



During the hiring process of Pastor Bryan Loritts, Summit Church leadership examined allegations of mishandling a sexual abuse case at Fellowship Church in Memphis, TN, ten years ago. Our evaluative steps included engaging legal counsel, and with their help contacting CPS and the Memphis police department, as well as talking to victims, critics, and past leaders/members at Fellowship Memphis church involved in the incident. We received signed statements from victims and testimony from key individuals affirming the essential parts of the narrative. At the end of this process, we were fully convinced that though mistakes in reporting and caring for victims were made, Pastor Bryan Loritts acted in good faith and in pastorally responsible ways in this matter, and that he had not sought to protect an abuser or cover up abuse.

However, after conversations with members of the [Church Cares Team](#), we realized that without an open and confidential channel for victims to report and an independent investigative firm to evaluate that evidence, an important part of our process was incomplete.

Proper handling of these issues is no small matter. It is crucial to follow best hiring practices for at least three reasons:

- First, the emotional safety of those directly affected requires an open, safe channel to which victims can appeal. We realize that when survivors have been abused within the church, and particularly in cases where a church may have mishandled or covered up abuse, survivors or witnesses will justifiably feel unsafe bringing information to a new church or pastoral team. Thus, it is important to have a channel for communication that creates a trusted place for these individuals to share what they know and have experienced. Without this information, churches may be making decisions without vital information.
- Second, the existence of this communication channel should be made public so that unknown victims can come forward. We recognize that without some type of public communication asking survivors or witnesses to share what they know, those who possess relevant information will be unaware of the opportunity to speak.
- Finally, it is important for the The Summit Church to provide a healthy example of churches handling abuse allegations with integrity. The courage of current victims to come forward is strengthened when they see churches take the appropriate steps. Past victims deserve to know the truth about how their case was handled. Private steps do not assist either past or current victims. Until churches begin to take this step, the public trust the church has lost will not be regained.

With regret for where we fell short of the mark and for any confusion and hurt caused, The Summit Church plans to pursue the following courses of action:

1. Acknowledging that we should have followed a better-advised protocol in vetting and hiring Bryan Loritts.
2. Hiring an independent firm to pursue any additional information regarding Bryan's handling of the sexual abuse cases at Fellowship Memphis which may have been missed in our previous assessment, including creating a channel for other victims to share their experience at their discretion.
3. To work with the Church Cares team to establish a protocol that will be helpful to other churches in similar circumstances.

At the recommendation of trusted advocates, we have engaged the firm Guidepost Solutions for the above. This firm was recommended to us based on their independence from any geographic location, entity or denominational affiliation, and because of their expertise in investigations and assessing institutional processes and dynamics specifically related to sexual harassment, abuse, and assault.

More detailed information will be forthcoming in a separate statement from the firm, but this review will include the following aspects:

- Guidepost and its team will be retained in an assessment capacity, meaning they will not be retained as legal counsel. Thus, the assessment will not create any privileged information.
- Personal identifying information of survivors or witnesses **will** be protected from the public and from Summit leadership unless those individuals designate otherwise in writing.
- The Summit will waive privileges related to any information or assessments already done on the circumstances surrounding Bryan Loritts and his time at Fellowship Memphis so that all information is accessible to Guidepost's team.
- The assessment will be done independent of any input or control of Summit or anyone affiliated with the Summit, outside of responding to questions and requests put forward by Guidepost.
- The assessment will culminate in a fully public report. For the two focal points above, this report will explain how information was gathered, fully detail the facts found, and note where questions or testimonies conflict in ways that factual information could not resolve.

Our hope is that as we continue to learn and implement the best practices for responding to abuse allegations that we can do so in a way that allows other churches to learn from our journey.