

Megachurch Pastor Urges Members to Speak Out About Sexual Abuse

Sharon Daugherty, pastor of the Tulsa, Okla., megachurch that was rocked by allegations of teen rape, is urging her congregation to speak out about incidents of sexual abuse in their midst.

Five employees allegedly waited two weeks to report a 13-year-old girl's rape claim and were arrested, along with the girl's suspected attacker.

"I want to personally say, that if anybody here is aware of any child being neglected or abused, physically or sexually, that you should please inform the authorities immediately," Daugherty, Victory Christian Center pastor, told the congregation during Saturday services, according to *Tulsa World*. "Our children are precious, and we owe them our full protection."

Police report that Daugherty, pastor of the 17,000-member church and global ministry whose messages reach more than 200 countries via satellite television, also knew about the abuse. She thought employees, which included her son and daughter-in-law, were reporting the incidents. Daugherty has not been charged with any crime.

"I was briefly told of an incident involving two ... employees and members of 24/7 (a youth group) ... and was told it was being reported but did not receive any details on the specific allegations," Daugherty said. "I was extremely disappointed to later hear of the delay in the time it was first reported."

A then-Victory Christian Center employee, Chris Denman, allegedly raped the girl at the church, *TulsaWorld* reports.

Denman was fired and the police were notified. He was charged with several felonies, including first-degree rape, forcible sodomy, lewd molestation and use of a computer to facilitate a sex crime.

Former Victory Christian employee Israel Shalom Castillo, meanwhile, is facing felony charges for allegedly making a lewd or indecent proposal to a child and using a computer to facilitate a sex crime, according to *TulsaWorld*. He turned himself in last week.

“Prior to their hiring, Denman and Castillo both passed a screening process that included personal references and a nationwide background check. No history of any criminal activity was found,” the church said in a statement. “Along with working with DHS to evaluate our reporting process, Victory Christian Center will perform a full review of our policies to ensure the safety of our children and youth.”