics of power and the concerns expressed by those who participated in this assessment.
3. GRACE recommends that CHBC host a service of lament related to the harm addressed by this assessment. A service of lament can be an opportunity for prayer, for acknowledging harm caused by CHBC, seeking wisdom going forward, for honoring those who have been hurt by CHBC, and for acknowledging a shared priority of the church as a whole to do better in the future.
4. GRACE recommends that CHBC repent to the individuals and the congregation for the use of giving severance with clauses that encourage silence or inaccurate information about the existence of the document or the reason why the individual resigned/terminated.
5. GRACE recommends that CHBC make this report available to the congregation in full.
6. GRACE recommends that CHBC acknowledge its failure in caring for the congregation and staff.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHBC ADDRESSING THE PRESENT

1. GRACE recommends that CHBC collaborate with the wounded to determine the best plan for further communication.
2. GRACE recommends that CHBC follow the guidance provided in the included policy review.
3. GRACE recommends that CHBC review training for all staff and volunteers to assure it incorporates and provides annual updates on:
 - The use and abuse of power
 - Grooming, boundaries, and misconduct
 - Caring for those who have been hurt or abused, whether it occurred at CHBC or elsewhere
 - Humility in the face of historical, cultural, and gender considerations
 - Internal and external reporting requirements
 - Trauma-informed practices

4. GRACE recommends that CHBC consider possible pathways to release former employees from the separation and release agreements.
5. GRACE recommends CHBC develop a task force to address issues and allegations of misconduct, abuse, and misuse of power.
6. GRACE recommends establishing a biblical and theological foundation for protecting the vulnerable to include within CHBC's policies. Policies provide a wonderful opportunity to speak about God's heart for the vulnerable and the abused. Integrating this perspective into the child protection policies helps establish the culture necessary to protect the vulnerable. Using the language of Christian faith will help everyone see the high priority of protecting the vulnerable resonate with your people, including kids. Incorporating CHBC's Christian beliefs and values within the policies allows CHBC to connect the policies' guidelines and protocols to their practices of walking out their faith. More detailed recommendations are included in the policy recommendation section.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHBC ADDRESSING THE FUTURE

1. GRACE recommends that CHBC consider participating in local and national efforts to encourage safeguarding and healthy use of power in churches.
2. GRACE respects the steps already taken by CHBC to develop and undergo a long-term process of learning about sexual abuse, abuse of power, and other forms of abuse. GRACE recommends that CHBC remain on this path and recognize it as aspirational - the learning must never end. Additional training may include:
 - Shepherding congregations through announcements of alleged misconduct
 - Responding to allegations of abuse or harm in a trauma-informed manner
 - How to care for survivors in its ministries with excellence
 - Ways Scripture has historically been used to justify abuse or harm and a poor response to abuse or harm
 - Implementation of trauma-informed principles in faith communities
 - Understanding and addressing the spiritual impact of abuse or harm, including when religious themes are incorporated into the abuse or harm or used to justify it
3. GRACE recommends that the entire CHBC community receive ongoing training and education on issues related to abuse, harm, and use of power.
4. GRACE recommends CHBC develop Abuse Safeguarding Teams. GRACE recommends that the safeguarding teams:
 - Include at least one survivor of abuse.
 - Include women.
 - Facilitate a support ministry for survivors of abuse.
 - Work with abuse experts developing safeguarding policies and response protocols for the church that satisfy best practice standards
 - Conduct annual audits of the safeguarding policies and response protocols, and revise as needed.
 - Facilitate ongoing safety training for children and adults.

- Play a central role in responding to reported safeguarding policy violations.
- Develop relationships with community partners who work in the field of addressing issues related to adult and child maltreatment.

5. GRACE recommends CHBC streamline and define, clarify, and simplify all reporting processes.

6. GRACE recommends that CHBC regularly preach and teach from the pulpit, Bible study groups, and meetings about Godly use of power, humility, God's love and justice for those who have been hurt or are vulnerable, repentance, and other related topics.