

## ***RISK REDUCTION: RESPONSE TO CONCERNS***



Effective ***response procedures***, which specify the details of handling an allegation or rumor, should include guidelines for:

- assuring that leaders of the congregation's governing body are accessible to members of the congregation for discussion of problems or complaints
- maintaining a written complaint or suggestion file
- guaranteeing that each complaint or suggestion receives some type of action or response immediately, according to church policy
- immediately reporting suspected child or dependent adult abuse to the proper legal authorities, as required by state law
- notifying and working with the denominational officials and the insurance company
- using an attorney
- suspending (but *not* firing) the accused volunteer or employee until an investigation is complete
- carefully following church and denominational policies
- maintaining adequate records
- selecting a spokesperson to report to the church board on the response process (to avoid secrecy while protecting the confidentiality of all parties)

### **SAMPLE POLICY**

The policy section on "Response to Concerns" might read:

- a. All concerns and allegations shall be taken seriously.
- b. Situations must be handled forthrightly with due respect for the individuals' privacy and confidentiality.
- c. The church's insurance carrier shall be contacted immediately.
- d. Full cooperation must be given to civil authorities under the guidance of the church attorney.
- e. Adequate care must be shown for the well-being of victims, the accused and families involved.
- f. Accusatory attitudes and statements should be avoided. No victims should be blamed in any way, nor should their stories be minimized.

***It is advisable that your final policies, procedures and forms be reviewed  
by both a local lawyer and your church's insurance agent.***

*Adapted from Preferred Risk Mutual Insurance Company; Washington Association of Churches;  
UCC Insurance Advisory Board; Carr McCellan, Ingersoll, Thompson and Horn (law firm);  
Western Insurance Associates and Church Law and Tax Report.*