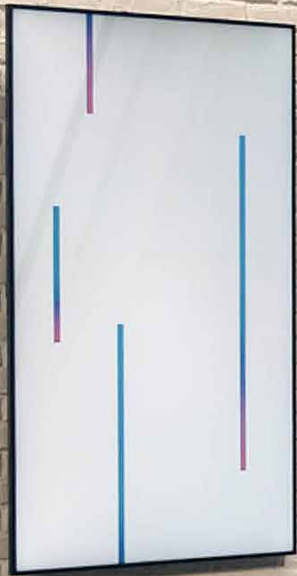


JANUARY 2024

Church Executive

HELPING LEADERS BECOME BETTER STEWARDS.



GREGORY LOVE, KIMBERLEE NORRIS + MinistrySafe:

25 YEARS, 30,000+ CHURCHES, 4 MILLION TRAINED
... and the work continues

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25 YEARS 30,000+ CHURCHES 4 MILLION TRAINED ... and the work continues

For more than 30 years, the husband-and-wife legal team of Gregory Love and Kimberlee Norris have labored to protect children from sexual abuse.

Partners in the law firm of Love & Norris, Gregory and Kimberlee co-founded MinistrySafe to provide a broad spectrum of resources to equip ministries in the prevention of child sexual abuse.

Though the firm provides services to secular organizations through Abuse Prevention Systems, their hearts beat fastest for the Church. Now, 25 years later, MinistrySafe has reached some impressive milestones:

- 30,000+ ministries served
- More than 4,000,000 trained
- 80,000+ trained online monthly, and
- The creation of training in 10 languages used by ministries on six continents.

But they're nowhere near finished. As Kimberlee points out: "Though the milestones are impressive, there is still so much work to be done."

WHO is MinistrySafe?

Love and Norris created MinistrySafe to address the challenge of child sexual abuse in ministry programs. In the early 1990s, the majority of sexual abuse headlines involved the Catholic Church. Protestant ministries were outraged by the allegations but failed to learn important lessons from Catholic allegations: the importance of understanding the *abuser's grooming process*.

In 1992, Norris represented a seminary student who was fired for reporting child sexual abuse at a group home where he was employed. That litigation developed into the representation of 37 of the 49 identified victims. Through litigation, Love and Norris saw the common pattern of the *abuser's grooming process* and *common grooming behaviors* — clearly discernible if staff members were trained to see them.

"Kimberlee is from a ministry family, and we've both been involved in student ministry for years," Gregory says. "We realized our *home church* was just as vulnerable to this risk, which led to the creation of MinistrySafe."

"The grooming process of the abuser is similar, whether it plays out in the context of Church, camp, sports programs or Christian school," Kimberlee adds. "Ministries across the US should have learned from Catholic litigation, but few did."

To Love and Norris, it became clear that education was the key.

"The grooming process is knowable, but it's *not* intuitive," Gregory cautions. "Staff members and volunteers must be trained to understand and recognize abuser characteristics, the grooming process and common grooming behaviors, including peer-to-peer risk. Training provides 'eyes to see' — the starting point for prevention."

But there's good news, according to Kimberlee: "Many aspects of the abuser's grooming process are *predictable*, and if it's predictable, it's *preventable*."

WHY MinistrySafe?

MinistrySafe was created to provide training and resources to prevent child sexual abuse in ministry contexts, built upon a thorough understanding of the abuser's grooming process.

"We have over 30 years of experience in this realm," Gregory explains, "and we provide resources in many child-serving contexts, but our primary mission field is the CHURCH."

Kimberlee agrees: "That's because we are Christ-followers, involved in leadership in our local Church, and invested in ministries across the globe. Unfortunately, the local Church is a place where, all too often, the protective barriers are low."

WHAT is MinistrySafe?

With a keen understanding of how the risk unfolds, Gregory and Kimberlee developed a 5-Part Safety System designed to prevent child sexual abuse in ministry contexts: including churches, camps, schools, missional organizations, and others.

MinistrySafe provides a "one-stop-shop" for training and resources necessary to implement the 5-Part Safety System, including:

- Sexual Abuse Awareness Training
- Skillful Screening Processes and Training
- Appropriate Background Checks
- Tailored Policies and Procedures, and
- Systems for Monitoring and Oversight

Over the past 15 years, the scope of preventative resources has grown exponentially to include more than 20 specialty trainings (see sidebar on the next page), service-specific Awareness Training, sample screening and policy forms, paperless systems for references, and a cutting-edge Background Check system.

Learning early that excellent resources were not enough, MinistrySafe provides a robust online management system to deploy each element of the Safety System, allowing administrators to (1) initiate and refresh training of staff members and volunteers; (2) order Background Checks and view completed reports; (3) initiate reference checks and review results; (4) create electronic archives of Safety System compliance, and more. MinistrySafe's online Control Panel provides administrators with a user-friendly system to make child safety sustainable.

WHERE is MinistrySafe?

Based in Fort Worth, Texas, MinistrySafe resources are used by more than 30,000 ministry organizations throughout North America. MinistrySafe has trained more than 4 million individuals, on 6 continents and in 10 languages.

Member organizations include all denominations, including Baptists, Catholics, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God, Lutherans, African Methodist Episcopalians, Methodists, Bible Churches, Anglicans, Acts 29, and Presbyterians.

In addition to solving the problem at the Church-level, MinistrySafe has a targeted approach to equip future ministry leaders by providing curriculum to seminaries. ➤

MinistrySafe TRAININGS

Sexual Abuse Awareness Training

- Children's Ministry
- Student Ministry
- Special Needs
- Education
- Overnight Camps
- Youth Sports
- Day Care

Parent/Guardian Training

Peer-to-Peer Sexual Abuse Training

Sexual Harassment Training

Skillful Screening Training

Understanding Background Checks

- Common Misconceptions
- Building a Search Package
- Strategies & Best Practices
- How Vendors Cut Corners

MinistrySafe Institute/Seminaries

Creating Policies & Procedures

Reporting Sexual Abuse Training

Child Safety Workshop

Third-Party Facility Use Training

Protecting Vulnerable Adults

Training for Agents/Underwriters

More



Gregory Love is an expert in legal standards of care related to child sexual abuse, working with ministry and secular thought leaders to shape prevention policy and legislation. He provides instruction and continuing education to legal professionals, lawmakers and risk management professionals. With expertise developed over three decades of sexual abuse crisis management, Love co-founded MinistrySafe Institute, which provides comprehensive sexual abuse prevention and response instruction to colleges and seminaries throughout North America. In addition, he serves as Visiting Faculty at Dallas Theological Seminary and guest lectures in graduate-level programs across the country. Love provides live and online instruction to denominations, churches, associations, camps, schools, nonprofits and youth sport organizations. Through the law firm, Love has provided legal representation to dozens of sexual abuse survivors.

Kimberlee D. Norris is a sexual abuse trial attorney; representing victims of abuse and providing crisis management and allegation response counsel to ministries of all sizes. After decades of litigating sexual abuse cases and providing legal counsel to ministries, Love and Norris partnered with Dallas Theological Seminary to create the first seminary course in existence that exclusively addresses the risk of child sexual abuse in ministry contexts. Norris frequently addresses national and regional audiences for organizations such as the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA), Baptist state conventions and hundreds of churches, private schools and camps. Representative consultation clients include the United States Olympic Committee, Awana International, Church of the Nazarene, Austin Stone Community Church (Austin), Prestonwood Baptist Church (Dallas) and Perimeter Church (Atlanta).



Background Checks

MinistrySafe provides a cutting-edge background check service and is unique in *how*.

As Kimberlee explains, “Our philosophy is to identify all records within a search parameter and return all information allowable by law. Most ministries assume this philosophy is embraced by all background check providers,” she says. “But that is *not true*.”

What can be searched and what can be reported differs from state to state. MinistrySafe has created a comprehensive framework of the various scope limitations to ensure that its members receive all available information within their state. Many providers, by contrast, simply create a one-size-fits-all scope that defaults to the most restrictive parameter (California, for example), and applies that limited scope to all ministries in every state — often without the ministry having any idea their searches are being arbitrarily limited when their state law has no such limitation. Why would providers do this? It’s easier and more profitable.

“Because we’re committed to abuse prevention, we’re not interested in ‘cutting the corners’ like most providers,” Gregory says. “We want to get the necessary information into the hands of ministry leaders to ensure unsafe people don’t get access to our vulnerable populations.”

“All ministry leaders are invited to ask the right questions and become better consumers,” Kimberlee adds. “The stakes are too high for ministry leaders to trust a provider and learn in a crisis that their trust was misplaced. Because our mission is to protect children and those who serve them, MinistrySafe provides an excellent background check while helping ministry leaders better understand this resource and create an effective search strategy.”

Ministry Minded


As of January 2024, the MinistrySafe Team is staffed by 37 employees, with an expectation of doubling that number by the end of 2025.

The majority of staff members have worked in ministry positions prior to joining the team. Past employment of other staff members includes work as a Special Needs Coordinator, former worship leaders, children’s and youth ministry staff, and missions.

Gregory and Kimberlee also volunteered in student ministry for 29 years themselves, ‘hanging up their cleats’ in 2022. “While not required for employment, it remains true that ministry-minded individuals are drawn to MinistrySafe’s mission: to protect children and those who serve them,” Gregory explains.

Giving Back

Sexual abuse prevention requires a focus on the vulnerable; protecting children in ministry settings is not the only context in which MinistrySafe serves vulnerable populations. MinistrySafe pours into other ministries and like-minded organizations, including anti-trafficking initiatives and sexual abuse survivor advocacy. Together with its seminary partners, MinistrySafe has initiated a research scholarship program to advance the understanding of sexual abuse trauma and care, from an academic standpoint.

Poverty might create a catalyst for vulnerability — especially in communities of color. MinistrySafe has provided for the prayer and tangible needs of Hope Farm, a ministry focused on the health, welfare and spiritual development of inner-city boys. Each December, MinistrySafe staff members assist Hope Farm kids, moms and grandmothers in a ‘shoe buy’ — where everyone walks away with new shoes, new socks, and the joy that comes from celebrating the birth of Jesus with fellow believers. 



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