

FAQ

How did we get here? What prompted the Elder Board to revisit this matter?

In late 2020, it was discovered that our Senior Pastor, Jake Goetze, had engaged in sexual contact with our Executive Pastor, Anna Tolf. Upon discovery of the matter, Jake resigned immediately and Arbor sought guidance and counsel from an independent legal firm. This firm conducted an extensive investigation and concluded that what transpired would likely be viewed as consensual in the court of law. This was presented in our original statement to the church in January 2021. Almost immediately, Anna appealed this conclusion as an inaccurate representation of what took place.

At the beginning of 2022, Arbor's leadership began to work toward a better understanding of this situation – one that was Scripture-based and trauma-informed – not merely through a legal lens. Through much prayer, study, and consultation with an outside organization ([GRACE](#), or Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment), we recognized that our original statement fell short of accurately representing what happened to Anna. As a result, we have worked diligently to construct a new statement that provides a more accurate description of what happened to Anna at Arbor.

Was the original report wrong?

The original report was conducted by a *legal firm* that distilled the facts of the investigation through a *legal lens*.

After months of prayer, outside counsel, and learning about the current research regarding the most relevant topics of concern (including, but not limited to, harassment, power imbalance, and clergy sexual abuse) we came to see that the scope of the investigation was limiting. In order to conceptualize what happened, the issue of consent needed to be understood through a biblical lens that is trauma and abuse informed. This was a matter of deep spiritual significance where authority was abused and trust was betrayed. So, while the original report was not wrong, the interpretations offered and conclusions drawn are now seen as deficient.

Is there something uniquely impactful about a faith leader being sexual with someone whom he/she serves or supervises?

Yes. One of the core responsibilities of a faith leader is to “do no harm.” This is also called their “fiduciary duty.” Many professionals have an obligation to act in the best interest of their patients, students, and clients. It is not simply *inappropriate* for them to make romantic or sexual advances towards a person seeking help, it is considered malpractice. It may even lead to their license being revoked. This is equally, if not more, true for clergy who also have theological and spiritual obligations to do all the good they can and do no harm.

A faith leader helps connect the ideas, heart, and words of God to their congregation. Sacred space is violated when trust is broken and a congregant is harmed, often taking years to heal the spiritual wounds left behind. Damaging the spiritual health of a church member is diametrically opposed to the role and calling of pastor.

Why is the word “abuse” being used?

We have chosen to use this word because we believe it most accurately and appropriately describes Jake's behavior toward Anna and the resulting impact his behavior had on Anna.

Jake was Anna's employer/supervisor and pastor/spiritual leader and he abused this position of influence by engaging with her sexually. Sexualized behavior within a relationship like this is always deemed abusive for the following reasons:

- There is no possibility of meaningful consent; in a professional or pastoral relationship, the unequal balance of power precludes meaningful consent to sexual activity (in order for consent to be meaningful, there must be mutuality, choice and equality, as well as the absence of fear).
- The misuse of power and authority; the leader uses their power to meet their own needs rather than to minister to those in their care.
- Vulnerability and trust are leveraged rather than protected by the faith leader.

To understand more about terms like *misconduct* and *abuse*, as well as related issues like power & consent, please see the article [What is Clergy Sexual Misconduct](#).

Are there legal concerns for Arbor with the change of statement?

Given the nature of Jake's behaviors and actions as a leader, boss, and pastor, there are naturally some legal concerns about what transpired. However, the Elder Board believes there is no intent by Anna to pursue legal actions based on her communication with us. Regardless, our highest priority is to bring the truth to light. We believe that with the truth comes freedom. Our hope is in Jesus and we believe that whatever happens next will be within His control.

I am an Arbor Family Member and it's hard for me to understand or agree completely with the leadership at this point in time. Now what do I do?

Come share with us your concerns, questions, or feedback. We will hold space for the Arbor family to listen, process, and pray together. This has been a long journey of study, research, reading, listening and seeking guidance from professionals in this field. We do not feel we are experts, but we are confident in where we have arrived in our learning and language about this incident and topic.

We would also say that we must be a body of believers that may not always agree on all matters. What we do need to agree on is the message of the gospel and what Christ tells us in his Word. And we are certain He tells us to seek out the hurting, the lost, the forsaken, the poor, the sick, and the wounded. It is in this spirit of His Word that we proceeded with Anna and arrived at the statement we shared today. We believe we do not have to fully agree on all aspects or language of the statement, but we can all be unified in the heart and intent of the message - to correct an inaccurate statement and seek forgiveness and healing. And in that spirit we can be the church God has called us to be... a body of broken believers helping others find and follow Jesus and to bring hope and healing to the hurting.

To initiate a conversation with Pastor Ryan, email him at Ryan@arborchurch.com. The staff can be reached at staff@arborchurch.com, and the elder board reached at elders@arborchurch.com. We look forward to connecting with you.

What resources might help us understand more?

Concerning healing the wounds of abuse:

Healing the Wounded Heart Support Group
Alternating Wednesday nights at Arbor @ 7 PM
For more information [click here](#), or email michelledeshazer@msn.com

[Healing the Wounded Heart Online Course](#)
Allender Center

[Resources from GRACE](#) for counselors and counselees.

[Restored Voices Collective](#)
Healing the specific wounds of ACSM/ACSA

Concerning spiritual injury and safeguarding faith environments:

A Church Called Tov, Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing by Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer.

[Recommendations for Churches Dealing with Abuse](#), Diane Langberg

[Resources from GRACE](#) about prevention, healing & accountability in faith environments

Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores, by Diane Langberg

[Understanding sexual abuse by a church leader or caregiver](#), 2nd Edition; Copyright:
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