



## **Ampersands Restorative Justice Recommendations**

Thank you for your interest in restorative justice and accountability. We are reaching out to you because you may have attended a webinar where we presented about what restorative justice (RJ) is and entails, you may have participated in a listening session with us, you may have been part of a restorative conversation with church leaders, or you may be an interested stakeholder. Whatever role you hold, we wanted to update you on where things are right now.

In mid-2024, church leadership reached out to us at Ampersands Restorative Justice to inquire about the possibility of conducting restorative justice work with survivors, survivors' loved ones, and current church leaders. We wrote a letter asking survivors and advocates to reach out to us if they wanted to participate in a restorative conversation with current leaders. We also spent time listening to survivors and advocates who did not want to speak with church leaders.

**For the sake of transparency and to honor the voices of all who spoke with us, we want to share the recommendations that we are making** based on all of the listening that we did and all of the conversations we have had from August through December 2024. It is important for you to know that **these recommendations come directly from those who have been impacted by the abuses at Avalon Community Church (ACC).**

There were several instances where we heard that survivors were not comfortable or ready to reach out to us and, therefore, we spent time talking with their advocates. We heard that survivors do not trust an organization such as ours that was hired by the church to do this work. We want to make clear that the church paid for our time because we never charge survivors. However, the church does not control the process or our recommendations to them.

Accountability requires multiple steps. Some of those steps are outside the scope of restorative justice and we outline them below. Those steps are followed by our RJ recommendations.

We want to note that in a project of this scope in a community with complex needs, survivor needs are going to contradict. For example, we have heard from some survivors and advocates that there is a desire to continue worshiping with Something New Catalina. However, we understand that the majority of survivors and advocates are seeking the complete dissolution of ACC with the funds from that dissolution being directed to meet survivor needs.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Pre-RJ Recommendations**

We recommend that the first next step be a full-scale **fact-finding investigative report that lays out an accurate narrative of all of the sexual harms and related church responses** that went on at ACC over the years. This is beyond the scope of our work and we have



connected church leaders with a law firm that specializes in historical institutional abuses in faith communities.

Simultaneously, we also recommend that church leaders create an **independently operated fund whose monies will be directed to survivors**. These funds can go towards survivors' therapy costs, medical costs, and other care they may seek in relation to the impact of harm on their lives. This too is beyond the scope of our work.

Having a **victim advocate to support victims** and their loved ones who choose to participate in the investigative interviews that will make up the fact-finding report is also recommended. This victim advocate can also help distribute the funds that will be directed to meet survivor needs.

We also recommend that the church **continue to work with Ministry Safe** and that they **create and enhance policies that will protect minors and provide guidance on how to create safety for all**.

### **RJ Recommendations**

**Once those steps are underway, we can begin our restorative work with those who want to participate.** This includes:

1. **Education and Conversations** (Topics include victimization, impacts of trauma and abuse, institutional betrayal and courage, accountability, restorative justice, etc.)
  - a. A tailor-made curriculum for church leaders and potential leaders
  - b. Educational sessions with church members
  - c. Conversations and workshops with community members
  - d. Most importantly, education with primary and secondary victims and survivors
2. **RJ encounters and experiences**
  - a. Small 1:1 or group restorative conversations between survivors and current or former church leaders
  - b. Communal conversation and community building circles
  - c. Healing circles for survivors who are interested
  - d. Large circle processes with survivors and those who harmed them institutionally
3. **Apologies and amends**
  - a. Working with survivors to understand the harms they endured and impacts of those harms
  - b. Working with church and community members to understand how the harm impacted them and their responses to the harms and victims
  - c. Working with church leaders to issue a public apology and amends

We understand that the harms that occurred at ACC extend beyond sexual abuses and beyond individuals. We have come to learn that the entire community, both in the church and beyond,



have been negatively impacted. Therefore, our restorative recommendations involve survivors, advocates and loved ones, community members, and current and potentially former church leaders. This honors the recognition in RJ that harm and repair impact individuals and communities.

In the event that the Pre-RJ and RJ work commence, we would hope to **establish a steering committee of interested stakeholders that include primary or secondary survivors, survivor advocates, and church leaders**. We would check in monthly with this group as we **co-create the processes involved in this restorative project**.

In solidarity,  
Alissa and Guila

Dr. Alissa Ackerman - Co-founder and Owner, Ampersands RJ

Dr. Guila Benchimol - Director of Faith-Based and Communal Accountability, Amersands RJ