



A message from Menlo Church:

As we have been discussing throughout the year, we have been in conversation with survivors of abuse at Menlo Church from several decades ago. As a part of moving forward, we want to honestly look back and hear the stories and needs of those who have experienced abuse, including those who have been harmed as a result of the abuse. We also want to be sensitive and open to reports of more recent abuse and make sure that the process is thoughtful and helpful. The attached letter reflects that heart and the partnership organizations that will be helping through the process and our partners in our commitment to be direct and transparent in any action that is taken. Our prayer is that God would help us to honestly look back at the harm caused as we hold out hope for redemption and growth ahead.

Thank you in advance for your prayer and participation in the process,

Phil EuBank
Lead Pastor

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Introducing A Restorative Justice Response to Sexual Harm at Menlo Church

A message to the Menlo Church community and anyone who has been subject to sexual abuse or harm within the Church - or by the Church as a result - from Dr. Alissa Ackerman and Dr. Guila Benchimol:

In the summer of 2023, due to the long-time persistence of survivor allies and advocates to bring sexual harm to the attention of Menlo Church leaders, survivor allies and Church leaders reached out to us at Ampersands Restorative Justice. They sought to understand what a restorative justice response to survivors, as well as a response to the wider community, might look like. While the process that we are embarking on now was initiated due to historical cases of sexual abuse at Menlo, we are also open and sensitive to reports of abuse that are more current.

Restorative justice is a human-centered approach to repairing and preventing harm, meaning that it recognizes the inherent dignity, value, and worth of all people. According to Howard Zehr, "restorative justice is a process that seeks to involve, to the extent possible, those who have a stake in a specific harm and to collectively identify and



address harms, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible.” It should be survivor-centered, and *this* is our north star.

Restorative justice cannot undo the harm that has been caused, but it can bring about true accountability and repair, which requires more than just apologies and policy changes. It requires listening to the harm and its impacts, taking responsibility for having caused the harm, taking the steps to ensure the harms do not happen again, and offering authentic and active amends.

All these factors have been taken into consideration as we built the following plan for this Menlo Restorative Justice Project:

Plan and Timeline:

Pre-Education

In **January 2024**, we will engage in separate pre-education **and question and answer sessions** with survivors and advocates, as well as Church leaders and Elders, about what restorative justice is and what participating in restorative justice processes entails. We will make this learning available to the wider church community, so that anyone who is interested can have an understanding of the framework, possibilities, and limits of restorative justice.

All are invited to watch our [video about restorative justice](#) and attend a question and answer session, where you will get a chance to learn a bit more about us and this project:

- A **closed session will be held for survivors** once they are in touch with us to set a date that works for them. We will send them a link to that session directly.
- A **closed session for Menlo Church staff and board** will be held on Thursday, January 11 at 4 p.m. PST. Menlo will be sending internal communications about this session.
- An **open session will be held for the Menlo congregation on Sunday, January 21 at 3 p.m. PST.** [Here is a link to register for this open session.](#)



Survivor Listening Sessions:

Following these pre-education and sessions, in **February 2024**, we will invite primary survivors (which are those who directly experienced sexual harm within the Church or by Church leaders or staff) to **private and confidential listening sessions** with the two of us. This will give survivors the opportunity to share their **restorative, justice, and healing needs** that they would like the Church to meet.

We recognize that restorative justice processes are not right for everyone and we fully respect and understand survivors' decision not to participate.

While we will be listening to survivors' needs, we are not taking official reports of sexual abuse. Anyone who wishes to make a report or share an experience of sexual abuse or misconduct, may do so through contacting Zero Abuse Project at menlo@zeroabuseproject.org.)

Publication of Survivor Needs:

A **report** that outlines primary survivors' needs from the Church and Church community will be publicly issued, with recommendations as to how the Church can best meet those needs in survivor-centered and restorative ways. The report will also include what we learn in listening sessions with Church leaders and Elders, where we gauge their understanding of the harms and its impacts on all those affected. After the publication of the report, we will begin Phase II of this project which is where we will work with Menlo to meet survivor needs.

Secondary Survivors and Primary Perpetrators:

We understand that there are many people who are 'secondary survivors', those who did not experience direct sexual harm, but who witnessed it, or were harmed because they were socialized in a Church culture that allowed sexual harm to occur, or were harmed by the poor response. Secondary survivors will have a place in this project in the **spring of 2024**, because restorative justice involves the entire community. However, the first part of this project will focus on direct survivors of sexual harm who are interested in participating in restorative justice processes.

Additionally, at this time, we are not including primary perpetrators in this project. That may change once we learn more about survivors' needs. We will, however, focus on the



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harm caused by the Church's failure to support survivors following their abuse or when they disclosed, and how they can repair that harm.

We look forward to working with those who want to engage in this process and you are welcome to share this communication with others who may want to participate. Please look out for future communications about the question and answer sessions as well as an invitation to survivors to participate.

We believe that this is holy and sacred work and are honored to be on this journey with you,

Alissa Ackerman and Guila Benchimol

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WHO WE ARE

Dr. Alissa R. Ackerman is a “pracademic” and “survivor scholar” who incorporates her academic training, practitioner, and personal experiences related to sexual violence to inform her everyday work. She is the co-founder and owner of Ampersands Restorative Justice and is a professor of Criminal Justice at California State University, Fullerton. She holds a PhD in Criminal Justice from the City University of New York, Graduate Center. Alissa has dedicated her career to understanding everything she can about sexual offending, including why it happens and how to prevent it, the impacts of sexual victimization, and restorative justice options for those impacted by sexual harm. After participating in restorative justice processes as part of her own healing work as a survivor of sexual violence, she began building and facilitating processes for others who sought restorative options as part of their healing. She co-authored *Healing from Sexual Violence: The Case for Vicarious Restorative Justice*, with Dr. Jill Levenson in 2019 and her most recent co-edited volume, *Survivor Criminology: A Radical Act of Hope*, was released in 2022.

Dr. Guila Benchimol is a researcher, educator, consultant, and victim advocate whose work focuses on gender, abuse, and power. Guila holds a PhD in Sociological Criminology from the University of Guelph. Her doctoral dissertation focused on



understanding the processes through which some victims and survivors become anti-sexual violence advocates and activists and the multiple and complex identities they hold. Guila is also a trained restorative and transformative justice facilitator and the Director of Faith-Based and Community Accountability at Ampersands Restorative Justice. She has been invited to address Jewish professionals and clergy across Canada and the US, as well as other faith communities where she educates, trains, and develops and implements policies. Guila is the Senior Advisor on Research and Learning with the SRE Network and was one of the key advisors who guided its launch in early 2018. She also sits on the board of the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) and is a research associate at the Center for the Social and Legal Responses to Violence. Her first 10+ year career as a Jewish educator in and outside of the Orthodox Jewish community informed her understanding of the need to address victimization of all kinds.