

Whereas: The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference does not currently have a functioning trained response team to assist individuals, and churches when sexual misconduct is discovered.

And whereas, research has shown responding well to sexual misconduct reduces levels of harm to individuals and churches and lessens liability;

And whereas, the following policy is proposed to guide the establishment of a Sexual Misconduct Response Team (SMRT):

Guiding Principle:

The *Book of Discipline* allows for the use of a Response Team to provide pastoral care when handling and following up on a complaint or other traumatic experience in a ministry setting. The cabinet in consultation with an experienced practitioner shall select “persons with qualifications and experience in assessment, intervention, or healing to assist during the supervisory response” (§362.1b). These roles include, but are not limited to, individual support for the accused and the complainant, and a working team to facilitate communication with and support for the congregation and families or others who are affected. *The bishop and Cabinet are mandated to “provide a process for healing within the congregation, annual conference, or other context of ministry...”* as part of the supervisory response (§362.1f) and judicial process (§2701.4c) (GCSRW, 2022).

Purpose of the Response Team:

The Response Team can be vital in support of congregations and individuals who have experienced sexual misconduct throughout the healing process. Teams also provide education to help understand the nature of sexual misconduct by a faith leader. The Response Team is not involved in any judicial or disciplinary processes that involve a legal resolution of a situation. *Bishops and/or district superintendents may employ a Response Team whenever a congregation and individuals experience trauma related to sexual misconduct.*

The response team shall be deployed across the conference for situations including but not limited to:

- Ministerial or clergy sexual misconduct
- Laity sexual misconduct directly involving the congregation or ministry setting
- Sexual abuse of an individual at a church camp or other church-affiliated event
- Any other instances as requested by the bishop, the bishop’s representative, the alleged individual harmed, the church involved, or the alleged perpetrator.

The focus of response teams is to support individuals who have experienced trauma and assist with healing. Response teams are charged with providing support, prayer, and encouragement for individuals harmed, families of the alleged individual harmed, the alleged perpetrator and their family, and the church community impacted by a complaint.

Recruitment of Team Members:

Response Teams should include an equal number of laity and clergy to reflect the gender, racial/ethnic, geographic, and age diversity of the congregations and constituent groups within an annual conference. Team members should be chosen and formally nominated through the nominations process and voted on at each annual conference session. Team members shall be identified in the following ways:

- Each district superintendent identifies by December 31st each year, 4-6 individuals within their district that can serve; once identified, the district superintendent confirms the willingness of the individual to serve.
- Any current team member is also given an opportunity to nominate individuals.
 - Nominations should be rotating based on a 3 year cycle so there is always someone who knows and keeps institutional memory
 - 2 coordinators- one acts as case manager and one acts as administrator and communicator

Once team members are identified and voted in, a list is developed of all contact information for any year and whom each is willing to walk with (victim, perpetrator, families, and church members); not all team members have to be willing to work with all individuals. This list will be kept by the 2 coordinators and the annual conference office.

Team members must:

- Complete training prescribed by the Annual Conference in conjunction with COSROW and approved by COSROW on a yearly basis.
- Complete and pass a background check every three years
- Have the skills, maturity, and passion for responding to trauma
- Be available to travel on short notice throughout GNJ.
- Present at one cabinet meeting per year, new clergy orientations, and a highlight at Annual Conference for both clergy and laity yearly about the purpose of the response team

Training for the Response Team

- Training will be provided by the annual conference a minimum of once yearly, for all response team members, and open to all members of the annual conference.

- Training will include the Do No More Harm curriculum and training to be developed and implemented yearly by COSROW and in conjunction with the GNJ Leadership. All training shall be approved by COSROW prior to being advertised to the conference membership and response team members.
- Topics to be covered in annual training shall include at minimum:
 - Counseling 101
 - Maintaining healthy interpersonal boundaries
 - Power dynamics of abuse
 - Responding well to individuals and congregations that have experienced abuse
 - Sacred trust
 - Secondary trauma
 - Self-care
 - Spiritual guidance
 - Trauma-informed care
 - Walking with the accused

Deployment of Response Team:

- Deployed at the bishop's discretion to a local ministry setting and/or;
- Deployed at the request of an individual or church impacted.
 - If deployed via request of individual or church community, the episcopal office will be notified of request and deployment
- If deployed to a local church, the team will host separate small group meetings with staff, SPRC, and members of the congregation.
 - At no time will the name of the alleged individual harmed be disclosed to prevent secondary harm to the individual.
- A minimum of 1 meeting will be required with a church or faith community after a complaint is filed against a church leader.
 - The purpose of these meetings is to address healing in the aftermath of misconduct or trauma.
 - Dates for follow-up meetings will be set to meet again with each group if requested.
 - A focus will be made on transparency while keeping confidentiality.
- Response Team Members shall also be deployed as an individual support person for any individual (alleged victim or alleged perpetrator) involved in a sexual misconduct complaint.

- Response Team members will be able to make recommendations for appropriate care and response to congregations, the cabinet, and the bishop when deemed appropriate and necessary by the Response Team.

Care of the Response Team:

- Co-chairs will debrief with the team after each interaction with an individual or congregation. Debriefing is critical and is an opportunity for team members to share thoughts, feelings, and ideas about each meeting.
- Ongoing learning opportunities for the Response Team, including team building, keeping skills sharp, and staying up-to-date on potential conference needs.
- The coordinator(s) set up meeting times and help determine resources to offer educational and spiritual growth for the team.

Therefore, be It Resolved That: The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference shall establish the GNJ Sexual Misconduct Response Team; The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference shall nominate at the 2024 Annual Conference two co-chairs to serve during 2024 year to plan and organize the team to include a budget, resources, plan trainings, and establish fuller policies and procedures internal to the team; The Greater New Jersey shall nominate members to the Sexual Misconduct Response Team in 2024 to serve starting in July 2025; The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference shall provide funding for 2024 for any necessary training for the co-chairs and COSROW members to fully develop final training and guidelines for the Response that will start in 2025; The Greater New Jersey Annual Conference shall included a budget line for the Sexual Misconduct Response Team to develop a budget for the training, travel, and response costs of the response team for 2025.

Rationale: When sexual misconduct is handled through trauma-informed practices, and with care for all involved, healing is more likely, and liability is lessened. Developing a team that can respond well when sexual misconduct complaints are initiated will help Greater New Jersey to be a beacon of hope and healing for those impacted by sexual misconduct, and lessen Greater New Jersey's liability when sexual misconduct happens.