



**FIVE YEARS OF *SAFECHURCH*:
PROGRESS AND PROMISE IN CHANGING
CULTURE TO END CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE**

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**Report prepared for Samaritan *SafeChurch* by:
Hilary Binder-Aviles, Evaluation Consultant**



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Table of Contents

	Page Number
About the Convening	1
Why SafeChurch?	2
Reflection by Linda Crockett Director, Samaritan SafeChurch/SafePlaces	
Overview of SafeChurch	4
The Impact of SafeChurch: Culture Change	4
Increasing Awareness and More Open Discussion of CSA	6
Creating Environments where Adult Survivors Feel Safe and Supported	8
Survivor Wisdom	11
Creating Safe Environments for Children and Youth	12
Making Infrastructure Changes	15
Deepening Learning and Sharing Learning with Others	17
The Promise of SafeChurch: The Power of Faith Communities	18
Closing Reflection: What's Next for SafeChurch?	19
Appendices	21

Samaritan SafeChurch

Report to Congregations on April 2016 Convening

About the Convening

On April 9, 2016 Samaritan SafeChurch held the first regional convening of leaders from churches that have engaged in the SafeChurch process since it began in 2011. Over 70 people attended, representing 32 churches and 11 denominations.

The purposes of the Convening were to:

- 1) Determine how culture has shifted and continues to shift in those congregations that have completed the process by asking questions and by gathering stories to weave into a bigger narrative;
- 2) Draw representatives from 30-50 Safe Churches together to share stories of inspiration, hope, and challenge in order to spark new ideas, energize people;
- 3) Learn what resources churches need to move forward in this work; and
- 4) Create a space where relationships form across congregations to lay the ground for more intentional regional movement building.

It was a high energy, inspiring day of sharing stories of success, challenges, and learning. Planning for the event began in late 2015 with an extended design team that included SafeChurch staff as well as Hilary Binder-Aviles (Washington DC) as cultural shift evaluator, and Leah Silverman (Pittsburgh PA) as graphic recorder. Convening day included topical table discussions followed by full group sharing, with Leah sketching the story as it emerged. Participants were encouraged to write down “nuggets of wisdom” they heard, as well as make notes on paper table covers, which were periodically gathered as documentation to supplement the graphic recording and Hilary’s observations.

Survivors and special guests were designated as “butterflies” and were free to flit from table to table as they chose. Linda Crockett interviewed two survivors on stage with questions designed for them to share perspectives on what a congregational environment of safety and respect looks like to a survivor.

The Convening closed with a discussion about building a faith-based stream to flow into the river of the larger national social movement to end child sexual abuse.

This report, which is based on data gathered from participants before, at, and after the Convening, intends to: *(See Appendix A: About Pre-Convening Survey Respondents)*

- Gather examples of progress, nuggets of learning, and promising practices we’ve learned along the way (see participant comments in shaded text boxes);
- Reflect on where we are now, where we want to be, and the challenges to get there;
- Celebrate what we’ve accomplished; and
- Energize ourselves for the work ahead.

We hope you enjoy reading it, find your own experience reflected, and gain new ideas and inspiration for your work.



Why SafeChurch?

Reflection by Linda Crockett, Director, Samaritan SafeChurch/SafePlaces

Ending child sexual abuse (CSA) requires a systematic approach to shifting culture, while simultaneously creating policies and practices to sustain a positive shift. It means moving beyond education, awareness raising, and citing statistics that document the prevalence and impact on survivors, offenders, families and communities, and engaging in a social movement. However, the values, aspirations, challenges and history of a specific community or people must be incorporated into the work. Too often, those from outside the community or culture of people they are trying to change attempt to impose a new set of norms. These changes don't "stick."

The Christian church as an institution has historically privileged protection/inclusion of offenders and the comfort of bystanders, using doctrines of "forgiveness" over healing and justice for survivors and protection of children. Policies are often written by denominations or insurance companies and oriented to liability avoidance. Church culture has often discouraged survivors from seeking healing or sharing stories, or having open conversations about sexual abuse. Yet 95% of offenders describe themselves as "extremely religious" in studies, and they gravitate toward congregations, often being "forgiven" by church leaders that try to protect offenders from consequences of their actions.

As a result, children are unprotected and survivors suffer in silence. Survivors often feel ashamed of the abuse and even alienated from God because they cannot forgive their offender, who may retain a leadership position in the church or community. The change in church culture we need can only be effected from within, and by those with a deep love for God's people.

I joined the staff at Samaritan Counseling Center in 2003, making a mid-life career change after 23 years in corporate finance. In the late 1980s, I had done extensive volunteer work with churches in El Salvador during the civil war and had been transformed by the faith and courage of oppressed people who worked for justice and peace at great risk to themselves. Mentored by Dr. James W. Hanna, Samaritan's founder and a Presbyterian minister, with whom I shared the vision of the church as a true sanctuary and place of safety, I became known for expertise in congregational consulting after CSA had occurred. Often, the alleged offender was a trusted church member or leader. These dynamics can literally tear a church apart, and some churches split in the wake. Nearly all these churches had "boilerplate" policies they had gotten from their insurance company or denomination, and some training; it was not enough.

In 2009, I began work on what would become our biggest case and span two years. Multiple adult victims who had been abused as children, as well as two offenders including a trusted leader, were identified within a congregation I was called to help. The ripple effects created enormous losses for the church and community. The survivors I interviewed echoed what nearly all survivors in other cases I worked on wanted from their church: ensure this never happens again; seek out other survivors and pay for counseling for anyone who desired it; and ask the offenders to publically confess, repent, and make whatever restitution was possible for the many losses victims had suffered as a result of the abuse.

After this case, I felt urgently called to shift our focus to prevention. I knew it was not God's will that one in four girls and one in six boys were molested. In 2011, we received a grant from the Ms. Foundation for Women to design what would become SafeChurch and launch our first "Cluster." The process was based on what I had learned as a consultant about the need to involve the whole congregational system, as well as the prophetic fire I had encountered in El Salvador working for justice. SafeChurch became a catalyst for people to step up and protect children inside and outside the church.

In 2013 we developed a facilitator training so other communities could offer SafeChurch. People we encountered from Atlanta to Oregon were ashamed by so many media reports of church failures to protect children from sexual abuse. They were hungry to find a way to take leadership and have the church become known as a place that was safe for children and for survivors. One woman put it well: "When a member sins in this way, it not only damages the reputation of the church, but of the Lord we serve. We must do everything in our power to prevent this." By early 2016, we had trained more than 120 facilitators, as well as establishing SafeChurch "hubs" in western PA and several other states.

For the past six years, I have participated in a cohort of leaders from organizations across the country working to end CSA through building a strong social movement, supported by the Ms. Foundation and more recently, by the Just Beginnings Collaborative. Although we represent some the best programs in the country, we also know that no single approach or program can bring the kind of change we need. For that, a social movement is required. The role of SafeChurch is to build a faith-based stream that will flow into the larger river of movement that is getting stronger each day. Since the source of our stream is the God who makes water flow in the desert, we are fed by an eternal spring that will never run dry.



Overview of SafeChurch

Samaritan Counseling Center has facilitated the one-year SafeChurch program in the Susquehanna Valley area for 50 churches with average worship attendance of more than 11,000 adults, and 7,350 children in care. These 50 churches represent 13 denominations and 5 independent/non-affiliated congregations. Survivors from these congregations have attended one of the *TamarSpeaks!* Retreats.¹

Safe Church is a place to find tools for us to prevent CSA. It's great to have this resource of dedicated trainers and support.

Safe Church provides congregations with best practices to follow and serves as a resource when we have questions or face issues.

SafeChurch is a long and intense process. It can be overwhelming but it brings awareness to the magnitude of the problem.

In addition, Samaritan has trained facilitators from the Lancaster Mennonite Conference (a regional denominational association) and they have facilitated the program in an additional 14 churches in the Susquehanna Valley. There is also a small cluster of 4 churches facilitated by a Lutheran Deacon we trained. Although these churches were not included in the 2016 inaugural convening, we plan to include them next time we convene in 2018.



The Impact of SafeChurch: Culture Change

A primary purpose of the Convening was to reflect on the first five years of SafeChurch and ask: *How are we seeing church culture shift in ways that will move us toward ending CSA?* What we heard through the surveys and at the Convening was powerful.

¹ *TamarSpeaks!* Retreats were designed by SafeChurch to give voice to our sister Tamar through our own experiences and in dialogues with the text.

As a result of participating in SafeChurch, congregations are seeing evidence of culture change in five main areas:

1. Increasing awareness and more open discussion of CSA within congregations (or, “breaking the silence”);
2. Creating environments in which adult survivors feel safe and supported;
3. Creating safe environments for children and youth, and ensuring they have trusted adults to go to;
4. Making infrastructure changes related to policy, practice and facilities; and
5. Developing CSA-related ministries and/or sharing their learning with other churches.

Safe Church takes away the “I don’t know what to do”...It allows us to love our church family and also to hold people accountable... How do we care for both sides of the offense – how to love and accept them but also be realistic and have something in place.

SafeChurch has helped our church prepared to receive new people...it has opened us up to having outsiders coming in and helping them feel comfortable because a policy is in place and practiced.

Through SafeChurch, culture change has taken root. Congregations are affecting change at both the individual and institutional levels. Not only are individual church members changing their own knowledge, perceptions, and behavior, they are building mini-movements within their congregations to create safe and supportive environment for children, youth, and adult survivors. Further, congregations are establishing and owning the policies, practices, and structures needed to ensure that culture change is systemic and sustained.

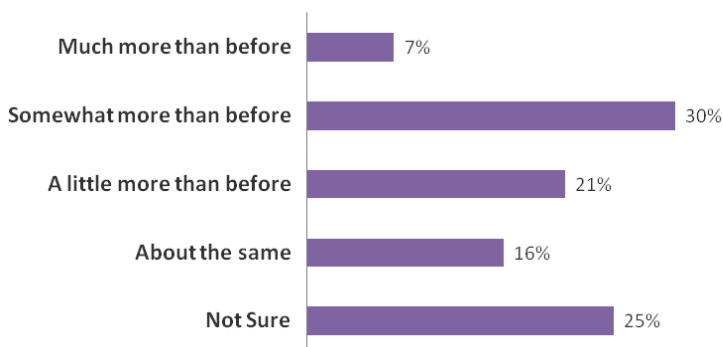
At the same time, the pace and scope of change does vary among churches, suggesting that each church must find its own path and there is no one right model of change. While the majority of survey respondents and convening participants reported observable and measureable changes in all five areas, some have seen a great deal of change and others only *a little*. About 1 out of 4 survey respondents were “not sure” if culture change is underway in their congregation, mainly because it is too early to tell or they are not sure what to look for. Only a small minority reported encountering obstacles – from a lack of commitment or outright resistance among church leadership to apathy among congregation members – that are getting in the way of any progress at all.

All churches are learning that this work is hard and that culture change takes time. They are learning that consistent church leadership is key to leading congregations to keep children safe and create healing space for survivors. While a few are struggling, the large majority believe that their church is on the right path and are hopeful about deepening and sustaining change within their congregations and taking what they have learned beyond church walls into the community.

Below, we briefly describe progress, lessons learned, and challenges for the five main areas of culture change.

1. Increasing Awareness and More Open Discussion of CSA

Progress: A majority of survey respondents (58%) reported that, as a result of participating in SafeChurch, congregation members talk about CSA more than before, with most of these reporting that people talk about it *a little to somewhat* more.



In both the survey and at the convening, congregation members shared many examples of what this culture change looks like in practice. People *talk more about CSA and the importance of SafeChurch*:

- At committee meetings and/or meetings to plan activities, especially planning for youth retreats and events, children's ministry events, etc. For example, "we now talk about the need to have appropriate trained leadership in the right percentages of adults to children."
- When the congregation holds training for adults, in adult Sunday school, and in talking about the process of being an approved adult/mandated reporter.
- When the congregation rotates in the *Circle of Grace* or *Our Whole Lives* curricula, which pull teachers, children/youth and parents into conversation.
- When pastors "speak across the pulpit" and mention church's responsibility to protect children or walk with survivors in their sermons.

It's a more open discussion now...It's more often mentioned to the congregation how we are a Safe Environment for all.

I believe that people feel more comfortable talking child sexual abuse and prevention, as well as offenders. Because we have an offender actively attending, it has made people much more aware of this situation.

Further, because people are more aware, not only are they talking about CSA more, but information about CSA is informing behavior and decisions. *See further discussion and examples under #4, Infrastructure, Policy and Practice Changes.*

Lessons Learned About What It Takes: In both the survey and at the convening, people emphasized the importance of education in changing the culture of silence. Education increases awareness and when people “become more aware of the situations that may be faced by our children,” then they take the need to protect children “more seriously” and are “more willing to act.” Further, SafeChurch provides “a known route to follow” and people are more willing to discuss an issue when they can envision a course of action to address it (i.e., “I don’t know what to do” so therefore why talk about it is no longer true).

We need to be relentless in educating people and helping people understand why this is so important.

I wish all members could go through the training just to become educated.

Congregations have also learned that education must be continuous – without ongoing education, the SafeChurch message “withers.” Lastly, they have learned that when church leadership is engaged in raising awareness – for example, the pastor talks about it in sermons – the messages hold greater power.

Challenges: All participants agree that making the church a safe space for talking about CSA – naming it and recognizing that it may exist within the congregation – is hard work that takes time.

A small number of participants have found that lack of buy-in and ownership among church leaders – and their reluctance to admit CSA is a problem within the church family – makes it hard to start the conversation. Continued discomfort with the topic makes it hard to maintain ongoing communication on the topic. Some also report that “CSA fatigue” results in dwindling interest after initial conversations. Lastly, our survey data indicated that about a third of participating churches had a pastoral leadership change since completing the one year SafeChurch program. These changes can hinder progress as new leadership may come in with little awareness or buy-in, or may have different priorities.

Our pastors and Christian Education Committee have not bought into SafeChurch. They seem to think it's someone else's job to promote the program as they have more important things to do.

People still don't like to hear about the topic and there is never enough talk about healing for survivors. We approach God very differently than someone who has not been abused.

It seems that folks are more aware, but there is still discomfort with the discussion of sexual abuse.

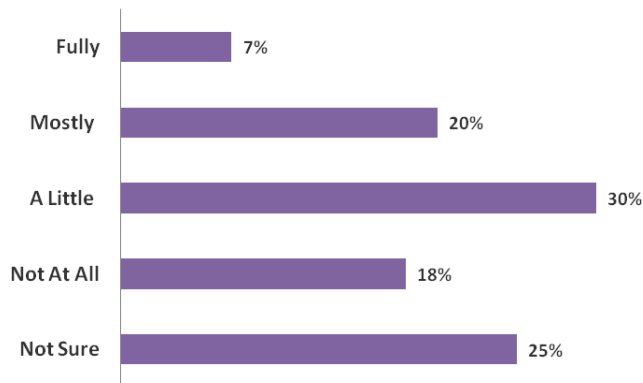
Participants also brainstormed about ways to meet these challenges, and what kind of resources would be helpful after the SafeChurch process is completed in a congregation. (See Appendix B)



2. Creating Environments where Adult Survivors Feel Safe and Supported

At the SafeChurch Convening, participants put forth a powerful vision of what it would look like for congregations to truly honor, give voice to, and support survivors and their families. They envision the church as *a safe place to share and disclose to the congregation, without being judged and without judgment but with accountability for the perpetrator*. They envision church leadership and members *holding survivors in their hearts, being their prophets, and walking with them in love with the ultimate goal of healing*. They envision the church as a space where *survivors want to share and can contribute their wisdom*.

Progress: A majority of survey respondents (57%) reported that, as a result of participating in SafeChurch, their church has made progress in developing an environment where adult survivors of CSA have the safety and support they need to tell their stories/ feel empowered to lead. However, 30% said only *a little* and a quarter were not sure.



SafeChurch is designed with a primary focus on protecting children and preventing abuse. It engages survivors in various ways, but it was clear at the Convening that the program raises the expectations for survivors and they want more attention paid to developing safer and more sensitive environments for them as well.

In both the survey and at the convening, congregation members shared examples of how *we know that survivors feel safe and supported*. When survivors:

- Seek and receive support from pastoral staff.
- Share their stories with members of the congregation in a Sunday morning service or a small group setting.
- Step forward to minister to children and/or adults in their churches.
- Have become leaders in SafeChurch, which “has been a huge piece of their healing/journey.”

Congregations that have seen this type of culture shift – with SafeChurch truly coming alive for adult survivors – have been intentional about their support for adult survivors. They are, for example, offering specific programs such as *In the Wildflowers*² support groups and explicitly talking about healing for survivors.

Protecting the innocence of children is not enough. One of the values of Safe Church is: How do we honor and give voice to survivors in our congregation? If Pastor says, “We have no survivors,” you just know that is a place where survivors don’t feel comfortable talking about their experience.

Lessons Learned About What It Takes: While congregations report they still have a long way to go in creating an environment where adult survivors feel safe and supported, they are learning a tremendous amount about what it takes to create that environment, including:

- **Support for survivors needs to be long term.** The devastating effects of CSA are long term and we must be ready to accompany them over the long term.
- **What leadership says and does matters.** Pastors need to do the right thing, which is the hard thing. “Pastors did a sermon directly from SafeChurch and incorporated it into the sermon and named stats during dv awareness month. It was really hard. You could see people squirm but it helped open up space and allowed survivors to feel this is a safe space.”
- **Making SafeChurch visible matters.** The more visible SafeChurch is to the congregation (for example, in announcements and the newsletter, through advertising *TamarSpeaks!*), the more this signals to survivors that environment is safe.
- **Knowing what not to do when supporting survivors is just as important as knowing what to do.** To that end, we need to have an understanding of trauma and how it effects the experiences of survivors. We need to listen and support without judgment.

Because SafeChurch is visible to our congregation through normal announcements regarding volunteer training and adaptations to the facility, members sense an openness regarding CSA as well as adults who have experienced issues traditionally not shared in public such as emotional well being, etc.

² *In the WildFlowers* is a curriculum targeted to those who wish to facilitate a group of people who have experienced the pain of childhood sexual abuse.

- **Survivors have wisdom to share.** When survivors become leaders in SafeChurch and share their wisdom, that experience contributes to their healing/journey and improves our practice.

In the post-convening survey, about half of the survey respondents reported that one of the “gold nuggets” they are bringing back to their congregation is the importance of creating a safe space for and ministering to adult survivors. Several made contacts at the Convening – including with the two survivors who spoke – to support their efforts back home.

Challenges: Many survey respondents and convening participants acknowledged that their church has simply not paid as much attention to adult survivors as they have to children. These churches want to do more to create safe space for adult survivors – such as offering support groups or other programs – and need more guidance around what to do and how to do it. Several noted that their churches have support groups for other areas (e.g., substance abuse) so surely they can “figure something out” for survivors. They also recognize that even by starting with “speaking from the pulpit” and advertising Tamar Speaks, the church can begin to create a welcoming environment for survivors.

Some of us don't take this on (e.g. support groups) because we don't feel like we can run it.... At the very least can we be a provider of resources, at least say we don't have anything set up now but here are some places you can go and some people you can talk to...How does this work, what does it look like and what can you do if don't you feel you can facilitate this yourself?

A few survey respondents and convening participants identified church leadership and/or doctrine as obstacles to creating safe space for adult survivors. Pastoral forgiveness based on an offender's confession and remorse rather than insistence on accepting full responsibility and engaging in the hard work of repentance can be very hurtful to survivors, especially if they are then pressured to “also forgive.” And many pastors underestimate the impact including a known sexual offender in the congregation will have on many adult survivors, even when inclusion comes with strict boundaries. When church leaders either do not know how to relate to or build trust with survivors, or, worse yet, have no interest in doing so, it is difficult to shift the culture.

Survivor Wisdom

Reeve Platt and Jodi Fike, courageous women of faith and the Convening's survivor speakers, gave powerful examples of experiences that illustrated the importance of community, support, leadership and space for healing.



"Someone who Linda introduced me to was willing to sit with me in my pain. Although she is a survivor, she never presumed what I felt like. She helped to carry my pain when it felt too heavy. She did not quote scriptures, she just listened and cried with me and through her tears, I saw Jesus cry. Another example occurred today when some of the people at my table chose the topic of Adult Survivors to discuss. I was so honored and felt embraced by these people who genuinely wanted to know how to support survivors better. One woman shared about how her pastor had a sermon about abuse and prayed for survivors. My spirit yearns for experiences like this. If the Church is the body of Jesus, I need safe and open arms."

Jodi Fike

"The SafeChurch TamarSpeaks! Retreat was intense but so life affirming...moving through grieving to acceptance. It was a space of deep, enriched healing. I have also done the SafeChurch facilitator training. That was the most important and most intense training I've ever done. I've also been part of SafeChurch brainstorming meetings and watching Linda in action is like watching Mother Theresa. I think I can speak for every survivor when I say that. Rachel Naomi Remen talks about how much recent medical research suggests that isolation make us vulnerable and community heals."

Reeve Platt



3. Creating Safe Environments for Children and Youth

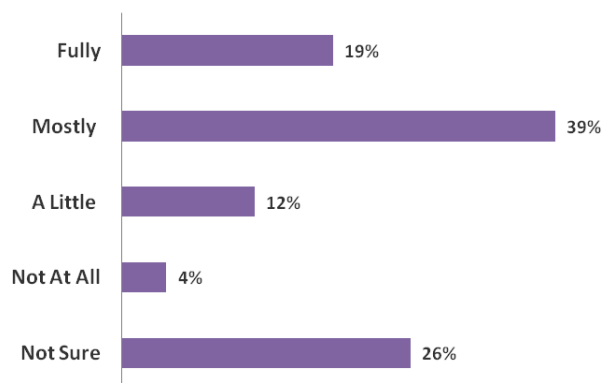
In talking about what they have learned about ways to keep children safe, survey respondents and convening participants also spoke powerfully about why it is so important for congregations to honor their covenants with children: When a child is sexually abused by someone they know, that breach of trust impacts all aspects of their life. When a child discloses and is not honored, they will feel alone and suffer. Examples of theological framing statement sections that most resonated for participants included:

“The promise that we make during baptism to protect God's gift to us (our children).”

“Remembering our baptismal promises and responsibilities toward the children and other vulnerable people entrusted to our care.”

“Our first paragraph gives biblical basis for our policy and provides the foundation for the protection of children, our most precious resource.”

Progress: A majority of survey respondents (70%) reported that, as a result of participating in SafeChurch, their church has made progress in developing an environment where children and youth have safe and trusted adults they can go to with questions about problematic sexual behavior by an adult or older child. Further, most of these reported that they have *mostly* to *fully* created this environment.



Congregations report the following as ways in which they are seeing progress in creating an environment of trust:

- Teachers and children and youth workers/volunteers “get it,” have been trained, and are effectively building open trusting relationships with children and youth.
- Fellowship and other activities are building open communication and trusting relationships between youth and adults in the larger congregation.
- There is a consistent group of youth leaders who have been trained and who children know and trust to go to.
- Parents hear children talking about CSA in the terms they are learning, such as their “Circle of Grace.”
- Teens are talking about their own safety and asking questions following the educational session.
- Children and youth have expressed concerns, and in a few instances, disclosed abuse as a result of having a trusted adult.

Our teachers are open and honest with our kids and create a feeling of welcome and love.

The problem of sexual abuse has been made known to our congregation. I think our teachers are realizing the importance of being available to the children and open to noticing changes in child behavior that might point to abuse.

Our ongoing awareness about the grooming process and need to protect our children is making a difference in our churches. Disasters have been averted and caution is now being exercised due to the education you are giving us. We are alert and empowered! Thank you!

Lessons Learned About What It Takes: SafeChurch congregations have learned that education is at the core of keeping all children safe. Congregations need to educate all members of the congregations and especially those volunteering with children to understand the steps to take to prevent CSA and what to do if abuse is divulged. Congregations also need to educate children to “honor themselves and others” by setting boundaries and knowing what to report.

Congregations are also paying closer attention to building stronger communication and trust between adults and children/youth. As one noted, “We have really been working on bridging the gap between our children and youth and the older members of our congregation. This has done wonders for building and strengthening trusted relationships between our adults and children.

Safety and education go hand in hand. We must educate ourselves that the risk of child abuse is everywhere, including in church. By educating ourselves, our youth, and our children, we can work towards safety, including making a safe space for worship.

Prevention happens though education and love and love happens when adults honor our covenant with children at baptism or child dedication.

We are learning the importance of building proper rapport between our teaching staff and our children so that if any type of abuse was happening, it would be made known by our kids.

Congregations especially appreciate the *Circle of Grace* curriculum³, which they find “opens the door” to conversations and teaches safe adults to be there for children and helps children visualize the possibility of approaching a safe adult if they need their support. As several noted, “we need to keep importance of the program and the *Circle of Grace* language in front of the teachers and the children.”

Challenges: While most congregations have made positive strides in shifting culture to keep children safe, congregations also identified continued challenges to fully changing culture in this area. These include:

- **Stigma/taboo:** Some find that continued stigma of the issues prevents more open and deeper conversations about CSA. Some find that a continued “sense of taboo” with church elders in particular makes it difficult to get buy-in to use *Circle of Grace*.
- **Lack of commitment:** Others point to challenges in “keeping the issue alive” and find that once their church completed the process, the mindset became “we’re done and can move on to other matters.” These participants noted a need to find ways to keep church leaders, teachers, and volunteers invested.
- **Leadership transitions:** For some, leadership transitions have hindered progress. In the post-convening survey, one participant noted that “we need to plan for and assist congregations when pastoral transitioning occurs to ensure that Safe Church remains strong in the congregation” as a gold nugget from the Convening.
- **Broader societal trends:** Participants also observed that parents have less support now when raising children and the social environment for children has changed: How do we protect innocence of child when everything about our culture is sexually explicit? We are up against a whole world that does not recognize what we are doing to our children.

It can be difficult to admit that church itself can be place where abuse happens.

We need to teach children to recognize what looks like abuse of authority or abuse of power. We teach the opposite, we are part of the problem.

It's very hard to find the balance between loving and accepting our church family and also being aware and “checking” of people. Safe Church takes away some of the struggle, by having policies in place.

I'm grateful for the ongoing education of our congregation and their receptivity to having the dialogue, attending training & filling out paperwork.

People are more accepting of the need for clearances and training involved with Safe Church practices. I did not see much stress etc. when we discussed that all volunteers are mandated reporters - this would have been very difficult at first.

³ *Circle of Grace* is a safe environment program developed by the Archdiocese of Omaha. The program serves the dual purpose of educating and informing youth about the value of positive relationships with God and others.



4. Making Infrastructure Changes

Policy and Practice Changes

Progress: As a result of participating in SafeChurch, all but a handful of congregations have made progress in strengthening church infrastructure to both support and sustain the shift in church culture.

Congregations have brought their members together to create and put in place policies and practices to keep children and adult survivors safe. Further, staff, volunteers, and members understand why the policies and practices are important and are thoughtful and careful about following them.

These churches are:

- Making their policies visible. For example:
 - 61% have copies or summaries in a visible location
 - 57% periodically review with all staff/volunteers
 - 30% post policy on internal/external website
 - 27% provide summary to prospective members
- Providing regular volunteer training.
- Ensuring that background checks and certifications are up to date.
- Increasing the number of approved adults leading or assisting with children and youth programs.
- Improving communication between staff and Christian education leaders regarding who is approved to work with children and youth.
- Gaining greater clarity around responsibilities for keeping children safe, including authority in dealing with known offenders.

Adult volunteers are now more aware and careful with things like: always having two adults with babies to teens, hidden locations in the church building, who has keys, bathroom breaks for children, not leaving doors open when diapers are changed, and the transporting of children/adolescents on church-related events.

I simply think we are all more careful about our contact with kids and youth, and that this element of life in congregations plays in the background of most discussions.

We are intentional now with how we will respond and handle situations should they arise.

Facility Changes

Progress: As a result of participating in SafeChurch, congregations have also become much more aware of the built environment and are making changes to ensure facilities are safe.

Examples of changes include:

- Installing cameras/monitors in hallways and other strategic locations.
- Locking outside doors in children's wings and locking closets.
- Posting someone at the entrance to sign children in to Sunday morning programs.
- Putting windows in all classroom doors.
- Having ushers check on all Sunday School classes each week.
- Placing greeters/ushers at the doors and in the hallways.

Additional policy, practice, and facility changes people would like to see:

- A good system of accounting for the clearances going forward, as PA now has complex requirements for the type of background checks required, the frequency at which these need to be renewed, and has greatly expanded the pool of people required to get them.
- More discussion about how to welcome and work with offenders, given that they are present in the congregation.
- A yearly evaluation of how the church has worked on the area of safe church.

Challenges: Again, while the pace of infrastructure change has varied among churches, only a handful of churches identified obstacles to making any infrastructure changes. Again, the buy in and commitment of leadership are key.

The fear of and resistance to change can be real. It can lead to internal conflicts within congregations. For one church participating in the program, that conflict led to the resignation of a pastor whose congregation was not ready for change.

On the other hand, a church that initially experienced resistance to a known offender policy – based on concern about the work and responsibility involved in supervision – turned that moment into a transformative one. An influential church member who opposed the policy approached the parents of a youth who had offended, seeking their support. The parents surprised him by saying that they were so thankful that church had this policy because “It allows us to stay in the church and keep our child in the church and safe from offending.” After this conversation, the member's views were changed.

People are tired of hearing me talk about SafeChurch. I would like to see our church leadership realize the need and make implementation a priority.

We have been through some very challenging discussions but I think our church has grown and become stronger and more of a "safe sanctuary" for all - survivors, children and offenders.



5. Deepening Learning and Sharing Learning with Others

Progress: Nearly half of those responding to the survey identified ways in which their church has taken initiative to deepen learning and expand awareness of CSA prevention beyond the elements of the one-year SafeChurch program. These include:

- Providing training to all volunteers and offering training to the congregation.
- Attending other trainings on the topic (for example, a Pastor and members of the SafeChurch Committee attended a FaithTrust Institute training).
- Holding education forums (such as an adult forum with a speaker from a rape crisis center).
- Sponsoring awareness campaigns during child abuse prevention month.
- Staying engaged with their cluster, hosting cluster meetings or just meeting one-on-one with other churches from their cluster to share updates and lessons learned.

Our church has undergone a complete cultural shift. Ten years ago, they were still trying to figure out if "grace" meant letting former known offenders work with children.

Now we are one of the leading churches in our denomination/conference on this issue, and I consider it one of the strongest programs in our church.

Several congregations started support groups for survivors and one supported two church members to attend a survivors retreat at Black Rock Retreat Center.

Close to 15 churches have taken their learning beyond the walls of their own church to educate others. These churches have:

- Shared information and learnings with other congregations.
- Provided SafeChurch training for other churches in our synod.
- Presented SafeChurch work and policies at local conference gatherings and association meetings.
- Communicated with District staff regarding policies to increase understanding of the new child safety laws in PA.

Our church is getting known as a Safe Church and people outside church in community approaching her church because they see it as a resource.

We shared newsletter articles and made a presentation on Safe Church policies at the York Association's Annual Meeting. Our intent was to encourage those churches without a policy to begin the process to adopt one and help inform them of the new PA laws.

Challenges: About a third of the survey respondents were “not sure” if their church has initiated or participated in CSA prevention- related activities beyond the SafeChurch cluster, with a few of these noting the need for more follow up and better internal communication about SafeChurch-related activities.



The Promise of SafeChurch: The Power of Faith Communities

At the end of the convening, participants reflected on the question: *Do we believe God is calling us to take leadership in stopping child sexual abuse at this moment in history? Is it a Kairos? What is God's message to us?*

Convening participants shared a deep belief that faith communities have a unique responsibility and opportunity to step up, speak out, and lead the way to end child sexual abuse. They expressed deep concern that churches have too often hidden abuse and been at the center of scandals. They agreed that God is calling us to be leaders not just within our churches but within our communities.

Churches in particular:

- **Have a moral obligation to work to end CSA.** The church is entrusted with children's safety and ultimately protecting their relationship with God. If the Church does not act if an offense has happened in the church then that child will have damaged view of Christ and of the world as a safe place.
- **Can and should be places of healing, hope, and forgiveness.** "Jesus asked his father to forgive others when perhaps maybe he could not. What an example for us."
- **Have widespread influence and can impact safe communities.** "We represent real communities of people. If we do our work well, it won't stay within the four walls of the Church. We start within Church and do it there, but when we change Church policy and culture, we are not done. We have to take it out."

We, as churches, should change the culture to take responsibility for CSA... We are "God's hands and feet on earth."...The numbers are real. And it happens here.

"We have not been doing our work correctly....This is a good moment to redeem ourselves and really be the body of Christ."

"Jesus loves the little children and so do we in caring for, protecting, and teaching our children."

As one participant summarized it: *This is our call. This is the face of the movement to welcome the least of these. Children do not have a voice. Abused children are the least of these. What we have to offer the world is that God cares. It is not just some existential thing. We care because God cares and that's different from a reporter that is just following a story and who might want justice. We care because God cares.*



Closing Reflection: What's Next for SafeChurch?

The Convening was exactly what was needed at this juncture in our work, and it was a significant accomplishment both in what we are learning as a result, and in re-energizing people we had not communicated with for a few years. It strengthened the foundation of our local network of participating churches for better mobilization in movement building, as we hope to offer the model we used to facilitators in other communities as their work matures after several years of leading Clusters.

We found that many were longing for more connection with us and other congregations doing this work after the one year program concludes, and we are now designing ways to do that. As a result, we are almost ready to release our inaugural edition of a SafeChurch electronic newsletter to foster connections, provide requested resources and encourage capacity building, and include “action steps” people can take. The newsletter is designed for a distribution platform beyond participating congregations to use in our movement building work.

One learning is that churches want to more visibly identify as part of SafeChurch. Our first steps have been to design a pew insert card that identifies the congregation as participating, and describes their commitment to creating safe environments for children, for adult survivors, and to integrating sexual offenders who agree to transparency and the boundary conditions of the policy. We also created a SafeChurch certificate that can be framed and hung in a prominent location, and are in the process of having a SafeChurch logo designed with the year of congregational cluster completion that churches can use on their websites and in their material.

We look forward to offering our new “Wisdom Circles” for survivors and allies this fall. These are intended to be a safe space **for focused conversations on critical questions about building a faith-based movement to end CSA** that will inform our own work, and also contribute a faith-based perspective to the larger secular social movement.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his April 1967 address “Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence” at Manhattan’s Riverside Church said: *“We are now faced with the fact, my friends, that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late.”*

This urgency was echoed by a Convening participant and we close with her words: *If we don’t raise our voice, who is going to do it? As the people of God, we need to raise our voices. We have the truth. God has placed us with a purpose. Today is the time and the opportunity.*



The wonderful illustrations were created by Leah Silverman, graphic recorder, leah@designbyleah.com. Thanks to Leah for the added dimension her work provided to the Convening day and this report.

APPENDIX A

About the SafeChurch Pre-Convening Survey Respondents

A total of 59 individuals from a total of 32 congregations completed pre-convening surveys.

About the Individuals

Role in Congregation

Volunteers:	70%
Paid Staff:	25%
Pastors:	5%

Role in One-Year SafeChurch Process

Member of SafeChurch Core Team:	70%
Attended Samaritan Staff & Volunteer Training:	56%
Attended a retreat for Adult Survivors of CSA:	30%
Teach Circle of Grace:	27%

Current Involvement in SafeChurch

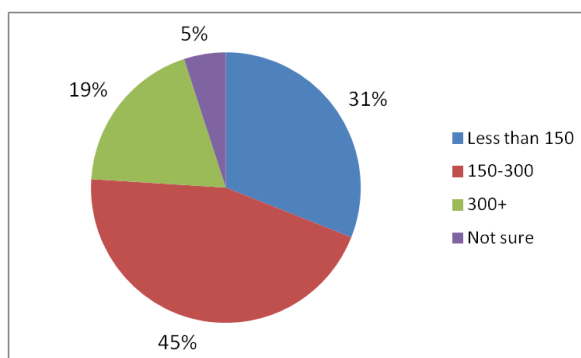
Mandated Reporter:	66%
Serve on Child Protection Committee:	62%
Work with Children and Youth:	58%
Provide Adult Education on CSA Prevention:	40%
Administer PA Mandated Reporting Compliance:	18%
Ministry with Adult Survivors/Families:	7%
Ministry with Offenders/Families:	5%

About the Congregations

Had Pastoral Leadership Transition (since completing SafeChurch process)	32%
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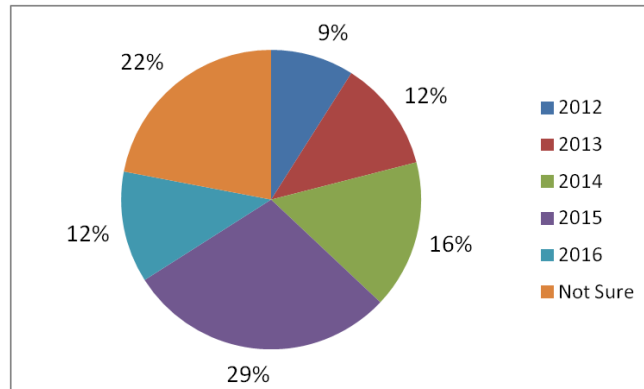
Have Paid Program Staff Beyond the Pastor (involved with aspects of SafeChurch)	52%
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Average Weekly Attendance:

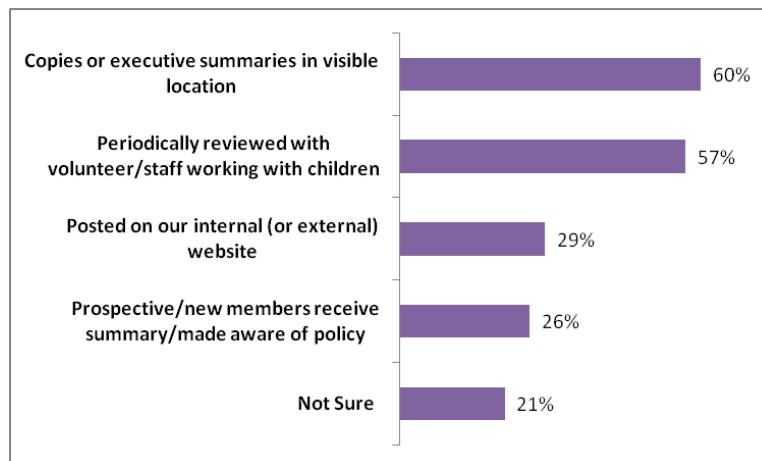


About the Congregations, continued

Year Completed SafeChurch Process:



How Congregations do or will make SafeChurch policy available and accessible to current and prospective members: *(could check more than one response)*



APPENDIX B

Follow Up Resources: Post-Convening Survey

Many ideas for additional resources were expressed at the Convening. Please click the top 5 that would be most helpful to you to advance your SafeChurch program.

