

# Independent Investigation of Covenant Love Community Church

Summary Report &  
Recommendations

October 9, 2024



**GRACE**  
Godly Response to Abuse  
in the Christian Environment

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## I. Introduction

Covenant Love Community Church (“CLCC”) is located in Freeville, New York, and was founded in 1969. Until 2023, CLCC operated a grade school on its campus, Covenant Love Community School (“CLCS”).<sup>1</sup>

In 1987, Cleek was hired as a teacher at CLCS and retired in June of 2023. Cleek became an elder at CLCC around 1996. In 2013 he became the Senior Pastor of CLCC, and continued in that role until September of 2023, when he was placed on administrative leave. Cleek resigned on November 1, 2023, and moved to Pennsylvania.

In August of 2023, a police report was filed in New York by a former member of CLCC and student at CLCS (“Reporting Victim 1” or “RV1”), alleging sexual abuse by Larry Cleek from the time RV1 was five years old until she was approximately thirteen years old. In September of 2023, CLCC leadership became aware that allegations against Cleek were being investigated by the New York State Police, and placed Cleek on administrative leave. After confirmation was received that a third party investigation would not interfere with the law enforcement investigation, and CLCC received a petition signed by parents of former CLCS students, former teachers, and former members of CLCC advocating for an independent investigation, on January 26, 2024 CLCC engaged GRACE to conduct this independent investigation and produce this summary report.

## II. Scope and Methodology

GRACE’s investigation was limited to the scope defined in the Engagement Agreement and was conducted using semi-structured qualitative interviews,<sup>2</sup> surveys, and qualitative content analysis of collected relevant documents. The following section provides a summary of the scope and methodology.

### A. Scope

Pursuant to the Engagement Agreement,

GRACE shall investigate the behavior of Larry Cleek, that is directly or indirectly related to Covenant Love Community Church or any of its

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<sup>1</sup> In 2023, Covenant Love Community School was closed and a consortium of 8 churches, including CLCC, opened Willow Glen Community School.

<sup>2</sup> Questions included a mix of open-ended, direct, and hypothetical prompts towards both factual and policy-oriented subject matter.

ministries, and assess whether this behavior constitutes sexual misconduct<sup>34</sup> or behavioral misconduct<sup>5</sup> or involved in grooming behavior.<sup>6</sup>

GRACE shall provide the parties identified in Section 1 with an Executive Summary that presents factual findings and a brief overview of CLCC's knowledge of and response to the allegations, including how the response compares to best practices, Scriptural values, and SAMHSA's Six Principles of Trauma-Informed Practice. GRACE shall be available to meet with Covenant Love Community Church leadership to review the investigation findings and proposed recommendations, as outlined in the Executive Summary.<sup>7</sup>

Ultimately, the findings of GRACE's investigation will be analyzed using the methodology discussed in Section II(B) Methodology, below. The investigation was limited to the scope of the Engagement Agreement.

## **B. Methodology**

The following section provides a brief summary of the investigation methodology. The investigative methods consisted of conducting interviews, a survey, and collecting

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<sup>3</sup> Sexual Misconduct is defined as any verbal, nonverbal and/or physical acts of an immoral, indecent, improper, or sexual nature that are 1) unwelcome or 2) performed without consent or 3) committed by one in a position of authority upon a subordinate or 4) committed by an adult upon someone under the age of 18 regardless of consent.

Examples include, but are not limited to, derogatory or indecent statements about a person's body; slurs, epithets, anecdotes, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual or intimate nature; verbal advances, propositions, or invitations of a sexual or intimate nature; suggestive or obscene gestures or communications; unwanted attention such as leering or staring; "groping" or any unwanted touches of a sexual or intimate nature, adult sexual assault, and sexual abuse of a minor.

<sup>4</sup> Sexual abuse of a minor is any sexual activity-- verbal, visual, virtual, or physical-- upon a minor (a person 17 years of age or younger). The minor is considered unable to consent due to developmental immaturity and an inability to understand sexual behavior. An offender may perform acts involving sexual abuse against the minor, or the minor may be told, forced, or in any other way, the offender may cause the minor to engage in sexual behavior with the adult. This also includes nude or sexually suggestive or explicit photographic images of a child which are produced, possessed, or distributed by any person.

<sup>5</sup> Behavioral misconduct is any verbal, virtual, nonverbal and/or physical acts which are improper, immoral, indecent, or unlawful. For the purposes of this investigation, behavioral misconduct includes emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, and sexual misconduct.

<sup>6</sup> Grooming behavior refers to the manipulative tactics employed to deceive a victim, encouraging compliance with sexual misconduct while preventing disclosure. This harmful process has three main objectives: establishing conditions for easier perpetration of sexual abuse, enabling future acts against the victim, and reducing the likelihood of disclosure. In the context of faith communities, grooming is defined as behavior by spiritual leadership seeking to develop a close relationship with targeted individuals, including flattering language, affection, sharing private information, religious language, and erosion of boundaries.

<sup>7</sup> GRACE's Engagement Agreement with Covenant Love Community Church, January 26, 2024.

documents and other non-testimonial information.<sup>8</sup> Because this investigation was not a judicial proceeding, GRACE did not have the power to subpoena witnesses or documents. GRACE's investigation relied upon the voluntary cooperation of individuals with relevant information.

GRACE conducted 32 interviews of 30 individuals whose names were shared by the church, who contacted GRACE, or who were referenced by other witnesses. Accordingly, the material presented in this report should not be considered a comprehensive articulation of relevant information. The alleged offender did not participate in the investigation, but multiple witnesses relayed his statements and/or communications to the GRACE team. Most individuals are referred to through coded witness designations. In some cases, additional steps are taken to preserve witness identity and confidentiality, such as the use of multiple designations for a single witness.

GRACE sought to pursue and conduct each interview in a way that reflected the character of Christ, viewing each person in the process as image-bearers who are deeply loved by God. GRACE interviewers sought to apply trauma-informed principles to each interview and exchange in order to promote safety, trustworthiness, transparency, and agency. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Recordings, transcripts, and related correspondence were stored in a secure database.

### III. Summary Findings and Analysis

The following section presents a summary of the findings of this investigation and is organized in a manner consistent with the scope of this investigation.

**Warning:** this section of the report describes explicit conduct and speech and may be activating for those who have endured abuse, harassment, or other trauma. Readers who may have difficulties reading the content should be careful and wish to speak with a professional prior to reading the report. We also encourage parents and caregivers to read the report first before allowing youth who may be interested in the report to review it.

#### A. Sexual Misconduct

##### 1. Summary of RV1's Allegations and Analysis

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<sup>8</sup> Non-testimonial information included: publicly available audio and video resources, text messages, and emails relevant to the scope of the investigation or information received from witnesses. Engagement with the church's email account was targeted to direct phrases or specific recipient addresses, to avoid intersections with material and communications beyond the scope of the investigation.

RV1 is a former student of CLCS and formerly attended CLCC. In lieu of an interview with GRACE, RV1 provided other forms of documentation that detailed her allegation that Larry Cleek committed several acts of sexual misconduct when she was a child. GRACE additionally interviewed individuals to whom RV1 had directly disclosed or who were close to RV1 when the abuse would have occurred.

The history of RV1's disclosures is summarized as follows. After 2012, RV1 began to experience traumatic episodes. In late 2017, RV1 began to recover more distinct memories of being abused by Larry Cleek.<sup>9</sup> In early 2018, RV1 told a close relative (W2) that Larry had abused her. As described by W2, the recall process could sometimes depend on a gradual increase in RV1's understanding of the sensations that she increasingly experienced. These sensations often involved particular places, events, and acts of violative touch that, especially at first, did not always present as coherently connected.<sup>10</sup> In RV1's own words, at first, "The clearest flashbacks that repeated themselves consisted of feeling a hand in my panties, usually at the Hershey Chocolate Factory during a field trip. The other one was smelling the smells of the cleaning closet, Mr. Cleek's breath on my neck and uncomfortable sensitivity in my breasts."<sup>11</sup> As she experienced these and other sensations, RV1 was eventually able to express that she had "serious concerns about Larry Cleek and remember incidents that I believe were inappropriate and perhaps even characteristics that an abuser might display."<sup>12</sup> In early 2019, RV1 disclosed to a friend of the family via email, recording sixteen particular memories of hearing or observing behaviors that indicated to her that Cleek disregarded the need for healthy (especially sexual) boundaries and the overall wellbeing of his students. She then listed four factors from her personal history that she thought could evidence that she had endured abuse as a child. In 2023, RV1 made a police deposition that highlighted five distinct acts of physical sexual violation. RV1 expressed her motives for bringing these allegations to the police in a letter she wrote to Cleek around this time but ultimately did not send.<sup>13</sup> The entire letter is included in Appendix A of this report.

In addition to the allegations that had been brought to the police, RV1 reported two additional allegations to GRACE for which she could identify particular locations and

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<sup>9</sup> W2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>10</sup> W2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>11</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication

<sup>12</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication.

<sup>13</sup> RV1 Letter to Larry Cleek (unsent, written in November 2023). Stated motivations of RV1 include "to protect children from the far-reaching devastation of sexual abuse. My goal is to stop you from creating more victims and to open the eyes of parents whose children are at risk of being harmed or have already been harmed [...] I did this for the little girl who is currently your favorite. So she can have something I never got... validation that what is happening to her is not okay and assurance that there are grownups out there who will fight for her because she matters.[...]My second motivation was to give any adult survivors who may be suffering in silence an opportunity to find their voices and perhaps begin their healing knowing they are not alone.[...] Lest I sound more altruistic than I really am, there is also something I want for myself. No, it's not money or attention (who would want attention for this?) and it's definitely not revenge. More than anything, I want acknowledgement and vindication."



occasions for the abuse acts. Based on the presence of other memory fragments, RV1 believes that other abuse acts occurred.<sup>14</sup> RV1 reported additional abuse sensations related to the following events or locations: “Picture Day”, the running trail at school, the Pole Barn, the upstairs sound booth, “Doctor Day,” the pond near the Cleek’s cabin, and the tall grass near the soccer field.<sup>15</sup> RV1’s allegations and available corroborative information are detailed below. They are arranged in roughly chronological order.

- 1. Exposure.** In 1998, Cleek exposed himself to RV1 when she was 5 years old at CLCC.<sup>16</sup> While a new playground was being built, 15-20 children were watching a show together under adult supervision. Cleek used the show to reference his penis, which he had taken out of his pants. RV1 recalled other specific details about the space on that day.<sup>17</sup> RV1 did not remember how Cleek approached her separately, in light of the presence of other children in the room.

**Corroboration Factors:** As a young child, RV1 remembers telling her mother that she was experiencing unexplainable guilt and shame over seeing unwanted images of a penis in her mind and noticing them elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> GRACE could not identify other adults who could’ve been present on this occasion (RV1 did not mention any other adults as being present in her deposition). Please refer to a later section of this report which addresses other witness testimony related to allegedly harmful and potential grooming behaviors committed by Cleek against them when they were prepubescent children.

- 2. Sexual Assault (Oral).** In 2002, Cleek put his penis in RV1’s mouth when she was 9 years old in a storage room at CLCC, in the presence of another staff member recently convicted for sexual abuse of a minor.<sup>19</sup> This occurred during a church Monday night event (“Hot Dog Church”). The storage room was described as being by the 7th and 8th grade lockers. RV1 reported, “I remember I couldn’t breathe and felt like I was going to die.” “Larry and [the other staff member] were laughing at me as Larry had his penis in my mouth.” “Afterwards I ran to the bathroom, spit and

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<sup>14</sup> W2 Tr. at 7-13.

<sup>15</sup> RV1 Communications to GRACE.

<sup>16</sup> RV1 Deposition with NY law enforcement, August 15, 2023.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication. “From a young age I had strange penis-related shame. I had ‘bad’ thoughts that would torment me with intense guilt and shame until I confessed to my mom. Usually it had to do with ‘imagining’ a penis or noticing a penis in art or a sculpture. The guilt and shame was truly overwhelming and seems disproportionate if that was all it was. No one ever told me it was a sin to ‘imagine’ a penis yet I was confessing ‘bad’ thoughts all the time like I was a really evil girl. I should add that these ‘imagination’ were not something I was doing intentionally. They were images that popped into my head unwanted and unannounced. I hated it.”

<sup>19</sup> RV1 Deposition with NY law enforcement, August 15, 2023.

washed my face. I do not know if Larry ejaculated.”<sup>20</sup> RV1 did not tell anyone about the abuse at the time.

**Corroboration Factors:** Another witness has reported that the other staff member hugged and touched her and other young girls in ways that made her uncomfortable.<sup>21</sup> Recently, the former CLCC member was convicted and sentenced for sexually abusing his minor relative. GRACE received reports that the former CLCC member admitted to the abuse of the minor relative during the police investigation. The former CLCC member did not respond to GRACE’s interview requests. RV1 also reported that she began to have night terrors around this time, which her relatives corroborated.<sup>22</sup> She also remembers experiencing “body-hatred” and “body-shame” around the age of 10 and into puberty. She wrote, “I literally felt guilty all the time. I didn’t want my mom or sister to ever see me naked. Other girls were excited to develop breasts and start menstruating. I hated every second of it. I also felt unlovable and like everyone hated me. This was completely out of step with reality and it’s hard to understand why I would feel such self-loathing when my family life was so healthy.”<sup>23</sup>

- 3. Sexual Assault (Groping, Sexual Touch) Against a Minor** RV1 does not associate these memories with specific dates or occasions, but she has reported being groped and touched (she especially remembers her breasts being touched) multiple times while assisting with clean up in a closet.<sup>24</sup> At times, Cleek would select a boy and girl to stay behind and assist with clean up. Cleek would sexually touch her even if the “boy was also in the closet putting something away. And it was almost like crazy, [...] he’s doing this in front of someone, even though he was doing it in a way that it wasn’t noticed, but he definitely liked to get away with it in front of other people.”<sup>25</sup>

**Corroboration Factors.** W17 shared that she remembers RV1 regularly going into the gym storage room when RV1 would have been in elementary school. On Fridays, the school would have a special worship service called “Encounter.” W17 further detailed that the girls “were expected to dance” and that she remembered RV1

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<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> W17 Tr. at 30. “[The former CLCC member] was always at school events. He was off and on school property, and he was handsy. I remember being touched by [the former CLCC member] and he’d come up and he’d always hug and hold a little too close, a little too tight. [...]He was too chummy to a very young girl and would physically touch me and hold me and hug me and wanted to be friends in a very creepy way. I specifically mainly remember this from going to church, although at things like the book sale or the open house hosted by CLC, the former CLCC member was always there with the same type of behavior, that was done in front of all the adults and everyone. And I remember telling my mom, ‘I don’t like [the former CLCC member]. He is really creepy. I don’t like it when he touches me and hugs me.’”

<sup>22</sup> W20 Tr. at 19.

<sup>23</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication.

<sup>24</sup> W2 Tr. at 8-9. “There also was fondling at school with the cleaning closet. So there’s a gym closet and I believe a cleaning closet as well. Both. He used both of those to abuse her at school.”

<sup>25</sup> W2 Tr. at 8.



being one “one of the girls who really loved to dance.” RV1 would regularly go to the gym storage locker on these Fridays and on some Sundays as this was where “they kept the worship flags, they also kept the gym mats and things..” W17 did not see Cleek enter this storage space with RV1.<sup>26</sup>

- 4. Sexual Assault (Fondling of Genitalia).** On October 28th, 2005, when RV1 was 12 and in the 7th grade, Cleek slid his hand under RV1’s pants and underwear and fondled her genitals while on an amusement-park style ride.<sup>27</sup> This occurred on the Chocolate Factory Ride at Hershey Park in Pennsylvania. He again fondled RV1 under her underwear on another occasion on a similar trip to Lackawanna Coal Mine, sometime between 2005-2007. W2 additionally described RV1’s experiences as follows: “[Cleek was] touching her while other students and adults are present but distracted. So that was a pattern that he used [... at] different places they would go, and just almost like messing with her, just touching her constantly in public, in front of other people without anyone noticing it was kind of a game.”<sup>28</sup>

**Corroboration Factors:** For information relevant to both this allegation and the following allegations made by RV1, please see the section titled “Other Corroboration Factors.” W19, RV1’s peer, was also present on the Hershey Park trip. She recalls that RV1 showed great fear at the shared housing for the trip, once waking up in the middle of the night looking “really scared” and later “was following me really closely and wouldn’t leave my side... she stayed right next me in the kitchen while we were packing our bagged lunch.”<sup>29</sup> GRACE reviewed an itinerary for this trip that confirmed that both RV1 and Larry Cleek were on the Hershey Park trip. RV1 reported that another staff member was also present on the ride as an adult supervisor.<sup>30</sup> Larry Cleek was the only adult supervisor listed on the itinerary, but the itinerary suggests that additional supervising adults were being sought. W2 shared that in traumatic episodes involving these memories RV1 would cry out, ‘Why isn’t [the other staff member] doing anything?’<sup>31</sup> The former staff member did not respond to GRACE’s interview requests. Regarding evidence of Cleek’s selection of RV1 as a sexual target, please see “Teacher’s Pet Dynamics” under 3 in this section (Sexual Misconduct). RV1 was known by others to be Cleek’s ‘Teacher’s Pet’ (in Cleek’s classroom, this was an informal role sometimes associated with privileges) around this time.

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<sup>26</sup> RV2 Tr. at 20-21.

<sup>27</sup> RV1 Deposition with NY law enforcement, August 15, 2023. W2 Tr. at 4, “We could figure out things like the trip to the Hershey chocolate factory. We know when that happened. We know how old she was. So we can confirm that because she was having an image of being on the little train car that drives through the displays and having the physical sensation of someone’s hands in her underwear touching her [that] we can put that together.”

<sup>28</sup> W2 Tr. at 8.

<sup>29</sup> W19 Tr. at 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> *Id* at 9.

<sup>31</sup> W2 Tr. at 9.

- 5. Sexual Assault (Groping, Sexual Touch) Against a Minor.** RV1 reported having “clear and consistent memories of being abused by Larry on the Boston Trip that took place over October 26-28, 2006,” and explained that this account was not reported to the New York State Police because the abuse occurred outside of New York.<sup>32</sup> Incidents reported include: “Larry abused [RV1] in a dark museum room after her friend [W26] walked away from her... He grabbed her across the chest and diagonally down to her crotch—fondling her breasts and genitals[...].”<sup>33</sup> and “[RV1] has [also] had repeated flashbacks of Larry approaching her from behind and touching her breasts in the bathroom where they were staying during the Boston Trip. She remembers that she was brushing her teeth and wearing green pajamas when he did this.”<sup>34</sup> RV1 provided several photos from the trip to GRACE that confirm her and Larry’s presence and that RV1 wore green pajamas while on the Boston Trip.
- 6. Sexual Assault (Groping of Breasts).** Between 2005-2007, when RV1 was 12-14, in the 7th or 8th grade,<sup>35</sup> Cleek, as a physical education teacher, placed his hands on RV1’s breasts when he lifted them up to the monkey bars. RV1 specifically reported that Cleek “made a point to touch [her] nipples.”<sup>36</sup>

**Corroboration Factors.** Please see the summary of RV2’s similar allegations in the next section. (RV2 was not in RV1’s class-year but a few years ahead, and so would not have had the opportunity to see RV1 being abused during this exam.)<sup>37</sup>

RV1 also reported memories of another incident of possible sexual touch. “We were stacking firewood for [redacted]. It was one of those things that happens really quickly and you want to believe it was an accident. I don’t remember it clearly. Either he touched my bottom or breast or brushed his body against me or accidentally caught my shirt and lifted it up.”<sup>38</sup>

**7. Sexual Assault (Oral) and Maintenance (Issuing Threats to Discourage Disclosure)**

When RV1 was between 12-14, during a school trip to a facility with a skating rink and indoor soccer field in Ithaca, NY, Cleek threatened RV1 that he would “do things

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<sup>32</sup> W2/RV1 Supplemental Communication

<sup>33</sup> W2/RV1 Supplemental Communication. *Also see* RV1’s written summary of flashbacks and triggers from the Boston trip.

<sup>34</sup> W2/RV1 Supplemental Communication. *Also see* RV1’s written summary of flashbacks and triggers from the Boston trip. GRACE received photo evidence of RV1 on the Boston trip (dated October 28, 2006), wearing pajamas that correspond with her written summary.

<sup>35</sup> W20 Tr. at 21

<sup>36</sup> RV1 Deposition with NY law enforcement, August 15, 2023.

<sup>37</sup> RV2 Tr. at 20.

<sup>38</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication

on [RV1's] sister if she didn't cooperate with him, and he performed oral sex on [RV1]."<sup>39</sup>

**Corroboration Factors.** W10, who is a close relative of RV1, shared that she remembers that the school offered ice skating trips.<sup>40</sup> She would not have been in attendance when the threats and abuse are reported to have occurred. W10 said, "And that was I believe she said she was taken aside from the ice skating and there was a turf in the building. They had an indoor soccer turf. And that happened there." A review of the facility map confirms the presence of both an ice rink and indoor soccer field with artificial turf.

- 8. Verbal Sexual Misconduct.** Between 2005-2007, when RV1 was 12-14 and in 7th and 8th grade, Cleek repeatedly made overly intimate disclosures about his sexual preferences in RV1's presence and repeatedly made coarse and sexualizing comments, sometimes about the bodies of the young girls, including RV1. In March 2019, RV1 reported that Cleek turned his attention to her body in the following ways:

"At the end of the year, he gave everyone a little plastic animal as a gift that supposedly represented us. Mine was a flamingo because I was graceful, feminine and had long legs. He never really knew me at all, I remember being baffled when he said I would love the movie *The Notebook* which I was never allowed to watch but knew was a romantic movie with sexual scenes. He said that to me more than once. I have no idea why he thought I would like it so much. I wasn't the least bit interested in romance or sex at age 13."<sup>41</sup>

**Corroboration Factors.** W26, RV1's peer reported, "I don't remember if this was during this time when he was giving gifts sort of as graduation type gifts, but I do remember him giving her, I want to say it was a flamingo. And if you remember, I said something about her commenting on her beautiful long legs or something like that.[...] The specific gift, I want to say he gave something to everyone. I think he did, but I don't recall other people's specific gifts. I think he [gave me a gift], but I don't recall what it was or what the sentiment was."<sup>42</sup> RV1 additionally shared memories of comments Cleek made about the appearance and bodies of other children. Her and other witnesses' reports can be found in a subsequent section of this report.

**Other Corroboration Factors** This section concerns signs of psychological distress RV1 exhibited in her middle school years that commonly corollate with sexual abuse, RV1's relatives' suspicion that RV1 was being abused, and Cleek's reaction to the publicizing of RV1's eating disorder and the subsequent cessation of abuse.

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<sup>39</sup> W2 Tr. at 8.

<sup>40</sup> W10 Tr. at 34.

<sup>41</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication.

<sup>42</sup> W26 Tr. at 14.

RV1's peer W26 recalled, "And she just kept saying, if you knew basically what, if you knew who I was, basically, you wouldn't think that I was a worthwhile person. And that conversation didn't have specific significance until this past August when [RV1] basically told us about the allegations."<sup>43</sup>

RV1's relative reported:

[RV1] had a lot of signs of eating disorder, cutting. She was, for one year and a half, not able to sleep in her bed. We would move the mattress to our room because she was afraid. And what she would describe to us was, "I feel this presence over me, this darkness coming but not clear."

RV1's relative believed that RV1 was exhibiting signs similar to those who have been abused, and at one point asked her whether she had been abused. RV1's relative stated, "she said, 'No, I'm not being [abused] ...' I said, 'Somebody did something to you.' And she said, 'No,' [...]. [W]e encouraged her to confess [to the eating disorder and cutting] at church."<sup>44</sup>

According to her relative, RV1 "confessed" to the eating disorder and cutting when she was 13 and had finished the eighth grade. RV1's relative remembered that Larry Cleek was "the first person that got up" and said "I'm with [RV1], let's support her. And other people [then] got up to say we will support you."<sup>45</sup>

RV1 remembers that, despite the fact that Cleek "knew [that RV1] was battling anorexia and making an effort to re-feed and gain weight," Cleek would "tease" her "about having such a big appetite [...] he'd also talk about how milk makes you fat and no one should drink it. Being fat was like the worst thing ever for him." RV1 specifically remembers that after the "confession," Cleek's teasing continued. Both RV1 and RV1's peer, W19, shared that Cleek "said something about [RV1] dabbing the grease off her pizza."<sup>46</sup> Cleek would have continued to see RV1 at church after she graduated middle school.<sup>47</sup>

RV1 and W2 suspect that the abuse ended around this time because Cleek may have been "concerned about [RV1] getting more attention (and outside help) after her public confession and so he backed off from abusing her and targeted other students at the end of the school year (which was [RV1's] last year at the school)."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> W26 Tr. at 5-6.

<sup>44</sup> W20 Tr. at 19.

<sup>45</sup> W20 Tr. at 19.

<sup>46</sup> W19 Tr. at 19, W2/RV1 Supplemental Communication.

<sup>47</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication.

<sup>48</sup> W2/RV1 Supplemental Communication

In middle school, RV1 also had strong reactions to the idea of exploitative, objectifying sex. W20, a close relative of RV1, shared, “When [RV1] was in high school, she used to talk about how she didn’t want to get married ever, she wanted to be a nun, or how it would be great to be a nun. I know pornography was a really big deal for her.”<sup>49</sup> RV1 reported:

My dad found a note I wrote when I was 13, about reasons not to get married. It includes some very strong anti-sex statements. I have attached it below. I was definitely very angry that some of my best male friends had seen pornography but it still seems strange that I would draw such strong conclusions that sex and love are totally incompatible. I had never seen any porn myself. What’s more, my dad and mom modeled a wonderful and obviously loving marriage. My dad has always been 100% respectful of women. Everything my parents taught me about sex was very positive and healthy. I don’t know where I got the idea that sex was about male domination, that women never experience pleasure and always feel degraded.<sup>50</sup>

Among the statements this letter contained were the following:

“Love and marriage don’t go together because marriage involves sex and sex and love don’t go together.” “Sex is the complete degradation and dishonoring of a woman.” “Sex is like telling a girl she’s totally worthless, she has no feelings, no mind, no spirit, no soul, just a body.”<sup>51</sup>

### **Credibility Analysis**

RV1’s allegations of sexual abuse by Cleek when she was a child demonstrate factors that favor credibility. Credibility is based on a number of factors including the consistency and specificity of statements, the presence of a motivation to lie or lack thereof, corroborating information from other sources, and any partial or complete admissions by the reported offenders. GRACE recognizes that it is not a charging party or plaintiff. However, in order to thoroughly analyze the credibility of allegations based on the evidence collected, GRACE finds it useful to apply an evidentiary standard to its investigation. GRACE closely considered all evidence collected and found credible allegations that appear to be supported by evidence sufficient to exceed a “greater weight” test. Conversely, GRACE was not so stringent as to find credible only those allegations that are proven without a reasonable doubt.

As discussed previously in the report, RV1’s recollections of abuse by Cleek did not appear to surface until 2017. This dynamic is not uncommon for survivors of child sexual

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<sup>49</sup> W20 Tr. at 37.

<sup>50</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication

<sup>51</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication, Excerpt from RV1’s “Reasons Not to Get Married,” handwritten by RV1 at 13 years old.



abuse, who are “more likely to have no recall of the abuse,” particularly in cases involving survivors “who were younger at the time of the abuse” and “who were molested by someone they knew.”<sup>52</sup> Further, the findings of recent studies support the belief that memories of childhood sexual abuse or other traumatic events could be lost and then recovered.<sup>53</sup> Taking into consideration ongoing academic and professional discussion over the reliability of recovered memories, GRACE has also considered other factors of credibility, discussed within this section.

The credibility of RV1’s allegations against Larry Cleek is supported by multiple factors. First, RV1’s statements were consistent, specific, and corroborated by multiple other witnesses who received disclosures from RV1. RV1 disclosed sexual abuse in general, the time period of the abuse, and additional specifics in multiple disclosures over time with consistency, although some disclosures understandably involved greater detail as reflected in the type of relationship and RV1’s level of understanding of her own trauma and abuse dynamics at the time. The evolution of detail is typical in cases of childhood sexual abuse and does not undermine credibility. Rather, it reflects the complexity of trauma processing. Further, RV1’s denial of abuse at 13 is not uncommon for survivors of child sexual abuse, who face many barriers to disclosure, such as age and developmental maturity, the resulting inability to recognize the behavior as abusive, the fear that they will not be believed, and relational proximity to the perpetrator (a close relationship with the perpetrator may lead to the victim not fully understanding the abuse and choosing not to disclose the abuse for some time).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Williams, L. M. (1994). Recall of childhood trauma: A prospective study of women's memories of child sexual abuse. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(6), 1167–1176. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.62.6.1167>

“One hundred twenty-nine women with previously documented histories of sexual victimization in childhood were interviewed and asked detailed questions about their abuse histories to answer the question “Do people actually forget traumatic events such as child sexual abuse, and if so, how common is such forgetting?” A large proportion of the women (38%) did not recall the abuse that had been reported 17 years earlier. Women who were younger at the time of the abuse and those who were molested by someone they knew were more likely to have no recall of the abuse. The implications for research and practice are discussed. Long periods with no memory of abuse should not be regarded as evidence that the abuse did not occur.”

<sup>53</sup> Loftus, E. F., Polonsky, S., & Fullilove, M. T. (1994). Memories of childhood sexual abuse: Remembering and repressing. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 18(1), 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1994.tb00297.x>

“Women involved in outpatient treatment for substance abuse were interviewed to examine their recollections of childhood sexual abuse. Overall, 54% of the 105 women reported a history of childhood sexual abuse. Of these, the majority (81%) remembered all or part of the abuse their whole lives; 19% reported they forgot the abuse for a period of time, and later the memory returned. Women who remembered the abuse their whole lives reported a clearer memory, with a more detailed picture.

<sup>54</sup> According to a recent study, the average age of reporting child sexual abuse is 52; this means that despite enduring sexual abuse as a minor, victims often do not disclose until well into their adulthood, if at all. Delayed Disclosure, Child USA (2020) <https://childusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Delayed-Disclosure-Factsheet-2020.pdf>.



Second, RV1 presented no motivation to lie and displayed no personal gain, apart from a desire for “acknowledgment and vindication,” in bringing these allegations to light. In contrast, RV1 specifically stated she does not want “revenge,” “to inflict pain,” “money,” or “attention”<sup>55</sup> and numerous witnesses who were already aware of RV1’s identity spoke of her truthful and trustworthy character. Third, a significant amount of corroborating information, including the presence of psychological distress (eating disorder, self-harm, night terrors, viewpoint of sex as a “degradation” and “dishonoring”<sup>56</sup>), which were present during the time period the abuse is reported to have taken place, aligns with common effects of sexual abuse.<sup>57</sup> Further, RV1’s experiences were corroborated by the statements of other witnesses who reported similar behaviors by Cleek, as discussed later in this report.

Cleek’s reported demonstration of public support for RV1 when she was asked to publicly disclose her eating disorder, and teasing RV1 about her big appetite while she was struggling, may have been an attempt to exercise control over the situation and RV1. Further, in a conversation with a law enforcement detective pursuant to RV1’s police report, Cleek is reported to have declined an interview, stating “I don’t know who came forward or what the statute of limitations is.”<sup>58</sup> This statement to the detective may indicate that Cleek was aware that there were victims of his, that there may be multiple victims, and that the length of time from the offenses may have surpassed a statute of limitations.

Based on the prior consistent statements by RV1, the lack of evidence of any motive for RV1 to lie, the corroborating information provided by other sources, and Cleek’s posture and statements to the law enforcement detective, GRACE finds RV1’s allegations of sexual misconduct by Larry Cleek to be credible.

## **2. Summary of RV2’s Allegations and Analysis**

RV2 is a former student of CLCS, has attended CLCC, and was in the 7th and 8th grade from 2002-2004. The information below was obtained through RV2’s interview with GRACE. These allegations were also shared with police in 2023. RV2 shared that she came forward with this information at this point because in the past, “I didn’t want to look at these memories and my time at CLC, both the church and the school. It was just exceptionally painful, things that I knew would really upset my family, really cause a problem with my family. And so I just didn’t look at them and focused on the few, good, happy things that I could remember. But hearing that [RV1] was coming forward really

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<sup>55</sup> RV1 un-sent letter to Larry Cleek, included in an appendix to this report.

<sup>56</sup> RV1’s “Reasons Not to Get Married,” handwritten by RV1 at 13 years old.

<sup>57</sup> Corroborating information pertaining to the psychological distress referenced is included in the previous section.

<sup>58</sup> GRACE communications with NYS Detective, June 6, 2024. *Also see* W2 Tr. at 18 (W2 also spoke with the detective and received this information).

unlocked a lot of... It was hugely traumatic for me. " RV2 reported that Cleek had committed the following acts of sexual misconduct:

**Sexual Misconduct (Leering).** While RV2 was in the 7th and 8th grade, Cleek smilingly leered at RV2 when her skin was exposed during dress code checks (students' midriffs could not be exposed, among other rules) he regularly conducted on her.<sup>59</sup> Importantly, RV2 did not recall other students being singled out in this manner. On an almost daily basis, when the students were coming in, Cleek would pull RV2 aside for the check. RV2 explained that "Due to the layout of the school, it was pretty much just Cleek and [the students] in the mornings in that area of the school."<sup>60</sup> Having conducted these checks on RV2, he never followed the policy to send the students in violation of the dress code out for a cover-up.<sup>61</sup> The repeated checks made RV2 uncomfortable, but she was relieved to not have to wear the cover-ups.<sup>62</sup> Though many teachers knew that RV2 was frequently found in violation of the dress code,<sup>63</sup> Larry Cleek was the only teacher who regularly conducted dress code checks on RV2. (Another male teacher RV2 had in the eighth grade conducted checks on RV2 in the classroom in front of other students, not in a more private space like Cleek, and sent her to the office if she was deemed to be in violation of the dress code).

**Corroboration Factors:** A former CLCS leader attested to asking Cleek and other homeroom teachers to conduct dress code checks of female students, and informed GRACE that Cleek was informed "he could bring in a female teacher."<sup>64</sup> The former CLCS leader further reported that Cleek was "exacerbated" by the request to conduct dress code checks, and stated, "I'm trying so hard to do the right thing. I'm not supposed to be looking

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<sup>59</sup> RV2 Tr.at 4. "It wasn't a friendly smile."

<sup>60</sup> RV2 Tr. at 4.

<sup>61</sup> RV2 Tr. at 3. "And during this dress code check, he'd have me raise my arms and often my stomach would show and he would just smile in a way that made me very uncomfortable..."

<sup>62</sup>RV2 Tr. at 3. "And so at the time, it was something that was very uncomfortable for me, but there was also a bit of relief in that, 'Okay, I don't have to put on the stupid shirt.' The shirts that they had were old T-shirts with cats on them, things, not cool clothing that a teen, a pre-teen or teenager wants to wear. So those were the emotions surrounding the everyday dress code checks."

<sup>63</sup>RV2 Tr. at 3. "They didn't always have this, but starting with fifth and sixth grade [...] the school started to provide shirts for students who were in violation of the dress code. So they would check your dress code. If a teacher saw that your stomach was showing, then you had to go to the office, you were sent to the office to put on one of the provided shirts so that for the remainder of the day[...] you would be following the dress code. [...] That was the procedure, the outline policy beginning from fifth grade on. And every other teacher who would check me, and I'd never really got[...] regular checks before Larry Cleek. A lot of the teachers knew that I was often in violation, so they'd keep their eye out. But every other teacher would send me to the office to put on the corrective shirt, but not Larry Cleek[...] What feels like on a daily basis in seventh and eighth grade, before the day would start, when we were all arriving, Larry Cleek would pull me aside privately and do a mandatory [that is, in the context of what Cleek is reported to have regularly required of RV2] dress code check. And during this dress code check, he'd have me raise my arms and often my stomach would show and he would just smile in a way that made me very uncomfortable, let me know that I was violating dress code, but he never took the prescribed corrective action. He never sent me to the office."

<sup>64</sup> W32 Tr. at 22.

at young women because that makes them uncomfortable[...] but then I'm supposed to be doing dress code."<sup>65</sup> Other secondhand reports were also reported by former students, who heard disclosures from other former students that "[H]e would make comments about dress code or he'd be like, oh, that's too short, or You need to cover up" and that "they used to have to bend over in front of him. [...] Larry. He was their teacher and I guess they had to bend over in front of him to show that their skirt was long enough or not long enough."<sup>66</sup>

**Sexual Assault (Groping of Breasts)**<sup>67</sup> Cleek, as RV2's PE instructor, used a once-a-year school fitness exam as an opportunity to grope RV2's breasts. This exam required students to attempt to complete a pull-up exercise from a chin-at-the-bar position. RV2 described the PE class location on the second floor of the church as isolated, in regard to the proximity of other school staff.<sup>68</sup> Cleek lifted RV2 to the bar, and in RV2's words, Cleek "put his hands [...] underneath [RV2's] armpits .. and his hands [came] around to [RV2's] breasts and they would explore, and they would feel and linger."<sup>69</sup> School leadership, RV2 remembers, often communicated to students that female students (or women generally), "needed to be modest so that we didn't tempt anyone, that showing our bodies was an evil temptation, making us the temptress and the person we were tempting the victim."<sup>70</sup> Because of these teachings, RV2 experienced distress and shame and "truly believed that it was my fault for causing the temptation."<sup>71</sup> RV2 did not disclose the assault at the time largely because of these cultural factors.<sup>72</sup> The fact that Cleek was a pastor was also disorienting for RV2: "Of course, he's not doing anything wrong. [...] He's a man of God."<sup>73</sup> This specific violation of RV2's body occurred in a context in which Cleek allowed boys to jump to the bar to attempt to reach the starting position (chin to the bar), but all girls were picked up, without, as RV2 remembers being given an option to attempt without assistance.<sup>74</sup>

**Corroboration Factors:** Former student W26 said that "there were a few instances" where Cleek held boys by the hips to assist with the bar exercise, but that it was "less common." While not having witnessed Cleek touching any of the girls' breasts, W26 shared,

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<sup>65</sup> W32 Tr. at 22.

<sup>66</sup> W13 Tr. at 12. *Also see* W3 Tr. at 6. One of the individuals referenced indicated they did not want to participate in the investigation, and the other communicated with GRACE but did not agree to their statements being used for the final report.

<sup>67</sup> RV2 Tr. at 18-19.

<sup>68</sup> RV2 Tr. at 18. "So there was in an alcove that is now, I think, a restroom at CLC, the gym was kind of in the main church room. So the church is a barn, and there's, on the second story, this massive big open room that they hold services in. And that room doubled as our lunchroom and the PE room for different classes. And so Larry Cleek would teach PE up there completely isolated, totally alone with the students."

<sup>69</sup> RV2 Tr. at 19.

<sup>70</sup> RV2 Supplemental Communication.

<sup>71</sup> RV2 Supplemental Communication.

<sup>72</sup> RV2 Supplemental Communication.

<sup>73</sup> RV2 Tr. at 18.

<sup>74</sup> RV2 Tr. at 18-19.

I remember some of the girls, feeling from their body language, seeming kind of uncomfortable with that touch. I don't recall if he asked before doing that or if it was just kind of assumed that [...] if you couldn't do a pull up that you should maybe expect to get that type of assistance from him.<sup>75</sup>

Other witnesses recalled Cleek assisting female students onto the pull-up bar, but either did not recall or could not see Cleek's hand placement.<sup>76</sup>

### ***Credibility Analysis***

RV2's allegations of sexual misconduct by Cleek when she was a minor also exhibit key markers of credibility. RV2's statements were both specific and consistent, supported by witness testimony from individuals who either received disclosures from RV2 or experienced similar behaviors. The delayed disclosure of RV2's experience is not concerning, as delayed reporting of child abuse is common, especially in environments where young girls are taught not to tempt men toward sexual immorality. In such settings, there is often an increased fear of being blamed for the abusive actions of others and a reinforced misperception that any violation of their boundaries is their own fault, which can understandably delay a victim's decision to come forward. Additionally, RV2 demonstrated no motivation to lie or seek personal gain, instead expressing a genuine desire to help others who may have had similar experiences.

Furthermore, Cleek's statement to a detective aligns with the possibility that there are multiple victims, further supporting RV2's credibility. Taken together, RV2's prior consistent statements, the absence of any motive to fabricate, corroborating evidence from other sources, and Cleek's own statements all meet GRACE's evidentiary standard for credibility in determining that RV2's allegations of sexual misconduct by Cleek are credible.

### ***3. Behavioral Misconduct, Grooming Behavior, and Analysis***

GRACE's analysis of witness reports on Cleek's special relationships with students and public displays of affection is grounded in an understanding of grooming behaviors and uses of power.<sup>77</sup> Grooming refers to the manipulative tactics employed to deceive a victim, encouraging compliance with sexual abuse while preventing disclosure. GRACE acknowledges the challenge in identifying grooming before sexual abuse, as many grooming tactics can appear harmless or resemble normal adult-child interactions.

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<sup>75</sup> W26 Tr. at 12.

<sup>76</sup> W33 Tr. at 6. *Also see* W9 Tr. at 6, W10 Tr. at 10, W24 Tr. at 4, and W29 at 3.

<sup>77</sup> Power and misuse of power is defined throughout this section.

Additionally, while grooming is primarily associated with the sexual abuse of children, some researchers have observed the similarities of behavior between grooming a child and the coercive control of adult victims to facilitate sexual abuse.<sup>78</sup>

In their research, Georgia Winters, Leah Kaylor, and Elizabeth Jeglic analyzed thirteen distinct definitions of grooming in order to suggest a more universal definition of the concept. In a recent paper, they synthesized prevalent themes from previous definitions of grooming to propose the following comprehensive definition that presents the most essential themes:

Sexual grooming is the deceptive process used by sexual abusers to facilitate sexual contact with a minor while simultaneously avoiding detection. Prior to the commission of the sexual abuse, the would-be sexual abuser may select a victim, gain access to and isolate the minor, develop trust with the minor and often their guardians, community, and youth-serving institutions, and desensitize the minor to sexual content and physical contact. Post-abuse, the offender may use maintenance strategies on the victim to facilitate future sexual abuse and/or to prevent disclosure.<sup>79</sup> This harmful process has three main objectives: establishing conditions for easier perpetration of sexual abuse, enabling future acts against the victim, and reducing the likelihood of disclosure.<sup>80</sup>

Because grooming is inherently deceptive, it can be difficult to identify potential harm and to discern motive. For example, research suggests that behaviors like gift-giving or playing games, which seem innocent, can also be grooming strategies, with the key difference being the intent behind them.<sup>81</sup> A comprehensive definition provides a more objective means to assess specific behaviors that might constitute a process of grooming.

Many witnesses, both adults and former minor students, reported that they believed that Cleek's physical and verbal interactions with them were inappropriate. It was

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<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Psychology Today, posted August 26, 2021; <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/protecting-children-sexual-abuse/202108/how-coercive-abusers-engage-in-sexual-grooming>

<sup>79</sup> *Id.* at page 8.

<sup>80</sup> Georgia M. Winters, Leah E. Kaylor & Elizabeth L. Jeglic (2021): Toward a Universal Definition of Child Sexual Grooming, *Deviant Behavior*, DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2021.1941427.

<sup>81</sup> Elizabeth L. Jeglic, Georgia M. Winters, Benjamin N. Johnson, Identification of red flag child sexual grooming behaviors, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, Volume 136, 2023, 105998, ISSN 0145-2134, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105998>.

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0145213422005324>)



widely acknowledged that Cleek frequently made comments on the attractiveness and appearances of adult women and female students (both positive and negative), frequently gave hugs, and joked and spoke about sexual topics and preferences in surprising contexts (including while teaching and interacting with minors). These behaviors were sometimes understood as personality quirks. Other reports concerned various misuses of authority and influence over students, including giving alcohol to minors without parental knowledge, corporal punishment, inappropriately selective gift-giving, and cultivating intimate relationships with young female students in a way that compromised the ability of the community to ensure that the young women were safe. Specific reports are summarized and analyzed in the following brief sections on selective treatment, physical boundary crossing, sexualized and/or inappropriate comments, and other concerning behavior/misuses of power.

### **Selective Treatment:**

Three commonly recognized stages of grooming are targeting, gaining trust, and fulfilling needs.<sup>82</sup> Offenders typically select vulnerable victims, assess their needs, and then begin to meet those needs to gain trust and control.<sup>83</sup> Some reports received by GRACE that may relate to these stages include:

- Numerous reports were received that Cleek would designate a “teacher’s pet” each year, that the student selected was always a girl, and that the student would receive specialized treatment and attention. Reports were received that Cleek would have girls sit on his lap, most frequently the pet students across various years. Cleek hugged and kissed many students, but especially the favorite. Reports were also received that Cleek would give candy to favorite students,<sup>84</sup> and would assist the favorite with one question per test.<sup>85</sup>
- Reports were received that Cleek gave gifts to current and former students, including: a decorative bullet from a Gettysburg historic site, which was given to a then-current student; an expensive piece of jewelry to a former student when she graduated from high school (given by both Cleek and his wife);<sup>86</sup> an electric razor as mentioned later within this section; and a flamingo to RV1 in reference to Cleek’s regular compliments of RV1’s “beautiful long legs,” as previously stated in the section pertaining to RV1.

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<sup>82</sup> Georgia M. Winters & Elizabeth L. Jeglic (2017) Stages of Sexual Grooming: Recognizing Potentially Predatory Behaviors of Child Molesters, *Deviant Behavior*, 38:6, 724-733, DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2016.1197656

<sup>83</sup> Georgia M. Winters & Elizabeth L. Jeglic (2017) Stages of Sexual Grooming: Recognizing Potentially Predatory Behaviors of Child Molesters, *Deviant Behavior*, 38:6, 724-733, DOI: 10.1080/01639625.2016.1197656

<sup>84</sup> W14 Tr. at 5. “Mr. Cleek opened a Snickers bar and was like, Hey, come here. You can have a bite at my Snickers bar. And so I took a bite of the Snickers bar and shared the Snickers bar with him, and no one else did[...].”

<sup>85</sup> W13 Tr. at 8. “[W]henver we had a test, the teacher’s pet would choose one question that he could give us an answer to or a hint to.”

<sup>86</sup> W22 Tr. at 5-6. *Also see* W15 at 20, W13 at 8.



- One witness, who was an adult at the time of her interactions with Cleek, reported a pattern of concerning behavior and boundary crossing, which included: daily emails from Cleek inquiring about her marital relationship<sup>87</sup>; two instances where Cleek walked behind her and stood very close to her as she was having conversations with staff members; during one of these occasions, Cleek reportedly kissed the back of the witness' head<sup>88</sup>; once when Cleek approached her to kiss her cheek, "I felt like he almost was trying to kiss my lips" and that she turned her face to avoid a kiss on the lips<sup>89</sup>; an instance where Cleek informed a delivery driver that he would be distracted if he looked at the witness<sup>90</sup>; regularly calling the witness "beautiful" and "Wonder Woman"<sup>91</sup>; repeatedly invited the witness and two of her female minor relatives to his Pennsylvania farm<sup>92</sup>; and periodically focused on staying "above reproach" in acts such as meeting with the witness and Cleek's wife to ensure the witness "hadn't misconstrued" the nature of his frequent correspondence with her, including his wife on text messages after the witness asked him to do so, counseling the witness in his office while his wife was present,<sup>93</sup> and telling the witness not to hug him so that others would not misconstrue their relationship after a shift in the witness' relationship status.<sup>94</sup>
- It was reported that Cleek took on a father figure role for two female students whose biological father was absent.<sup>95</sup>
- Reports from chaperones and other witnesses that stated Cleek spent frequent time with female students on class trips and would pay them special attention, including acts such as: Cleek entering the girls' sleeping quarters and putting chocolate on each of their pillows<sup>96</sup>; Cleek requesting that a female student sit next to him at dinner, far from other chaperones, and pulling out her chair for her to sit but no one else's<sup>97</sup>; and that Cleek would walk near select students and talk to them while keeping his distance from other chaperones.<sup>98</sup>

The reports GRACE received indicated that Cleek was more physically intimate (ex., hugs, kisses) with *female* students. The role gender played in Cleek's selection of the children who would be the subject of his hugs and kisses is not consistent with healthy

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<sup>87</sup> W15 Tr. at 5.

<sup>88</sup> W15 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>89</sup> W15 Tr. 1 at 9.

<sup>90</sup> W15 Tr. 1 at 6.

<sup>91</sup> W15 Tr. 1 at 14.

<sup>92</sup> W15 Tr. 2 at 1.

<sup>93</sup> W15 Tr. 2 at 2.

<sup>94</sup> W15 Tr. 1 at 7-8, The witness also stated, "he was very huggy after that as well[...]but it was side hugs."

<sup>95</sup> W15 Tr. at 11. "[H]e would say he was aware that her dad's not involved in her life that much, and he was just trying to dote on her." Also see W13 at 3: "my dad was gone all the time, and so he kind of filled that role in as a father figure... he would make it clear that if I needed someone to talk to, I could talk to him."

<sup>96</sup> W22 Tr. at 6.

<sup>97</sup> W21 Tr. at 10-11.

<sup>98</sup> W21 Tr. at 10-11. W21, a former chaperone on class trips, stated, "it just seemed like he wanted us to not be with them."

adult patterns of mentoring and caring for children. While Cleek was described as generally physically affectionate, the amount and intensity of his affection towards women and girls was disproportionate. The common acceptance of Cleek's affection by the community as a whole was reported to have influenced women and girls against raising concerns.

It is important to acknowledge that the fact that Cleek often expressed physical "affection" for *many* of the women and girls in the community cannot prove that these physical acts were innocent expressions of unsexual affection. Some sexual abusers have been known to employ the tactic of frequent publicly-expressed affection in order to disguise the intent to sexually pursue and abuse a few individuals. Reports pertaining to Cleek's insistence on boundaries, such as involving his wife in meetings with another woman, does not indicate that Cleek always intended to respect those boundaries. Inconsistent boundaries can confuse others and enable exploitation.

Gift-giving is a common tactic by abusers to gain trust and fulfill needs of potential victims. Similarly, fulfilling a father-figure role satisfies a need for fatherly love and nurturing, and can develop unwavering trust, devotion, and loyalty. The fact that Cleek sometimes asked for parental permission before giving particular gifts cannot prove that these and other acts of gift-giving were innocent. The gift of a flamingo to RV1 to signify her "long" and "beautiful" legs was blatantly inappropriate. Dr. Langberg explains that predators often use emotions and words to manipulate and control vulnerable people. By understanding their desires, predators can exploit emotional vulnerabilities and deceive them into believing promises of fulfillment. This type manipulation can cloud judgment and make it difficult for individuals to recognize the potential harm.<sup>99</sup>

### **Physical Boundary Crossing:**

Additional stages of grooming include isolating the victim and gradually desensitizing them to physical touch. Offenders manipulate the relationship to create opportunities for time alone and progressively increase physical contact, leading to sexual touch.

- One former student reported that, in the late 80s at the age of 8, she was corporally punished by Cleek in an isolated setting after making a joke during a student assembly. The corporal punishment was described as: taking place in a back room with a couch, that she was required by Cleek to stand up and bend over the couch, that there was a long pause prior to the spanking, that the spanking was accomplished with a long wooden boat oar, and that after the spanking, Cleek sat on the couch with the student, put his arms around the student and placed his hands in her lap, and prayed with the student.<sup>100</sup> The former student stated that "He

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<sup>99</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, at 65-66.

<sup>100</sup> W30 Tr. at 3.

seemed like he enjoyed it,” and that regular threats from Cleek that he would “swat” the students for acting out and Cleek’s tendency to spank students loudly in earshot of others, led to continuous intense fear and physical shaking.<sup>101</sup> The former student also reported that many years later at an event attended by Cleek, he approached her and asked her whether she recalled the spanking from many years prior.<sup>102</sup> Another female witness reported, “He [Cleek] did[...]smack me on my bottom with a stick in front of the class once, which I believe happened in the second grade” and “he seemed to [...] take pleasure in making kids uncomfortable in public.”<sup>103</sup> Another witness, a male former student, also reported that he was corporally punished by Cleek at the age of 8 in a private room with a paddle.<sup>104</sup> Each of these witnesses indicated that their parents had given consent for school personnel to administer corporal punishment. It was also within school policy and practice for staff to administer corporal punishment on students.

- Another former student reported that Cleek regularly called her “beautiful” and gave her “mostly front-facing” hugs wherein Cleek would “always have his hands around [the former student’s] waist.”<sup>105</sup> The former student said that Cleek gave her an electric razor as a gift on a trip to Virginia Beach, and had the former student shave his mustache while he was shirtless and partially covered with a towel.<sup>106</sup> Photos were taken of the former student shaving Cleek’s mustache, which another witness attested to viewing on social media.<sup>107</sup>
- W3 reported that a former student had shared with her that, “one time in particular he put his arm around her but brushed her breasts as he and she felt it was purposeful and inappropriate and awkward.” GRACE contacted the witness, who ultimately did not agree to be interviewed.<sup>108</sup>
- Numerous reports were received that Cleek would kiss adult women and female students on the cheek or head,<sup>109</sup> and would wrap his arm around female students’ shoulders or hug them.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> W30 Tr. at 3,13.

<sup>102</sup> W30 Tr. at 3,13.

<sup>103</sup> W29 Tr. at 7.

<sup>104</sup> W33 Tr. at 7-8.

<sup>105</sup> W5 Tr. at 3, 5.

<sup>106</sup> W5 Tr. at 7-8.

<sup>107</sup> W21 Tr. at 13.

<sup>108</sup> W3 Tr. at 8. While this report meets the definition of sexual misconduct, it is included within this section as GRACE did not receive this account directly from the individual referenced.

<sup>109</sup> W14 Tr. at 2. *Also see* W13 Tr. at 10; W23 Tr. at 4 (W23 stated that Cleek “he was always trying to hug them or put a hand on the shoulder too....He would put his arm across the doorway when they have to go out” in reference to Cleek’s behavior with her daughters.); W5 Tr. at 6 (W5 reported that after the allegations had surfaced and Larry resigned, she was in a parked car in a store parking lot, that Cleek entered the car without knocking and sat down, grabbed her head, pulled her head towards him, and kissed her cheek); W23 Survey Response (“when I would drop my kids at school he would hug me uninvitedly.”).

<sup>110</sup> W13 Tr. at 10.

- Reports were received that Cleek gave piggyback rides to female students who were approximately 14 years old.<sup>111</sup>

Research on the physical punishment of children suggests that such practices can result in numerous harmful behavioral and psychological consequences to children. Clifton P. Flynn writes:

[R]ecent studies have suggested that a host of potentially harmful behavioral and psychological consequences may result from so-called 'ordinary' physical punishment. These negative outcomes include alcohol abuse, depression, suicidal thoughts, behavioral problems, low achievement, and future economic insecurity.<sup>112</sup>

Such discipline practices can be a result of a misuse of one's physical power and result in the kind of fear and intimidation reported by witnesses. Diane Langberg describes "physical power" as "embodied power" that can be seen in someone's physical size (how they fill a room) or by their physical presence. Langberg writes:

A presence that is scintillating, charismatic, and energetic can overwhelm. Heads turn, and the energy is felt and draws attention... Most of us are keenly aware of the physical power of others. We have some sense of when we are vulnerable, especially when that power is obvious. We are often less aware of what our own presence communicates to others... Whether we use our presence to overpower others or deflect attention, others will feel its impact, just as we feel the effect of their presence.<sup>113</sup>

The reports summarized in this section also indicate testing and crossing of physical boundaries in ways that appeared to be expressions of affection and familiarity. By

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<sup>111</sup> W4 Tr. at 13. Also see W21 Tr. at 7.

<sup>112</sup> Clifton P. Flynn, Regional Differences in Spanking Experiences and Attitudes: A Comparison of Northeastern and Southern College Students, 11 J. FAM. VIOLENCE 59, 59-60 (1996). Also see Victor Vieth Vieth, Victor I. (2014) "From Sticks to Flowers: Guidelines for Child Protection Professionals Working with Parents Using Scripture to Justify Corporal Punishment," William Mitchell Law Review: Vol. 40: Iss. 3, Article 3. Available at: <https://open.mitchellhamline.edu/wmlr/vol40/iss3/3> For an overview of the potential long-term medical and mental health consequences of being beaten as a child, or suffering other forms of maltreatment, see Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, "The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare," in Ruthe A. Lanius, Eric Vermeten, and Clare Pain, eds., The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2010) Also see Victor Vieth Until the Blood Ran: A Call to Re-Appraise the Experience of Child Physical Abuse in the Life and Works of Martin Luther Available at [https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/files/pik/files/until\\_the\\_blood\\_ran-\\_a\\_call\\_to\\_re-appraise\\_the\\_experience\\_of\\_child\\_physical\\_abuse\\_in\\_the\\_life\\_and\\_works\\_of\\_martin\\_luther.pdf](https://hfh.fas.harvard.edu/files/pik/files/until_the_blood_ran-_a_call_to_re-appraise_the_experience_of_child_physical_abuse_in_the_life_and_works_of_martin_luther.pdf)

<sup>113</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*. at 63.

extending seemingly harmless displays of affection to all, an individual who selects a vulnerable person for grooming might facilitate increased access to the targeted individual, such as a student. When a more vulnerable person, such as a student, has interactions with a more powerful person, such as a trusted teacher, that involves the potential testing or crossing of professional boundaries, the less-powerful person can feel uncomfortable even if those boundary-crossing behaviors seem relatively innocuous. This is further enhanced when a person experiences a more powerful individual engaging in increasingly inappropriate behaviors (whether it be the nature and frequency of touch, emotional intimacy, etc.) that cause the less powerful person to sense that they are being invited to give approval or disapproval, as if the more powerful person is putting out feelers to see which boundaries can be dispensed with. The more powerful person can engage in taking small liberties and guarded and coded communication to determine whether they are free to extend more familiarity. By keeping these interactions obscure and ambiguous, the more powerful person retains the control needed to stop, go back, or proceed. Again, the less powerful person, such as a student, is put in an increasingly vulnerable position because any response might increase their risk, either of being the recipient of more boundary-crossing behavior or of being the recipient of the more powerful person's displeasure, especially if the more powerful person has already demonstrated an ability to punish others.

No woman or former student should blame themselves for allowing Cleek to offer them hugs or shows of affection. Cleek's position of authority involved substantial interaction with people, that, as a pastor, people might have meant that he wanted to lean into being seen as friendly and available. Because enough women described their reactions of discomfort, it seems almost impossible to suppose that he did not notice. He could have modified his behavior and taken more responsibility to protect the integrity of appropriate boundaries. He could have asked if someone felt comfortable with a hug and given them another option or waited for them to initiate. Cleek felt a right to touch women and others without due regard for their preferences, and thereby misused his power.

### **Sexualized and/or Inappropriate Comments:**

Desensitization of potential victims can also take the form of sexualized comments. Further, when a person in a position of authority over students and others in the community crosses boundaries with their words, it is a misuse of that authority. Reports received pertaining to sexualized and/or inappropriate comments made by Cleek include:

- GRACE received reports pertaining to a former student that is now deceased, including the disclosures from the former student that she had been abused by a



pastor (without further disclosure of the pastor's identity) and that she had developed an eating disorder due to Cleek's stated desire for "all of the girls to look pretty."<sup>114</sup>

- Multiple witnesses that were former students of Cleek reported that, during class or school events, Cleek would discuss sexual topics or use sexualized language, including: during a Song of Songs Bible lesson, Cleek was "talking about sex and telling us that sex is really good in marriage"<sup>115</sup>; that getting pregnant from rape was unlikely "because you have to be relaxed in order to get pregnant"<sup>116</sup>; telling his class a story about a man peeing on an electric fence and saying "he got electrocuted in his private area"<sup>117</sup>; that Cleek would yell "sex" to get his 7th and 8th grade class to quiet down<sup>118</sup>; that Cleek would say to his class "How I learned what a compound word is was the word penis, pen and is" while gesturing to his genital area<sup>119</sup>; that Cleek yelled "Oh my! He's raping her!" with students while witnessing ducks mating<sup>120</sup>; that another student mispronounced the word "gentiles" and Cleek "made a big deal about it sounding like genitals"<sup>121</sup>; that Cleek sang a song about reading a Playboy magazine and joked about the impossibility of reading a Playboy without viewing the pictures included<sup>122</sup>; and joked that he should take the students to Hooters.<sup>123</sup>
- Witnesses said that Cleek frequently commented on the students' physical appearance, as well as the appearances of adult women. Reported comments by Cleek include: a sermon where Cleek referred to two students as "bigger girls"<sup>124</sup>; commented on one female student being "small" and "skinny"<sup>125</sup>; told a "story about God telling him to share the gospel with some 'really ugly' girl and how he really didn't want to do it because she was so ugly"<sup>126</sup>; that Cleek "got to share the gospel with a beautiful girl with long legs"<sup>127</sup>; that Cleek told a women she was getting fat when she was pregnant<sup>128</sup>; that during a class, Cleek "went around to each student and pointed and said whether or not we have a round head or an oval head" and

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<sup>114</sup> W6 Tr. at 6. *Also see* W19 Tr. at 26- 27.

<sup>115</sup> W19 Tr. at 6.

<sup>116</sup> W19 Tr. at 6.

<sup>117</sup> W23 Tr. at 3.

<sup>118</sup> W32 Tr. at 16.

<sup>119</sup> W17 Tr. p 23.

<sup>120</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication-

<sup>121</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication-

<sup>122</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication ("I remember him singing a song about Playboy magazine. Something about 'every Sunday morning reading Playboy.' And joking about how his grandfather (or uncle) had a Playboy subscription and how he claimed he read the articles without looking at the pictures. He joked about how that was impossible.")

<sup>123</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication-

<sup>124</sup> W19 Tr. at 27.

<sup>125</sup> W27 Tr. at 8.

<sup>126</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication-

<sup>127</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication-

<sup>128</sup> W19 Tr. at 27.



that he said “I personally find oval heads more attractive”<sup>129</sup>; that Cleek “told stories<sup>130</sup> about how he liked tall blondes, not plain girls; and [...] how proud he was of his son for marrying a tall blonde<sup>131</sup>; that Cleek called multiple female students and adults “beautiful”<sup>132</sup>; and that Cleek announced at a church gathering that an adult woman used to be “very ugly because of crying all the time,” but was now “beautiful.”<sup>133</sup>

- Reports were also received pertaining to racially insensitive comments made by Cleek. A former leader attested to Cleek making “a staff member really uncomfortable in a meeting, and it was a racial thing” and that she confronted Cleek and he apologized to the staff member.<sup>134</sup> A former student reported that Cleek stated that individuals from a country that had just experienced an earthquake were being punished by God “for all of the terrible things they do,” while knowing that the former student was of the same nationality as the country referenced and had family members living in the country.<sup>135</sup> Another former student reported that he witnessed Cleek making “a lot of racist comments” towards another student, including but not limited to calling the student the “N” word.<sup>136</sup>

Because this type of communication was used by someone who held more power toward those who held less power, such communication is then a misuse of authority as well. Dr. Langberg describes verbal power in the following way, “Words have the power to build up or tear down a person’s sense of self.”<sup>137</sup> Words easily become verbal abuse when “using words, our God-given verbal power to control, manipulate, demean, or intimidate.”<sup>138</sup> Similar to verbal power is emotional power. Having to “walk on eggshells” in fear of an outburst causing the “governing force” of the space to be the “emotional state of a single person.”<sup>139</sup> Another example would be “damaging and crushing responses to another’s feelings.”<sup>140</sup> Regarding verbal power, Langberg states, “Words are used to cover up terrible wrongs or to control. They can seduce, condemn, humiliate, or shock. The power of words to destroy is seemingly endless... Words can shatter the self of a child or an adult.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> W19 Tr. at 5. This statement was corroborated by W4, who stated that he commented on her face shape as well as other students in the class. See W4 Tr. at 14-15.

<sup>130</sup> W22 Tr. at 6.

<sup>131</sup> W8 Survey Response.

<sup>132</sup> W23 Survey Response. Also see W15 Tr. at 17, W4 Tr. at 3, W5 Tr. at 4.

<sup>133</sup> W8 Tr. at 18.

<sup>134</sup> W32 Tr. at 13.

<sup>135</sup> W27 Tr. at 1-2.

<sup>136</sup> W33 Tr. at 9-10. The witness indicated that the student who was subjected to Larry’s comments did not want to participate in the investigation.

<sup>137</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, at 64.

<sup>138</sup> *Id.* at 64-5.

<sup>139</sup> *Id.* at 64.

<sup>140</sup> *Id.*

<sup>141</sup> *Redeeming Power*, at 64.

A person or group should also not have to be put in a position where they are unsure of whether their leader is crossing boundaries with their words. They should not have to be put in a position where they have to decide whether or not to say something about the appropriateness of the communication used by a person in a position of trust and authority.

This kind of communication also fails to live up to the biblical standards of speech that ought to edify and build up others. 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. Appropriate communication from a Christian leader is to be wholesome and promote the well-being of others.<sup>142</sup> Additionally, edifying 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 and teachers but to all believers.

### **Other Concerning Behavior/Misuses of Power:**

- Reports were received that Cleek was seen in, coming out of, or standing in the doorway of the girls' bathroom.<sup>143</sup>
- Reports were received that on at least two occasions, Cleek provided alcohol to his minor students.<sup>144</sup>

In New York, providing alcohol to a minor is a class A misdemeanor under Penal Law § 260.20, which covers Unlawfully Dealing with a Child in the First Degree. This offense is punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 and up to one year in prison. The corporation that the offender works for may also be fined up to \$5,000.

These reports, as well as the other reports summarized in this section, indicate a pattern of Cleek misusing power in his interactions with others. Power is derived from God, and should always be used as the end goal of bringing glory to God.<sup>145</sup> Diane Langberg

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<sup>142</sup> Ephesians 4:29.

<sup>143</sup> RV1 March 2019 Email Communication—"he would come into the girls bathroom if we were late for class and mock girls for adjusting their hair or makeup."; *Also see* W6 Tr. at 4 (W6 stated she saw Cleek coming out of the girls bathroom, and did not recall any girls exiting the bathroom afterwards); W26 Tr. at 10 ("he would definitely talk into the girl's bathroom in terms of people whose parents were there who needed to get picked up or if he was looking for people.")

<sup>144</sup> A male former student, W26, reported "while I was underage, I was offered alcohol at his house by him," that it was "straight liquor" amounting to "a drink or maybe a drink and a half," and that Cleek's daughter, also a minor at the time, was also drinking alcohol. W26 Tr. at 7. *Also see* W21 Tr. at 6 (W21 reported that while at a rented home for an 8th grade trip "there was a bottle of champagne on the table," that Cleek said "they always leave that as a courtesy," that he "started to pour [...] everybody a sip of champagne," and that when one of the students expressed concerns that their parents would not be comfortable with her having alcohol, responded "It's okay. I talked with them, its fine," implying that he had received parental permission.)

<sup>145</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*.

addresses power by pointing to Matthew 28: 18-19, where Jesus said, “All authority, all power is given to me; therefore go...,” highlighting that “every drop of power” that any person holds is “shared power” given to us by Jesus who has lovingly shared it with us.<sup>146</sup> The power Jesus had came from the Father,<sup>147</sup> and he humbly followed not promoting himself, his own messages or his own kingdoms.<sup>148</sup> As followers of Christ, we are to emulate his example, yet often when we “use our power to damage or use a person in a way that dishonors God, we fail in our handling of the gift he has given.”<sup>149</sup> When power is used for personal gain and to uplift an individual rather than God, it is an abuse of power. How one uses their power not only impacts others, but tells us something about the person in power.<sup>150</sup>

Power can be used through the combination of knowledge, intellect, and skill.<sup>151</sup> Dr. Langberg asserts that we assume that those in positions of leadership who have this combination of knowledge, intellect, and skill are trustworthy.<sup>152</sup> Unfortunately this combination “increases the likelihood that a leader will be granted unfiltered, sometimes automatic authority by the people they lead.”<sup>153</sup>

In her book *Redeeming Power*, Dr. Langberg points out that the abuse of power within the body of Christ is akin to a cancer, corrupting the very essence of the faith community.<sup>154</sup> The findings summarized throughout this report underscore the importance of those in positions of trust stewarding their power well and of the need for all those within a community to understand the numerous ways in which that power can be abused. This understanding can also aid a process of redeeming power for the good of others.

## B. Survey Overview

GRACE received a total of 71 survey responses, largely by those who indicated they formerly attended CLCC or CLCS.<sup>155</sup> Of these respondents, 13 selected the option “yes” to

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<sup>146</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>147</sup> John 5:19 states, “The Son can do nothing by himself; he can only do what he sees his Father doing.” (NIV).

<sup>148</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Id.* Langberg states, “Our responses to the vulnerable expose who we are. This is an important principle to keep in mind as we consider the use--and misuse--of power.” *Id.* at 4.

<sup>151</sup> Langberg, *Redeeming Power*, at 66. Dr. Langberg uses the example of taking her car to the mechanic: “[M]y lack of knowledge, intellect, and skill in this area puts me at his mercy.”

<sup>152</sup> *Id.* at 67

<sup>153</sup> *Id.* at 66.

<sup>154</sup> Langberg, Diane. *Redeeming Power*, at 93-94 (Emphasis in original)

<sup>155</sup> Survey respondents were permitted to select more than one option regarding their involvement at CLCC or its ministries. Approximately 68% indicated they formerly attended, volunteered, or were on staff at CLCC; 53% of respondents indicated they formerly attended CLCS; 44% indicated they were formerly on staff or volunteered at CLCS; 27% indicated they currently attend, volunteer at, or are a staff member at CLCC; and 16% indicated they are currently staff members or otherwise involved at Willow Glen Christian School.

the question “Have you experienced, at any time, any form of behavioral or sexual misconduct from Larry Cleek?” Those who provided contact information were contacted by the GRACE team for an interview. In most cases, allegations against Cleek were provided anonymously or with an indication that the respondent would not be willing to communicate with GRACE further. Allegations conveyed via survey response include:

- “During a school trip, he entered into a hot tub with me while I was alone and unsupervised in the tub. I was underage at the time and felt extremely uncomfortable and left very quickly... I have spoken with other people who have witnessed inappropriate behavior but did not witness myself. They have described excessive touching/ familiarity with female students, hugging frequently as well as verbal abuse, grooming and sexual touching.”<sup>156</sup>
- “Larry would kiss students on the cheek and have students sit on his lap.”<sup>157</sup>
- “[Larry Cleek made] Inappropriate comments about students' race and bodies.”<sup>158</sup>
- “Body comments.”<sup>159</sup>
- “He was often an intimidating person, and I observed him being cruel to others at the school, but he knew my father was an abusive pastor and I suspect he was afraid to harm me. At times he went out of his way to help me.”<sup>160</sup>
- “What I felt at the time was verbal abuse, belittling, and berating from several classmates as well as three teachers, [Redacted], [Redacted], and Larry Cleek[...]One occasion in particular was when a student lied about me and said I called Larry Cleek stupid, which I did not. I was immediately dragged into the principal's office and spanked several times with a wooden paddle after being told to bend over and hold the arm rests of a chair. The whole I was protesting and claiming my innocence to no avail. I cannot recall other specific incidents at this time[...]I distinctly remember verbal abuse directed toward other classmates, especially[...] an Indonesian student.”<sup>161</sup>
- “He loves to Publy [sic] beat children ( young second graders) with a wooden boat paddle to humiliate them[...] He would shut himself behind closed doors with young kids to abuse them... He abused multiple kids daily[...] After a beating he would sit super close to cuddle and console and hug[...] Clc covers everything up and condones his actions.”<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Survey Response #10. The survey respondent provided contact information but did not respond to interview requests.

<sup>157</sup> Survey Response #12, Anonymous.

<sup>158</sup> Survey Response #31. The survey respondent indicated they would not like to be contacted by the GRACE team.

<sup>159</sup> Survey Response #58, Anonymous.

<sup>160</sup> Survey Response #60, Anonymous.

<sup>161</sup> Survey Response #61. The survey respondent provided contact information but did not respond to interview requests. The survey respondent further elaborated that “spanking was the normative punishment. I'm pretty sure there were other staff members who engaged in this punitive punishment. I know I reported many times the abuse I received from fellow students, and that always fell on deaf ears, so I assume that if I had it my parents had said anything, it too fell on deaf ears.” *Id.*

<sup>162</sup> Survey Response #64, Anonymous.

- “Some of the girls he ‘spanked’ as part of his ‘classroom management’ said his behaviors in the room alone with them was uncomfortable. He seemed to specifically spank loudly in earshot of the other students and made a display of it that still gives me anxiety to think about 35 years later.”<sup>163</sup>

Graphs that depict survey responses to questions that relate to awareness of policies that pertain to misconduct and confidence level relating to CLCC’s response to allegations of abuse are included in “Appendix B” to this report.

## C. Larry Cleek’s Response to the Allegations

Cleek declined to be interviewed by GRACE investigators on July 23, 2024, stating “Since I have heard nothing from anyone about anything I have no response to give. I have served CLC and the school for 37 years. Therefore, if there is information you need, you may obtain it from those with whom I worked closely. I won’t be talking to anyone from GRACE Ministries. Larry.”<sup>164</sup> However, some of Cleek’s responses to the allegations can be gleaned from other sources.

As referred to in an earlier section, in a conversation with a law enforcement detective pursuant to RV1’s police report, Cleek is reported to have declined an interview, stating “I don’t know who came forward or what the statute of limitations is.”<sup>165</sup>

GRACE received an account that during an evangelical pastor’s meeting at an unknown date, elders spoke about Cleek being “accused of some things” and that Cleek stated he was being accused “of touching his students” because of “Me-tooism and wokes.”<sup>166</sup>

GRACE also received an account from a witness who was called by Cleek after the police investigation was initiated. During this call, Cleek was reported to have asked the witness whether they had left CLCC because he made her “uncomfortable,” and informed the witness that “someone had made some strange allegations,” that RV2 “was trying to get [another leader] kicked out” and was therefore “making this stuff up,” and “that he wasn’t going to talk to the police.”<sup>167</sup>

DARVO (Deny, Attack, Reverse Victim and Offender) is a strategic response that perpetrators commonly use to silence victims. According to Jennifer Freyd, PhD, the

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<sup>163</sup> Survey Response #70. The survey respondent indicated they would not like to be contacted by the GRACE team.

<sup>164</sup> Cleek text message to GRACE, July 23, 2024.

<sup>165</sup> GRACE communications with NYS Detective, June 6, 2024. *Also see* W2 Tr. at 18 (W2 also spoke with the detective and received this information).

<sup>166</sup> W22 Transcript at 12.

<sup>167</sup> W15 Tr. at 12.



researcher and educator credited with first describing DARVO, the denial is not evidence of guilt, since denial is what an innocent person would likely do. Rather, says Dr. Freyd, if the abuse accusation is true, then the denial is more indignant, self righteous and manipulative. The denial often becomes focused on ridiculing the accuser and “the offender rapidly creates the impression that the abuser is the wronged one, while the victim or concerned observer is the offender.”<sup>168</sup>

Cleek's responses, reported and directed to GRACE, seem to reflect elements consistent with DARVO. His refusal to engage with investigators and law enforcement, coupled with dismissive language regarding the allegations—framing them as products of "Me-Tooism" and "wokes"—may align with the DARVO pattern, as described by Dr. Jennifer Freyd. Cleek's focus on questioning the legitimacy of the accusations, particularly by suggesting that RV2 fabricated the claims to harm another leader, reflects the manipulation and reversal of victim and offender roles often associated with DARVO. While denial itself does not confirm guilt, the tone and context of Cleek's reported reactions suggest a strategic effort to discredit the accusers and shift the narrative. This behavior, if interpreted through the lens of Freyd's research, may be seen as an attempt to deflect responsibility and silence those raising concerns.

## D. CLCC's Knowledge of and Response to the Allegations

GRACE's review of CLCC's knowledge and response to the allegations against Cleek, as well as Cleek's boundary-crossing behaviors, reveal a pattern of dismissal towards concerns raised by members of the community, a protective culture that surrounded Cleek that hindered accountability, and a lack of care and support towards RV1.

GRACE received no reports that members of CLCC leadership became aware of the allegations of sexual misconduct prior to receiving information in August of 2023 through a second-hand source that RV1 had reached out to former students as part of the law enforcement investigation.<sup>169</sup> Evidence was also not received that CLCC was aware of allegations by RV2. Despite consultations with GRACE beginning in November of 2023, CLCC did not formally engage GRACE for an independent investigation until January of 2024, following a petition by parents, former students, and community members expressing concerns about Cleek's behavior and asking for an investigation.<sup>170</sup> Further, one individual that signed the petition stated that only current CLCC members that signed the petition

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<sup>168</sup> Freyd, J. II. Violations of power, adaptive blindness, and betrayal trauma theory. *Feminism & Psychology*. 7 (1): 22-32. February 1997.

<sup>169</sup> However, as discussed previously, GRACE did receive information that a former CLCC member witnessed an instance of sexual misconduct by Cleek against RV1. The former CLCC member did not respond to GRACE's interview requests, and has recently himself been convicted and sentenced for sexual abuse of a child.

<sup>170</sup> January 10, 2024 Petition.



were provided with an update by CLCC that they were “taking it seriously and [...] looking into it”<sup>171</sup> and that a WGCS leader inquired whether the petition signers were “just trying to stir up trouble[...] and perpetuating gossip” by including concerns about Cleek’s behavior within the petition.<sup>172</sup> The delay and nature of response may highlight a reactive rather than proactive approach by CLCC and its ministries in response to RV1’s allegations.

CLCC made some positive efforts in January 2024 by determining that they would work to develop a child protection policy, and in September of 2023 by placing Cleek on administrative leave and barring him from being present on school grounds. Additionally, it is a profound demonstration of commitment to the truth by engaging in this difficult and introspective investigation.

However, these positive efforts were minimized by a failure to offer care and support to RV1, despite becoming aware of her identity pursuant to conversations surrounding the police investigation.<sup>173</sup> GRACE has also received information that a WGCS leader and CLCC member has revealed the identities of the reporting victims in conversations with others about the investigation.<sup>174</sup> Further, in conversations with GRACE and others, CLCC leadership has routinely referred to RV1 as “the accuser,”<sup>175</sup> which, when coupled with WGCS’ statement to parents that child protection policies would be developed to “provide students with a safe environment as well as protect teachers from the risk of false accusations”<sup>176</sup> and that the allegations involved solely “inappropriate interactions”<sup>177</sup> may suggest a defensive posture and a disbelief in the validity of the allegations. In consideration of several studies that have estimated that false reports of child abuse comprises approximately 2% of reports,<sup>178</sup> a defensive and disbelieving posture is deeply

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<sup>171</sup> W21 Tr. at 29.

<sup>172</sup> W21 Tr. at 36.

<sup>173</sup> W2 Tr. at 19.

<sup>174</sup> W21 Communications. *Also see* W1 Communications.

<sup>175</sup> CLCC Conversations with GRACE. *Also see* W2 Tr. at 19.

<sup>176</sup> January 24, 2024 Announcement from school Board to Parents of Students at WGCS.

<sup>177</sup> January 24, 2024 Announcement from school Board to Parents of Students at WGCS.

<sup>178</sup> One comprehensive study concluded the following: “Jones and McGraw (1987) have conducted the most comprehensive study to date on the nature and incidence of false abuse allegations among children. Jones and McGraw reviewed all 576 complaints of possible sexual abuse made to the Denver Department of Social Services in 1983. Of the total number of cases, 53% were confirmed or substantiated. Twenty-four percent had insufficient evidence to make a determination about abuse. Another 17% of the cases, while unsubstantiated, were categorized as representing legitimate suspicions of the reporting party. Eight allegations of sexual abuse made by five different children were judged to be fictitious reports of abuse. After subtracting all cases in which there was insufficient evidence, false allegations by children represented nearly 2% of the total number of cases.”

Jones, D. P. H. & McGraw, J. M. (1987), Reliable and fictitious accounts of sexual abuse of children. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 2:27-45. Also See

troubling, as it shows a lack of empathy or concern for reporting victims, who are enduring significant pain regardless of any investigation's outcome. Further, several former CLCC leaders were aware of RV1's mental health decline during the years that the abuse is reported to have occurred, but did not attest to taking proactive action to care for RV1 during that time.<sup>179</sup>

Witness testimony also highlights a long-standing tendency to dismiss or excuse Cleek's boundary crossing behaviors, of which multiple leaders were aware. Dr. Anna Salter explains that offenders often present a facade of being a "good person" to the outside world, someone the community trusts and believes would never engage in inappropriate actions. Salter highlights that grooming extends beyond the victim, encompassing the community and institutions surrounding the victim as well.<sup>180</sup> Numerous witness reports indicate that concerns about Larry's overly affectionate physical contact—such as hugging and kissing women and female students—inappropriate comments, and providing alcohol to minors were dismissed by CLCC leaders and community members with remarks such as "that's just Larry."<sup>181</sup>

GRACE received reports from former CLCC and CLCS leadership that demonstrate their awareness of and inaction towards Cleek's boundary crossing behaviors, including:

- Yelling "sex" to get kids' attention in the classroom.<sup>182</sup>
- Kissing female family members "hello" and "goodbye" on the lips.<sup>183</sup>
- Comments "about body type" during biology lessons.<sup>184</sup>
- Viewing a picture from a class trip of Cleek with "a girl on each leg with his arm around them smiling,"<sup>185</sup> a picture from another class trip of Cleek "nuzzled up behind one of the students" and the student looked

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<https://www.nationalcac.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/False-allegations-of-sexual-abuse-by-children-and-adolescents.pdf>

<sup>179</sup> W32 Tr. at 21 ("She exhibited clear signs of trauma: self-harm and anorexia and perfectionism. And that became public in the youth group they had where there was cutting stuff that happened in front of the other kids.") *Also see* W8 Tr. at 18 ("it was obvious that something was the matter that they were withdrawn. I thought that it was something like with anorexia or something or some sort of eating disorder[...] and depression.")

<sup>180</sup> Anna C. Salter, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders*, 35, 229 (2003).

<sup>181</sup> W8 Survey Response ("We as a staff functioned in a culture of excusing Larry, and respecting him as the man of the building or more so the man at the helm, and eventually became the pastor of the church that oversaw the school[...] I fell right into the line of ignoring my own perception of any creepy vibes and replacing them with statements like "He didn't mean it that way", "He's oblivious (to how he sounds)", "That's just Larry being Larry" etc."); *Also see* W32 Tr. at 10,22, W6 Tr. at 9, W15 Tr. at 4. (W15 reported that in response to concerns raised about Cleek providing alcohol to minors, a leader stated "That's just Larry.")

<sup>182</sup> W32 Tr. at 15.

<sup>183</sup> W32 Tr. at 20.

<sup>184</sup> W32 Tr. at 21.

<sup>185</sup> W32 Tr. at 24.

uncomfortable,<sup>186</sup> and a picture of Cleek giving one female student a piggyback ride.<sup>187</sup>

- Cleek's designation of a "teacher's pet" each year<sup>188</sup> and display of excessive attention to these students (including gifts and compliments).<sup>189</sup>
- Cleek's tendency to be "handsy" with female staff members and mothers,<sup>190</sup> or to hug and kiss them.<sup>191</sup>
- Cleek's presence in the girls bathroom and entrance to the bathroom.<sup>192</sup>
- Making comments about female student's bodies.<sup>193</sup>

The communities' dismissive attitude allowed Cleek's behavior to continue unchecked and reinforced a lack of accountability that other witnesses attested to. One key example is CLCS's knowledge that Cleek had provided alcohol to minors and lied about obtaining parental consent. Instead of confronting this illegal behavior, leadership reportedly dismissed it as "that's just Larry,"<sup>194</sup> exacerbating the environment of permissiveness and lack of accountability. One witness stated, "I feel like the [school's leaders] were not above Larry, but they would be the ones to talk to him and probably try and reason with him... but I don't think anybody was really above him."<sup>195</sup> The same sentiment was expressed by a former CLCS leader, who stated that they couldn't "discipline" Cleek but could "correct" him, given his superior status as senior pastor at CLCC.<sup>196</sup>

Throughout this investigation, it has become evident to GRACE that Cleek is highly regarded within the CLCC community. While such a reputation should not immediately imply wrongdoing, it is crucial for CLCC to remain vigilant against the possibility of genuine flaws being masked by a positive image. As Dr. Salter points out, nurturing an "above reproach" reputation can create an opportunity for exploitative actions.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> W8 Tr. at 5. GRACE received a copy of this photo, and has verified that the witness' description is accurate.

<sup>187</sup> W15 Tr. at 7.

<sup>188</sup> W32 Tr. at 24. *Also see* W8 Tr. at 10.

<sup>189</sup> W15 Tr. at 6-7. *Also see* W6 Tr, at 16.

<sup>190</sup> W8 Tr. at 3, 6, 15. *Also see* W15 Tr. at 7,13, 15-16.

<sup>191</sup> W32 Tr. at 23. *Also see* W8 Tr. at 5.

<sup>192</sup> W6 Tr. at 14. *Also see* W8 Tr. at 14.

<sup>193</sup> W6 Tr. at 6.

<sup>194</sup> W15 Tr. at 4. (W15 reported that in response to concerns raised about Cleek providing alcohol to minors, a leader stated "That's just Larry.") *Also see* W32 Tr. at 17-18 (The leader in question stated they spoke with Cleek, the church elders, and the parents about the incident, but took no further action.)

<sup>195</sup> W8 Tr. at 21.

<sup>196</sup> W32 Tr. at 19-20.

<sup>197</sup> Salter, Anna, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, and Other Sex Offenders* 29 (2003).

## IV. Trauma-Informed Principles Analysis and Recommendations

### Safety

Safety was impacted in various ways as discussed in this report. Some key examples include the number of opportunities that Cleek was permitted to be alone with a student or to engage in physical contact with students. In order for an organization to foster a safe environment, it is crucial that both staff and members of the congregation, regardless of age, feel physically and psychologically protected. This entails ensuring a secure physical setting and promoting interpersonal interactions that cultivate a sense of safety. Giving importance to the understanding of safety as defined by those being served is a key priority. Safety is also given importance throughout Scripture.<sup>198</sup>

CLCC should:

- Establish a Child Abuse Prevention and Care Ministry: Develop a comprehensive ministry that integrates child abuse prevention with Bible studies and sermons to foster a supportive and informed community.
- Conduct Staff and Leader Training on Grooming: Facilitate training sessions on the 'Basics of Grooming' with organizations like Darkness to Light, GRACE, or RAINN, to help staff and leaders recognize and address grooming behaviors.
- Specialized Training for Clergy on Grooming: Offer targeted skill development sessions for staff and leaders focusing on grooming behaviors specific to clergy, to enhance their ability to identify and respond to potential issues.
- Provide Trauma Informed Training: Arrange training on 'Trauma 101' through organizations like GRACE or Trauma Informed Churches to help staff and leaders understand and address trauma effectively.
- Ensure Regular Mandated Reporting Training: Conduct mandatory reporting training through the Office of Children and Families for New York at least annually

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<sup>198</sup> Safety is discussed in the following passages of Scripture: Ezra 8:21-23 (Fast seeking safety from God); Psalm 82:3-4 (Justice to the weak); Proverbs 22:3 (Wise person protects from coming danger); Mark 10:14 (Suffer the little children to come unto Jesus); Titus 1:7 (Faith leaders should not be violent); Deuteronomy 24:6 (highlights God's heart for keeping children safe from harm).

for all leaders, staff, and ministry leaders to stay updated on reporting requirements and procedures.

- Explore Safety Measures for Facilities: Explore ways in which CLCC’s facilities can be improved to increase visibility by others, which may include the installation of windows in classroom doors or cameras in areas where visibility is limited.<sup>199</sup>

## Trustworthiness & Transparency

It is critical that the church ensures that organizational operations and decision-making processes are designed to build and maintain trust with congregants, staff, and other stakeholders. While trustworthiness and transparency was promoted through CLCC’s engagement of GRACE for this independent investigation, it may have been compromised through announcements that described the allegations as “inappropriate interactions,” despite knowing that the behavior in question was under investigation as criminal. Further, a significant percentage of survey respondents felt as if CLCC did not promote an environment of trustworthiness and transparency,<sup>200</sup> which is worth further consideration by CLCC’s leaders in consideration of the Scriptures that emphasize the priority of truthfulness.<sup>201</sup> CLCC should:

- Apologize to Victims: Formulate a plan for apologizing to victims of sexual assault, sexual abuse, misconduct, and spiritual abuse, collaborating with local trauma experts to guide these interactions.
- Incorporate A Church Called Tov Principles: Consider integrating the liturgy and principles from *A Church Called Tov* by Scott McKnight into your organizational practices to foster a healthier church environment.
- Address Historical Trust Issues: Create communal spaces for discussing and addressing historical patterns that have undermined trust and transparency. Pursue communal repentance and publicly apologize to survivors of abuse by Larry Cleek, explaining the reasons for this apology.

## Peer Support & Mutual Support

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<sup>199</sup> Cameras should not be installed in areas where there is an expectation of privacy, such as within bathrooms or surrounding diaper changing stations.

<sup>200</sup> See Appendix B.

<sup>201</sup> Christian leaders are to walk in the truth (3 John 1:3). They are to believe the truth and love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Paul calls Christians to put off falsehood (Ephesians 4:25) and speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:32). God delights in trustworthiness (Proverbs 12:22) and is attentive and responsive to the prayers of those who keep their lips from deceitful speech (1 Peter 3:10-12).



Peer support was limited by the lack of care and support offered to RV1, and the communities' permissiveness of boundary-crossing behaviors by Cleek that resulted in a barrier for individuals to raise concerns about Cleek's behavior. The term 'peers' refers to those with trauma experience or their family/caregivers. They are also known as 'trauma survivors.' Scripture that pertains to the promotion of peer support include: peers can support one another during adversity (Proverbs 17:17), refine one another (Proverbs 27:17), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), and encourage and build up one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Key tools for fostering safety and hope, building trust, enhancing collaboration, and leveraging lived experiences for recovery include:

- Connect with peer support groups such as Empower Survivors (CSA) and Restored Voices Collective (adult clergy sexual abuse) to include survivor perspectives and lived experiences in decision-making processes.
- Provide Training on Toxic Culture and Disclosure: Offer training for elders and staff on recognizing and dismantling toxic cultures, understanding typical dynamics of disclosure related to sexual abuse, including the normalization of delayed disclosures.
- Explore paths of funding for mental health services for survivors of abuse that occurred on church property or were perpetrated by Larry Cleek

### **Collaboration & Mutuality**

Collaboration and Mutuality demonstrates that healing occurs through meaningful relationships and equitable sharing of power and decision-making.<sup>202</sup> Collaboration and Mutuality may have been hindered through reported questioning as to whether the signers of the January 2024 petition for an investigation were "perpetuating gossip." Recommendations that could help promote collaboration and mutuality include:

- Organize Annual Child Abuse Prevention Month Activities: Plan and execute events and activities each year during April (Child Abuse Prevention Month) to raise awareness and educate the community.
- Implement Body Safety Education Programs: Provide education on body safety for both parents/caregivers and children/students to ensure they are equipped with

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<sup>202</sup> Principles of collaboration and mutuality are reflected in the Scriptures. Proverbs speaks of the safety found in an abundance of counselors (Proverbs 11:14). Two people are better than one and a cord of three strands is not easily torn apart. One can lift up another when they fall, provide for the physical needs of another, and help defend another when they are vulnerable. (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). The Church is described as a body with many members supporting one another and building the body up in love (Romans 12:4-6; Ephesians 4:16).

knowledge and strategies for protecting themselves.

- Offer Training on Bystander Intervention: Educate staff, leaders and children/youth on 'Bystander Intervention' techniques to empower them to take action when they witness inappropriate or harmful behavior.
- Include Survivor Voices in Policy Revision: Invite youth members who are survivors of misconduct to contribute their perspectives in revising policies and procedures, ensuring that they reflect real experiences and needs.

### **Empowerment, Voice and Choice**

Empowerment, voice and choice are vital aspects embraced by churches that recognize the significance of power differentials and the historical marginalization of children/youth, often leading to a lack of voice, limited choices, and even coercive treatment. Empowerment, voice, and choice may have been hindered through leaders' statements such as "that's just Larry" in response to concerns being voiced about his behavior.

Jesus proclaimed that all power is given to Him. This means that the power held by leadership in the Church is power that they are stewarding, power that is rightly God's. As such, those with power must ask how Jesus used power. Again and again, Jesus used His power to uplift the hurting, protect the vulnerable, and strengthen the weak. Rather than grasping His power, He was willing to set it aside to save us. Leaders in the Church must be willing to follow this example.

- Collaborate with the reporting individuals on communication and logistics related to the report.
- Study Matthew 4, focusing on the proper use of power and the dangers of its misuse.
- Invite the inclusion of adult survivors in care teams, safeguarding teams, and planning teams.

### **Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues**

A history of sexual offenses within any organization or community can create an environment where long-lasting harm permeates, eroding trust and safety for individuals involved. According to SAMHSA's sixth principle of trauma-informed practice—Cultural, Historical, and Gender Factors—the historical context of trauma significantly impacts how survivors and witnesses perceive safety and trust. When past allegations of sexual misconduct go unresolved or are inadequately addressed, it deepens feelings of

vulnerability and mistrust. In this case, many individuals elected not to participate in this investigation, citing a fear of retraumatization and high level of mistrust resulting from alleged past incidents of misconduct or abuse within the broader CLCC community, which further highlights the long-lasting damage these allegations have caused.

Multiple witnesses brought up other individuals formerly associated with CLCC that either committed or were accused of committing sexual offenses. CLCC should consider the applicability of recommendations included in this report for individuals who have been convicted of sexual offenses, including a former CLCC member, referenced earlier in this report, who was recently convicted and sentenced for sexual abuse of a minor, and a former member of CLCC who was accused of masturbating while on the phone with a minor.<sup>203</sup> While not suspects of GRACE's investigation, GRACE recommends that CLCC explore and consider independent investigation of allegations against a former CLCC leader who was accused of having sexual contact with a youth group member,<sup>204</sup> allegations against a former CLCC leader who was accused of regularly having "an erection" during class with minor students,<sup>205</sup> and allegations of abuse against another former CLCC leader (details pertaining to the allegations are unknown).<sup>206</sup> It is possible, in each of these cases, that there are other survivors of abuse by these individuals that are currently or formerly involved in ministries at CLCC. While not included within this report, the names of these accused individuals will be provided to CLCC's liaison to GRACE upon release of the final report. Where there may be historical events that have caused harm, there are additional challenges for leaders to navigate when responding to allegations of abuse. This highlights the importance of acknowledging historical events and the effect on community trust when responding to allegations of abuse.

Actively overcoming harmful cultural patterns and providing equitable access to responsive services is critical in addressing the embedded challenges at CLCC. This includes implementing policies, protocols, and processes that address the needs of individuals served and acknowledge and respond to historical trauma. 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

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<sup>203</sup> W28 Tr. at 9-10 (W28 reported being called by the convicted sex offender on the phone as a minor, and stated he was moaning and breathing heavily while asking the witness questions about her age and her parent's location).

<sup>204</sup> W26 Tr. at 17 ("He wasn't fired, he wasn't disciplined or reprimanded. He left and he started a new church in [another state]"); *Also see* W21 Tr. at 21. ("I know that it was [...] completely abusive. This girl was so young and a friend of mine[...] He moved to [another state] after that and is still in ministry in [another state].") The preceding statements are contested by CLCC, who attested to the former leader being absolved of his role, the sexual activity being consensual, that the leader repented publicly for his behavior, and did not continue on to pastor another church. In consideration of this allegation, it may be helpful to review resources on clergy sexual abuse, such as the GRACE Live Conversation pertaining to clergy sexual abuse of an adult, located here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KhXjipWj5sM>.

<sup>205</sup> W30 Tr. at 9 ("The gym teacher [...] would wear tight sweatpants[...] and] would always have [...] an erection.")

<sup>206</sup> W28 Tr. at 9 ("There were allegations of abuse against [name redacted], and then he was moved and started another church.")

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. 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. These themes can be traced throughout the Scriptures.<sup>207</sup> CLCC should:

- Publicly apologize for an overemphasis on female bodies, and reinforcing messages about modesty and female students' responsibility for the temptation of others.
- Publicly apologize for the use of dresscode checks and fitness exams in sexual abuse.

GRACE also recommends that CLCC have difficult conversations that may necessitate even deeper changes. As reflected in this summary, there are credible allegations of sexual and physical misconduct, committed by Larry Cleek, many of which occurred in the school itself. These were not isolated instances and they have impacted the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the victims of these offenses. For some of these victims, it is triggering to drive by the building. To this end, GRACE recommends CLCC:

- Explore pragmatic actions towards a radical culture shift around the stronghold of abuse by Larry Cleek. CLCC should consider every possible avenue for transformation, including the facility itself. It may also be appropriate to create a memorial for everyone who was abused at CLCC as a reminder that Godly institutions and leaders can stray far away from Christ's command to care for the "least of these."

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<sup>207</sup> Leviticus 19:33-34 instructed God's people to treat the sojourner equally. Jesus was the fulfillment of care for the historically oppressed (Luke 4:18-21). The apostle Paul sought to be all things to all people (1 Corinthians 9:22). In Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free man, male nor female; for we are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

## Appendix A

Dear Mr. Cleek,

I'm speaking out now because this is the first time in my life that I've been strong enough. I count myself lucky that it only took me 17 years to find my voice. Some survivors never find their voices.

Believe it or not, I don't want to harm, let alone destroy anyone.

My first motivation in filing this police report was to protect children from the far-reaching devastation of sexual abuse. My goal is to stop you from creating more victims and to open the eyes of parents whose children are at risk of being harmed or have already been harmed.

I did this for the little girl who is currently your favorite. So she can have something I never got... validation that what is happening to her is not okay and assurance that there are grownups out there who will fight for her because she matters.

My second motivation was to give any adult survivors who may be suffering in silence an opportunity to find their voices and perhaps begin their healing knowing they are not alone.

Lest I sound more altruistic than I really am, there is also something I want for myself. No, it's not money or attention (who would want attention for this?) and it's definitely not revenge. More than anything, I want acknowledgement and vindication. Judith Herman says this is what all survivors want.

*"I daresay every survivor with whom I have ever worked, has wished above all for acknowledgment and vindication. Survivors want the truth to be recognized and the crime to be denounced by those in their communities who matter to them."*

I'm not interested in inflicting pain. I don't believe that justice is about making evildoers suffer for the wrongs they've committed.

I believe justice is about repairing the damage, setting things in order and making things right. This kind of justice undoubtedly involves suffering but it is the soul-purifying suffering of working diligently to undo the evil you've perpetrated.

Experts say pedophiles can't be cured. Perhaps that's because most of them are cowards. I believe that any pedophile who told the truth without minimization, willingly bore his shame, honestly looked at the devastation he's caused, and wrestled with what it would take to heal the massive wounds, would be transformed. Perhaps no pedophile has ever done this. It would be hell and it would save them.



If you are unwilling to do this work of justice, then setting things in order and undoing the evil is going to involve restraining you, the evildoer. I see jail, not primarily as a punishment, but as a way of ensuring you will never harm another child again. I honestly wouldn't care if you were restrained in a luxury resort in the Bahamas with other sex offenders. I'm not interested in causing pain for the sake of pain. I'm interested in stopping the sexual abuse of children and sending a message to victims that their wounds matter. They matter.

It's not too late for you to help me do this. The greatest gift you could give your victims is this: A full confession of every crime and sexual violation you've ever committed with the names of each of your victims. A complete list of every person you have ever violated. Even if they are no longer living. In writing. Without excuses. Without minimization. I'm asking you to consider this. It would change everything.

Isn't there a part of you that wants to be free? Aren't you exhausted from the deception? This is your chance to begin your real life. This is your opportunity to let go of the lies and start building something lasting on a foundation of truth.

Isn't it amazing that what's best for all of us is also what's best for you?

Please think about this carefully. It's never too late to do the right thing. The respect you get for doing the right thing is real. The respect you get for lying isn't.

Sincerely,

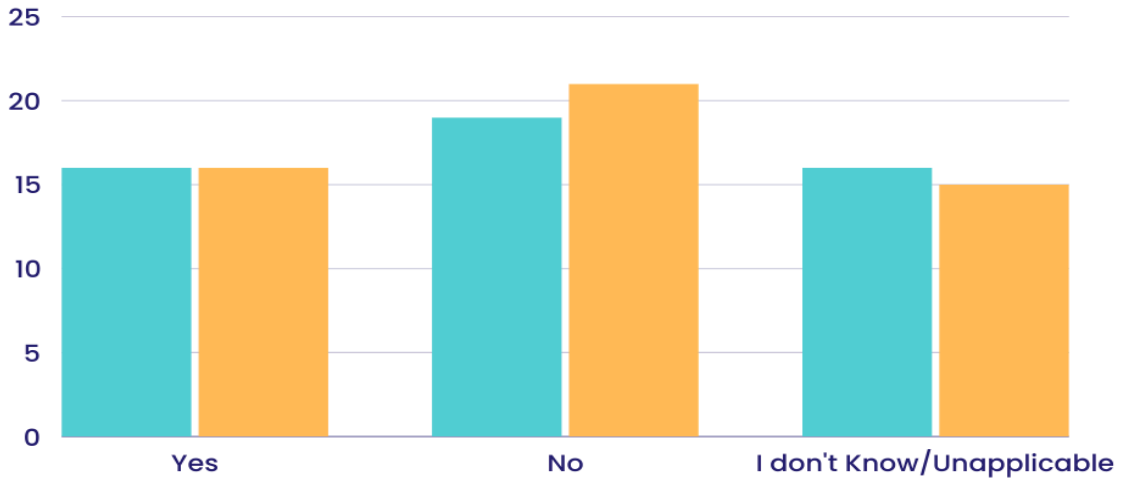
[RV1]

Appendix B

**PERTAINING TO COVENANT LOVE COMMUNITY SCHOOL (CLOSED JUNE 2023)**

**FOSTER A CULTURE THAT  
 ENCOURAGED AND EQUIPPED  
 REPORTS OF SAFETY CONCERNS**

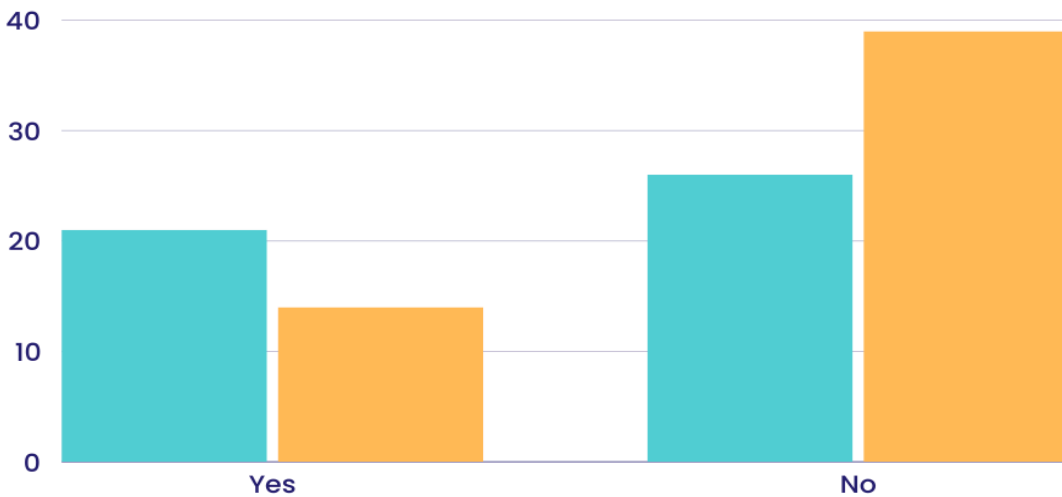
**AWARENESS OF POLICIES THAT  
 ADDRESS MISCONDUCT**



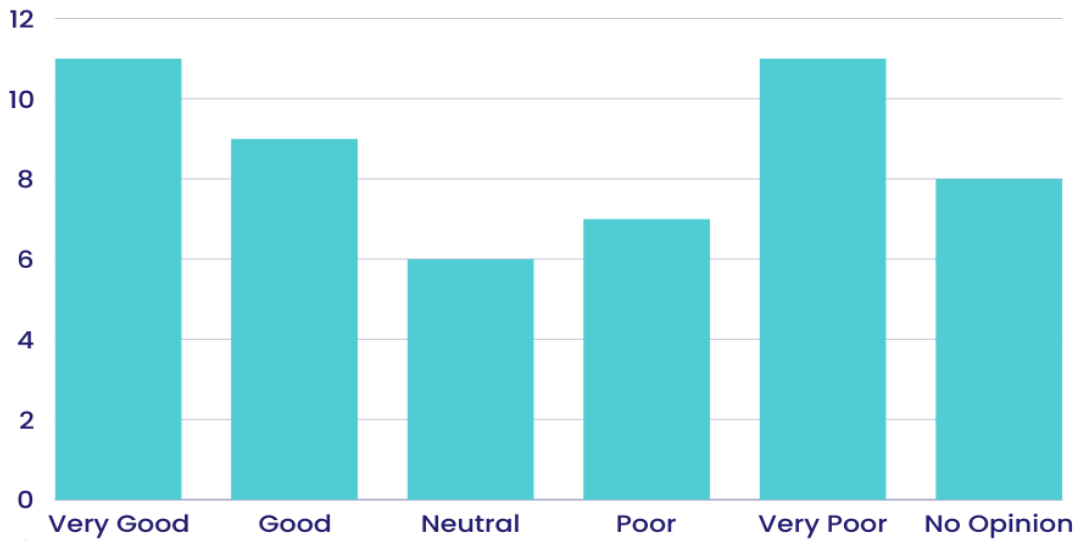
**PERTAINING TO COVENANT LOVE COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**FOSTER A CULTURE THAT  
 ENCOURAGED AND EQUIPPED  
 REPORTS OF SAFETY CONCERNS**

**AWARENESS OF POLICIES THAT  
 ADDRESS MISCONDUCT**



**GENERAL DESCRIPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE AT COVENANT LOVE COMMUNITY PERTAINING TO CREATING A CLIMATE OF TRUST AND TRANSPARENCY.**



**DESCRIPTIONS OF CONFIDENCE LEVEL THAT COVENANT LOVE COMMUNITY CHURCH WILL HANDLE REPORTS OF BEHAVIORAL AND SEXUAL MISCONDUCT APPROPRIATELY (I.E., EXPEDITIOUSLY, FAIRLY, AND TRANSPARENTLY) WHEN IT IS REPORTED.**

