

advocates and six family members of survivors. From our document review, we are also aware of other survivors who contacted the EC between January 1, 2000, to June 14, 2021. As was our protocol (see Section II.B, *supra*), we did not affirmatively reach out to those survivors. On occasion throughout this report, we have cited to some of those communications without providing identifying information about the survivor.

While some reports did not fall within the scope of our investigation, either because of time period limitations or because the conduct was not reported to the EC, we acknowledge the value and importance of survivors and others sharing their histories with us. These histories underscore how sexual abuse within churches is a wide-ranging and long-standing problem that has a profound effect on survivors and their loved ones. During our investigation, many of the survivors we spoke with were sexually abused as children, both boys and girls, who were of varying ages at the time of their abuse. We also had adult survivors of clergy sexual abuse come forward to share their histories with us.

In our interviews with survivors, they spoke of the trauma from the initial abuse, but also told us of the debilitating effects that come from the response of the churches and institutions like the SBC that did not believe them, ignored them, mistreated them, and failed to help them.

Faith communities and institutions should be a place of safety and refuge, but oftentimes for survivors of sexual abuse the church has been a negative turning point in their recovery and their faith journey – a setback that can create a turning away from the faith and a stunting of spiritual growth and emotional healing. When a survivor of sexual abuse by a faith-based community member comes forward to leaders, the survivor believes that the leaders are in a position to help them and will be a source of help, spiritual guidance, and emotional healing. However, what they often receive are negative social reactions to disclosures which can result in worsening symptoms of shame, depression, post-traumatic stress syndrome, disengagement from the faith community, and even suicide.