

# Summary Report of Investigation Outcomes, Learnings and Recommendations

March 28, 2022

**To:** Rexdale Alliance Church family and community including survivors, respondents, Church Members, and Adherents

**From:** Rexdale Alliance Church, The Alliance Canada, and the Eastern Canadian District of the Alliance Canada:

## **Introduction and Methodology**

On September 10, 2021, the Board of Elders at Rexdale Alliance Church as well as the Eastern Canadian District (“ECD”) and National Ministry Centre of The Alliance Canada (collectively, “we”) commenced an independent investigation with respect to allegations of sexual and spiritual abuse by clergy and lay leaders within Rexdale Alliance Church from as early as the 1970s.

An external, independent investigator with a background in law enforcement was engaged to conduct the investigation. We later invited Plan to Protect (an organization with more than 25 years’ experience in abuse prevention and vulnerable sector protection) to participate in the inquiry to help compile the findings, learnings, and recommendations from the witness testimonies. The purpose of the investigation was to: determine the nature and scope of the allegations; assist survivors in the healing process; create a culture of honesty, accountability, and transparency; and determine whether current policies and practices ensure a safe and caring environment.

Through multiple channels, we invited anyone who experienced sexual or spiritual abuse by clergy or lay leaders within Rexdale Alliance Church and who wished to be included in the investigation to contact the investigator.

## **Outcome of the Investigation**

The investigator spoke to five survivors who came forward with allegations of child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, or spiritual abuse. Additional survivors chose not to participate in the investigation.

In addition, the Board of Elders asked the investigator to help determine if Rexdale Alliance Church or The Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada (“C&MA”) policies had been breached.

The investigator found that eight out of eighteen allegations were substantiated, which involved sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and spiritual abuse.

The investigator also found that C&MA policy had been breached, including misconduct of licensed worker(s). With respect to the ten allegations that were unsubstantiated, these involved primarily spiritual abuse and the investigator found either that the allegations did not constitute spiritual abuse or there was insufficient evidence to substantiate them.

In light of the findings of the investigation, Rexdale Alliance Church, The Alliance Canada and the ECD, acknowledge the following:

1. Child sexual abuse was committed by a former lay leader within Rexdale Alliance Church from the late 1970s into the 1980s.

Sexual harassment was committed by a former licensed worker from the 1980s to the early 1990s and by a former youth worker within Rexdale Alliance Church in the early 1990s.

Spiritual abuse was committed from the 1980s to 2011 by former licensed workers and lay counsellors within Rexdale Alliance Church.

2. We are deeply grieved that these abuses occurred at all and particularly within Rexdale Alliance Church. The survivors were not provided the long-term care and support that they desperately needed. We are committed to working with survivors, affected individuals and the broader faith community to learn from these incidents and strengthen our approach to safeguarding and spiritual care.
3. Trauma-informed care of survivors of abuse means hearing their stories, reporting to public authorities as appropriate, providing them the support they need, and being able to have caring and intentional conversations to shepherd the survivors and promote safety as part of their healing process. This did not happen anywhere to the extent that it should have.
4. Pastors, church leaders, and counsellors need to receive more training on reporting and responding to abuse, power differentials to avoid spiritual abuse, sexual harassment, and the impact of child sexual abuse.
5. Survivors came forward not only advocating for themselves, but also for safer churches so that others do not suffer as they have.
6. Survivors of child sexual and spiritual abuse suffer intensely: physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

### **Summary of Key Findings & Recommendations**

In light of the outcomes of the investigation, Plan to Protect provided the following six summarized findings and recommendations:

#### **Finding #1 – Abuse, Trauma, and Sexuality were Overly Spiritualized and Improperly Reported and Addressed**

Initial disclosures of abuse were not reported to the Board or child protection agencies. Instead, survivors were minimized and silenced. Survivors were denied the opportunity to tell their stories, pursue justice and be agents in the healing journey, resulting in further trauma.

#### Recommendations:

Audit Rexdale Alliance Church safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure they align with Canadian legislation and appropriate standard of care.

Rexdale Alliance Church create a safe-space forum to continue facilitating reconciliation with survivors. Invite them to a neutral event, where they can share their personal experiences and their healing process. The forum should be facilitated by a neutral party, who will ensure that everyone is safe and feels heard.

Rexdale Alliance Church find space to recognize and celebrate the embodied humanity of individuals in the church, and not solely focus on the spiritual. Abuse and trauma cause individuals to change, and that change needs to be addressed and accepted as part of their healing process.

**Finding #2 – Responses to Allegations were not Trauma-Informed**

Responses to allegations were not survivor centered, or trauma-informed. Individuals in positions of power, authority, influence, and control exercised their power differential to silence vulnerable individuals.

**Recommendations:**

Rexdale Alliance Church establish regular learning on trauma and abuse. This provides an important opportunity to continue to grow and share the commitment of the church towards those who are suffering.

Rexdale Alliance Church adopt a more trauma-informed approach to addressing trauma and abuse.

Rexdale Alliance Church establish a counselling fund and avail such funds for the purpose of reimbursing the counselling costs for known affected survivors.

**Finding #3 – Insufficient Reporting and Remedy Protocols Exposed Survivors to Re-traumatization**

Without safe and transparent reporting and remedy protocols in place, individuals were retraumatized resulting in further suffering.

**Recommendations:**

Rexdale Alliance Church establish and adhere to a whistleblower policy and procedure in order for individuals to safely bring forth concerns. The policy is designed to create a safe place for concerns to be voiced, knowing that all concerns must be taken seriously.

Rexdale Alliance Church take steps to communicate clearly and openly with known affected survivors.

**Finding #4 - Policies and Processes at Rexdale Alliance Church were Used to Advance Unhealthy Power Dynamics**

Ministry personnel made decisions that demonstrated preference and protection of the church and perpetrators over the victims, and there were abuses of power. This allowed perpetrators of abuse to continue the cycle of harm.

In pursuing a more survivor-centered approach to allegations and disclosures of abuse and misconduct, the church should promote and nurture a safer environment for individuals to raise concerns.

**Recommendations:**

Rexdale Alliance Church treat respondents with dignity, but not grant preferential treatment of leaders and friends over the complainant.

Rexdale Alliance Church be more empathetic to legal action when the law requires it and in particular, when a party's concern is not resolved or satisfied.

Rexdale Alliance Church invest in a greater understanding and application of the scripture of "taking a brother to court." This verse may be misused to protect oneself and the interests of the church, creating a shame-based culture.

The Board of Elders of Rexdale Alliance Church identify ways and means of holding staff accountable for their words, actions, and decisions. All incidents of abuse and misconduct within the church must be reported to the proper authorities, as well as to the Board of the church.

Rexdale Alliance Church establish a policy which states that when church representatives make decisions that may result in trauma to a person, they must first assess the risks and consult with their direct supervisor or the Board prior to communicating the decision. Leadership may determine the necessity of bringing in a professional (i.e., lawyer, medical practitioner, or therapist) to assess the risks and consult on the foreseeable outcomes. The policy should also require that ministry personnel retain documentation about the incident and the follow-through of the decision.

**Finding #5 – Lack of Training and Knowledge among Ministry Personnel (Pastoral Staff, Board Members and Workers)**

Ministry personnel who were making decisions and communicating on behalf of the church lacked awareness, knowledge, and training on recognizing and reporting abuse.

Ministry personnel should receive initial and ongoing professional development on pastoral care and know the parameters for pastoral counselling to congregants. A minimum level of qualifications should be required to make decisions that impact an individual physically or mentally and ministry personnel should demonstrate that their qualifications are up to date.

Recommendations:

Rexdale Alliance Church identify forms of trauma that should always be referred to an independent professional licensed therapist. This mandate should be clearly communicated to pastors and ministry leaders.

If there is an allegation that harm was caused by someone representing the church, the counselling should always be referred to an independent professional counsellor. Once someone is referred to a counsellor, church leadership should provide continued pastoral care to support the healing process and to check in with the individual on a frequent basis.

If someone is making an announcement on behalf of the church, and that announcement speaks to historical church issues, the announcement should be validated and reviewed by individuals with knowledge regarding such issues.

**Finding #6 – There was a Lack of Transparency in Church Structures**

Individuals did not clearly understand how their disclosures were handled once received. Along with recommending the development of a whistleblower policy and procedure, there should be clear and transparent lines of communication and accountability.

Recommendations:

Rexdale Alliance Church examine the disconnect between the congregants' experiences of raising concerns to leadership compared to the stated policies and processes. Wherever possible, the Board, in partnership with the lead pastor, should ensure clear lines of accountability and supervision.

Rexdale Alliance Church establish a documentation management policy and procedure that requires all pastoral staff and those serving in a role of mentoring or counselling to maintain a ministry logbook and document the activity and communication. This documentation will assist in better protecting all involved parties.

### **Rexdale Alliance Church's Response**

Rexdale Alliance Church, The Alliance Canada, and the ECD are deeply grieved by what has transpired and the harm that was caused. We are grateful for the brave individuals who came forward to share their stories. Thank you for cooperating with us throughout the investigation. Thank you for raising your concerns.

We grieve over what has transpired, the pain that has been caused, the spiritual damage that was done, and the innocence that has been stolen. As a church we are sorry that these abuses happened. We are sorry that **any** Rexdale Alliance Church leaders had **any** part in this abuse. We apologize for not responding appropriately to the abuse.

May we humbly learn from these failings. May we understand the depths of the wrongs that have been committed, so that we can become messengers of God's redemptive story.

The Church will learn from these wrongs, in order to reduce the risk of abuse happening in the future and to better respond if abuse does occur. From these stories and others, we can reflect on the experiences of survivors of sexual and spiritual abuse and learn from their experiences, so in the future those seeking spiritual healing within a faith community will find healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation, as deeply troubling and painful as it has been for everyone, has been critical. We pray this investigation will provide a step towards healing for the survivors and their families, for their experiences of abuse have been extremely painful. Unless we have stood in their shoes, we will never truly know the pain they have experienced.

These experiences are life-altering and they can be deeply transformative for everyone. No investigation, apology, or correspondence can right these wrongs.

In conclusion, as you will see from the investigation findings, learnings and recommendations, there is much for us to discern and learn. While no current staff or board members from the church were named in any of the allegations, the current Board of Rexdale Alliance Church and the pastoral staff are committed to learning from historical cases of abuse and wrongdoing and are committed to a culture of goodness, truth and integrity moving forward. Therefore, over the course of the next 90 days, the Board of Rexdale Alliance Church, along with external parties from the ECD office, The Alliance Canada and expert independent consultants will be reviewing the recommendations and developing a scope and sequence to implement most, if not all of the recommendations. From there, we promise to report back to you within six months on the implementation progress we have made.

Though the external independent investigation is now complete, we continue to invite affected individuals to reach out to us directly to TJ Syroteuk: [tjsyroteuk@rexdalealliance.ca](mailto:tjsyroteuk@rexdalealliance.ca). We are listening and want to be part of your healing journey.

We continue to pray for the survivors and their continued healing. May we be relentless in pursuing goodness, integrity, humility, and justice.

Respectfully submitted,

*TJ Syroteuk*

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Rexdale Alliance Church

Per: TJ Syroteuk

Lead Pastor

*Dave Mullings*

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