



# Healing in Congregations After Clergy Sexual Abuse

A Resource to Assist Synodical Leaders  
and Local Congregations

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

[www.elca.org/safeplace](http://www.elca.org/safeplace)



## **HEALING IN CONGREGATIONS AFTER CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

### **A RESOURCE TO ASSIST SYNODICAL LEADERS AND LOCAL CONGREGATIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA**

prepared by the Reverend Jan Erickson-Pearson

Produced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Division for Ministry, Program for the Prevention of Clergy Sexual Misconduct Copyright 1997 - 2nd Printing December 1999 - Revised for Web display 2005

Permission to photocopy multiple pages granted to ELCA synods, congregations, and institutions for educational purposes. Include credits to Aid Association for Lutherans and disclaimer (see below).

Additional copies are available from Augsburg Fortress Press

800-328-4648 Order Number: Code #69-4580

Cost: \$3.50 per copy

We gratefully acknowledge the generous funding provided to this project, including the research, consultation, and production phases, by Aid Association for Lutherans. Appleton, WI.

The ELCA Office of the Secretary, Department for Synodical Relations and Commission for Women have graciously contributed time and talent to the review and preparation of this material.

The views expressed in this resource are finally those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views or official policy of the ELCA, any synod or synodical leader of the ELCA, or any congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

PLEASE NOTE: This is a historical document of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and while it is still a useful, valid resource, references made to unit and staff names, publications, financial figures, etc., may be out of date.

Please refer to [www.elca.org/safeplace](http://www.elca.org/safeplace) for the most current information.

# **HEALING IN CONGREGATIONS AFTER CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

A Resource to Assist Synodical Leaders and Local Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Division for Ministry

Chicago, Illinois

1997

prepared by

The Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson

In consultation with The Office of The Secretary, Department for Synodical Relations, and the Commission for Women; funding by Aid Association for Lutherans, Appleton, WI

ELCA Division for Ministry

8765 W. Higgins Road

Chicago, IL 60631

800-638-3522, Ext. 2859

The views expressed in this resource are finally those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect the views or official policy of the ELCA, any synod of the ELCA, or any congregation affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

PLEASE NOTE: This is a historical document of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and while it is still a useful, valid resource, references made to unit and staff names, publications, financial figures, etc., may be out of date.

Please refer to [www.elca.org/safeplace](http://www.elca.org/safeplace) for the most current information.

Introduction	
Chapter 1	After the earthquake—Getting started
Chapter 2	Using Crisis Intervention Teams
Chapter 3	Synodical staff meet congregational leaders
Chapter 4	Synodical leaders caring for staff
Chapter 5	When disclosure is made to congregations
Chapter 6	Making disclosure to the wider public
Chapter 7	Holding a congregational meeting
Chapter 8	Addressing pastoral care issues - some introductory comments
Chapter 9	Addressing pastoral care issues for primary victims
Chapter 10	Addressing pastoral care issues for family members of victims and offenders
Chapter 11	Addressing pastoral issues of congregational staff members
Chapter 12	Addressing pastoral issues of congregational lay leaders, members, and the community
Chapter 13	Understanding congregational dynamics
Chapter 14	Offering pastoral leadership after clergy sexual abuse
Chapter 15	Acknowledging signs that healing is happening
Afterword	

# CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
What is clergy sexual abuse?.....	3
Chapter 1 After the earthquake—Getting started.....	6
Chapter 2 Using Crisis Intervention Teams.....	17
Chapter 3 Synodical staff meet congregational leaders .....	25
Chapter 4 Synodical leaders caring for staff .....	29
Chapter 5 When disclosure is made to congregations.....	32
Chapter 6 Making disclosure to the wider public .....	37
Chapter 7 Holding a congregational meeting.....	40
The Meeting	
Chapter 8 Addressing pastoral care issues: Some introductory comments.....	56
Chapter 9 Pastoral care issues: primary victims.....	60
Chapter 10 Pastoral care issues: family members of victims amd offenders.....	66
Chapter 11 Pastoral care issues: congregational staff members.....	71
Chapter 12 Pastoral care issues: lay leaders and others .....	73
Chapter 13 Understanding congregational dynamics.....	78
Chapter 14 Pastoral leadership in aftermath of abuse .....	90
Chapter 15 Acknowledging signs that healing is happening .....	99
Establishing a Safe Conneciton .....	105
Bibliography.....	106

*Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*

Available from Augsburg Fortress,

800-328-4648, ISBN 6-0000-5815-2

\$2.00

A resource recommended for use with this material

# INTRODUCTION

Clergy sexual abuse is a devastating event in the life of any congregation. The aftermath of a disclosure of clergy sexual abuse can cause extreme disruption in the congregation's ability to focus on and carry out its mission tasks.

This disruption may continue for years and years, through the course of several succeeding pastorates. Some congregations are so undermined by this crisis they never recover their strength and vitality for mission, and some congregations die.

The ELCA is learning what synodical leaders, congregational leaders and others can do to help to effect a healing process for the congregation. We see how some congregations can recover from this trauma and even thrive when certain tasks and activities that promote healing are carried out.

These congregations take steps to:

- tell the truth about what happened
- deal with anxieties, expectations, and other feelings
- care for those most deeply wounded
- gather their resources
- affirm their progress
- make plans to move forward

Thanks to generous funding from Aid Association for Lutherans, through several years of research, we have been able to listen to and learn important lessons from scores of lay leaders and staff in congregations where a pastor was removed or resigned following credible allegations of clergy sexual abuse. We also learned from victims of abuse, bishops, and from pastors who carried responsibility to help congregations in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse.

We will continue to grow in our understanding of what promotes healing and growth in congregations. This is a complex problem, requiring commitment to a certain flexibility and willingness to try new options. We learn something new in everyday's mail or telephone calls. We know that every situation has its own unique variables and possibilities.

Healing and recovery happen more quickly, more completely, and more enduringly in congregations where intentional care is provided from the very beginning of the crisis and certain tasks are carried out.

This resource is offered to synodical bishops and their staffs, to other clergy and lay leaders, interims and "after pastors," including those who will provide on-site leadership for a period of time in congregations after the incidence of clergy sexual abuse.

Our hope is to provide assistance that makes these tasks easier and less stressful, in part simply by taking some of the uncertainty and loneliness from their response. Not knowing where to begin, or what would be most helpful often creates great anxiety for those who seek to promote healing. This is a place to start.

These ideas are not a quick fix or a sure cure. This is not a recipe for success, or policy guidelines, but it does provide the wise counsel gathered from folks who have been there, who have learned from their mistakes and from their hard work and effectiveness. This resource seeks to offer the collected wisdom of scores of bishops, synodical staff, pastors, congregational leaders and members, victims of abuse, consultants, counselors, and even some bystanders.

We have learned that some things normally do work better than other things, and that some things certainly work better than nothing at all! Some of the ideas here may seem idealistic, farfetched, even over-reactive. However, all of them are based in the very practical needs and realities experienced by devastated congregations. Where used, they have been generally effective, even cost-effective.

Promoting healing and strength, growth and vitality for individuals and congregations—even as they recover from the devastation of betrayal and the abuse of power that is an intrinsic part of clergy sexual abuse,—pays off, for each one of them, for the sake of their common ministry, and in the life of the whole church.

Congregations facing the crisis precipitated by clergy sexual abuse will find they have many resources within to help them find healing and move forward. The gifts, skills, and strengths of many members and friends will assist them in the tasks of assessment, mutual encouragement, crisis intervention, and planning for long-term healing. In some cases, these gifts may be heretofore hidden or under-utilized in the congregational context. Often, the bishop's office can help to identify and engage resources within and beyond the congregation.

We are at the point of experimenting and building these ministries and welcome any information or good materials that come from your experience. We encourage you to share them! This office can be a clearing-house. What works? What doesn't?

Most congregations in chaos and crisis will need some assistance from outsiders to:

- bolster their confidence and hope,
- remind them of their reliance on Jesus Christ—on God's grace and power,
- care for the most wounded among them,
- summon sufficient courage to face and experience the depth of their desolation and fear, and move through it,
- assure them that not all church leaders are unworthy of trust.

## **Using this resource**

You will note that the resource is presented in loose-leaf fashion. We urge you to add your own material, and then to share your resources with others across the church. This office can provide a clearing-house to facilitate this process.

Many of the pages are in bold and larger font typeface, and all pages are printed on just one side to facilitate their use as hand-outs or transparencies in training sessions that you may offer for leaders in your synod, or in a local congregation. Permission is granted to make local copies. Please indicate always the source of the material, including the disclaimer on the title page, and please acknowledge Aid Association for Lutherans as the funding source. We urge you to use this as a workbook, or a working-book—mark it up with notes about your situation, or about what helps and what doesn't. Then let us know!



## WHAT IS CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE?

Sexual contact between pastors and parishioners or any individuals for whom an ordained pastor has a pastoral responsibility, unless those two people are married to each other, is out of bounds.

Sexual contact between pastors and those whom they are called to serve is a clear violation of the purpose of that relationship. It is a violation of the boundary established to protect the purpose of the pastoral relationship: to make Jesus known. It is a misuse or abuse of the power, opportunities, and other resources of the pastoral office.

We come to pastors in trust—trusting them to use all of the resources of that office for our benefit and the gospel's. We trust them to honor and respect us and the gospel treasure entrusted to them, to care for and wisely guide us, to limit their own behavior, and to act in ways that serve the gospel's purpose in our lives and the life of the church community.

Pastors are called to serve communities of faith, the church, for one purpose: to make Jesus known. It is not a slogan, it is the mission of the church. And it is the purpose of pastoral ministry. Pastors are called to make Jesus known in ways that are direct and specific, challenging and nurturing, vital and creative.

Sexual contact with parishioners or others whom they are called to serve is never within the scope of this purpose. Sexual contact within the pastoral relationship is a betrayal of the very purpose of that relationship. It distorts, misdirects, and rips apart the pastoral relationship and, usually, the life of the lay person involved.

Most sexual relationships within the pastoral relationship are initiated by the pastor. This may happen in a variety of ways. Sometimes it begins with the seemingly innocent exchange of intimate information, sharing important and intense ministry assignments, or enjoying leisure time together.

Most damaging of all are the relationships that begin in the context of pastoral care and counseling, when the parishioner shares information about their vulnerability, fragility, and neediness. The pastor may then use this information, perhaps quite intentionally or maybe unconsciously, to initiate an intimate relationship that leads to sexual activity.

These relationships may seem innocent enough at the start. Often the parishioner is flattered or feels special because of the relationship. But the time comes, sometimes quickly, sometimes much later, when the parishioner realizes that he or she has been used by the pastor, and that the relationship was not truly a benefit to them, but it was directed toward meeting the needs of the pastor.

The feelings of betrayal, desolation, and anger that follow are enormously painful, often quite devastating. The parishioner often feels betrayed not only by the individual but by God, in whose name the pastor has come into their life. Many such individuals find it impossible to pray, to worship, to continue to be involved in the community of faith.

Even when the sexual behavior is initiated or suggested by the parishioner, it is still always the responsibility of the pastor, it is the pastor's job to say "no," and to maintain the safety and integrity of the pastoral relationship.

Clergy sexual abuse is more than personal sexual misconduct because it has occurred within the professional context of the pastor's call to serve. It violates the church's expectations not only for a standard of exemplary morality but also its clear expectation that pastors will not exploit their power to satisfy personal needs.

We use the term "sexual misconduct" to describe the wide variety of behaviors that are included in the range of clergy sexual abuse. The church has "Vision and Expectations" for all rostered ministers, including ordained pastors, that are clear about the pastor's responsibility to refrain from such activity. The church also has "Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline" that describe the behaviors that are out of bounds, and the consequences of violation.

The purpose of discipline is to preserve the safety and integrity of the pastoral office. Pastors who are disciplined are not removed from membership in the church, nor are they precluded from participation in its sacramental life. Indeed, pastors who are disciplined are urged to avail themselves of the means of grace, the preached Word, the communion of saints. We surely believe that God's grace and forgiveness extends to all who fall short.

This church has a responsibility to hold all of its rostered leaders accountable for their actions, especially those undertaken in the context of their interaction with those whom they are called to serve. We do not want anyone who comes seeking the gospel of Jesus Christ and the ministry of this church to be harmed in their relationship with its leaders.

Processes of discipline are in place to help this church provide a safe connection for the people of God to the gospel. When pastors fail in their responsibility for maintaining this safe connection, the church is empowered to take action to remove them from those opportunities that enable them to use others and to derail the mission of the church.

Serving as a pastor is a privilege granted by the church; it is not a right. It is necessary for the community of faith to make decisions about who is trustworthy to serve in that position of responsibility and power. When serious offenses are committed, the church has the hard responsibility to remove the offending person from that position or place that provides opportunity for that offense to be carried out.

Discipline of pastors is a matter of removing individuals from environments where they can harm others. It is about safety: providing or restoring a safe connection between the people and the gospel.

Discipline is not a comment on the pastor's eternal value and worth. It is not a commentary on their, often, very fine preaching and other skills. It is a careful determination, by those individuals responsible for the integrity of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, that this person cannot be trusted to refrain from hurting others by violating this critical boundary.

Discipline is distinct from the matter of forgiveness. The offender may be truly sorry, but still not free from the impulses or whatever it may be that has prompted the harmful behavior. We can forgive the offender and still not sanction their free and unfettered access to the considerable power and resources of the pastoral office.

Disclosure of clergy sexual abuse is an important part of the healing process. Knowing the truth about a painful event is essential before one can learn from it, process it and move on to healing. This church is committed to providing appropriate disclosure about instances of clergy sexual abuse.

While the behavior itself may have occurred in a very private setting, because it is part of the professional life of the pastor, it is a matter for the church to know about. By violating the boundary between personal and work life, the pastor has placed this activity within the realm of public consideration.

Disclosures, indeed charges of clergy sexual abuse, are never made until an investigation of the initial report yields information to corroborate it and warrant further action.

Disclosure of certain, basic facts are essential if the community is ever going to get beyond the rumors, misunderstandings, and trauma of the events. Another benefit is for additional, unknown victims who may need to come forward as part of their healing. However awkward and painful in the short run, disclosure is essential in helping the church respond with love, healing, and reconciliation. The church can begin then to move ahead with new focus and integrity.

For more information, order *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*. #6-0000-5815-2, \$2.00 Augsburg Fortress, 800-328-4648

# CHAPTER 1

## AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE - GETTING STARTED

“It felt like an earthquake rocked this church!” exclaimed one church member. “Solid ground gave way beneath our feet. Everything was caving in. I felt dizzy and disoriented, and very unsure of what to do.”

“Our pastor’s sexual abuse was an abuse of the power of his office and a terrible betrayal of all of our trust. It caused huge gaping wounds to open up throughout this congregation and ugly rifts to develop,” said a council member. “A betrayal of this magnitude creates after-shocks that cause us even now to doubt and mistrust our own judgment, each other, the larger church, and our new pastor. We feel duped!”

“We have been shaken to the very core,” explained another lay leader. “It is not just about the pastor’s private affairs, as we may have thought at first. He let us all down. We all feel misused I began to realize that it was a betrayal of our trust on the day I woke up and recognized that I didn’t trust anything he had done or said anymore. If he could use women as he did, something that to me seems a huge step to take, and then lie to us about it at first, how much easier to have used all of us at some time, in other ways. Was it all a sham?”

“Thank heavens we have a firm foundation, Jesus Christ. I keep thinking of that old hymn, ‘Built on a rock the church will stand, even when steeples are falling.’ That is how it feels here now, things are falling apart!” explained a choir member.

“We lost a lot of people right away. Some of them were related to the victims. Some were afraid the whole place would just collapse. Some were buried in anger and resentment. Some got lost in the mess of miscommunication. Others felt that the church itself was not trustworthy,—any church itself was not trustworthy,—any church, not just ours, that even God had let them down. How long will they stay away?” wondered another member.

“The victims were so hidden and hurt we had a hard time even getting a message of healing to them,” said a deacon. “We all kept looking over our shoulders, wondering what—or who—would crumble next.”

“All I could think about was how this same thing had wrecked the little church I grew up in. It never recovered—from more than forty years ago,” lamented a choir member.

“We misplaced our anger and ended up blaming each other, not trusting each other. This is not a safe place to be right now,” reported one council member.

Church members around the country have used this same image of an earthquake to describe what happened to their congregation as the result of their pastor’s clergy sexual abuse. Badly shaken, undermined, and often (infra-) structurally damaged, these congregations are struggling to understand what happened and why the effects are so devastating.

Clergy sexual abuse is like an earthquake. It begins in hidden, secret places, far from the calm surface of parish life. Gathering intensity, the relationship generates its own volatile forces of fear, deceit and abuse that finally collide with other, opposite, powerful energies that strain toward healing and truth. As the secret comes out, the sense of stability and safety of the congregation is torn apart. It feels like very shaky ground!

The abuse is like a jagged fissure that rips through the church, a community of trust, expectation and promise. Rifts and fractures splinter and break the spirit and undermine ministry. Chasms of suspicion and blame cleave the common ground of unity in mission. Bonds of kindness, goodwill, cooperation and commitment crumble. Trust, hopefulness and generosity are swallowed up by an ugly crevice in formerly solid ground.

Fear and cynicism flourish. Gaping wounds, rubble and chaos are left. Lines of communication—like pipelines essential to any structure—are broken. Streams of authority and decision-making—like wires that carry power around to the various parts—are torn and tangled. Power is diffused, its flow interrupted, diverted to aimless, even reckless purposes. It is dangerous ground.

New cracks appear with each aftershock. Hairline fractures grow, threatening further instability. Load-bearing walls are destabilized. Pillars crumble. Even as the building settles new damage becomes apparent. What will fall next?

Members are injured by falling debris. Some are buried in mounds of brokenness and some are lost. Some are shell-shocked, paralyzed and stunned. Some run in fear and never return. Some give their all to emergency efforts and then, exhausted, fall apart in quiet, alone and spent.

A deafening rumble drowns out the sounds of children playing, a bell choir rehearsing, senior citizens chatting as they fold bulletins. A telephone rings on and on, the secretary too rattled to answer.

The purposeful humdrum of daily life is overcome by sounds of anger, fear, frustration, and sorrow.

Without warning, like an earthquake, clergy sexual abuse tears open the surface of congregational life and rips apart the fabric of trust that such communities depend on. It opens up huge chasms of uncertainty and bitterness. It undermines the stability and strength of the whole structure. The ground shudders and buckles, again and again, as if leaving jagged waves of accordion-pleated black and white linoleum under splintered pews.

At the epicenter of this earthquake, in the lives of the primary victims, their families, close friends, the family of the abusing pastor, and others, there is complete havoc. Mounds of debris threaten to bury everything and everyone at hand. But even far from the epicenter itself, in circles far removed from the center of activity, decision-making and influence, in the surrounding community, and in other congregations around the church, the ground trembles and damage is done. Confidence and trust are shaken and safety is uncertain.

Some congregations will be torn apart by clergy sexual abuse while other congregations experience less serious trauma. Many factors may influence this variability but none of them are perfect predictors all of the time. Some congregations appear to be strong at first, only to reveal deeper divisions and damage later. Often congregational leaders are quick to declare that “things are fine!” and to resist interventions and assistance. Many simply want to forget it and move on, hoping to “put this behind us and get on with our ministry.” They may or may not recognize the impact of this event as troubles related to it emerge down the road.

The impact also varies from person to person. Within each congregation affected by clergy sexual abuse, some members are devastated, while others are relatively unscathed. It is not so easy as one might expect to determine who is who. Hasty assessments based on even the most logical assumptions (e.g. close relation to the pastor, active or inactive membership, age, gender, relation to a primary victim) may need to be revised over time. It is best to assume that each member has been deeply affected and to express respect and tenderness.

As with other kinds of trauma, so-called internal injuries are difficult to see. Those most deeply wounded may feel a need to mask their wounds or become absorbed in tending to the needs of others. Their distress may not become apparent even to them for quite some time and, when it emerges, it may come as a great surprise.

The first hours and days are critical. They will set the tone for a process of healing that continues, or they will create a vacuum into which all manner of unhealthy activity can be dumped and stirred up.

While it is impossible to control other's reactions to crisis and disaster, it is possible for a skilled person or persons to take charge, to offer leadership in managing the response and to take charge, in company with others, in creating a positive and appropriate climate for response.

Conflict resolution skills and processes area great benefit to churches in crisis. It is helpful to understand the congregation as an emotional system, a family system of sorts, and to do a "system analysis" as part of our work toward resolution and healing. The various methods of conflict resolution and systems analysis are not inimical, necessarily, to the particular suggestions lifted up in this resource. At the same time, however, it is absolutely critical to the healing of a congregational system that has experienced the trauma of clergy sexual abuse that specific attention be given to the unique dynamics that develop when power is abused and trust is betrayed. In our research, we found that when traditional methods of conflict resolution and system-based analysis were applied without particular reference to this problem of the abuse of power and betrayal of trust by the leader, healing was thwarted. In some situations, attempts to resolve conflicts actually obscured the most serious problem: the abuse of trust and power on the part of a pastor. Systems analysis is extremely valuable in helping congregations develop new, healthy patterns of relationship with future pastors and within the membership.

The good news, of course, is that the earthquake in this case does not break the foundation of the church itself. Jesus Christ, our sure foundation, the rock and cornerstone, is as strong and powerfully present to heal and to save as ever. It is the privilege of those who are invited to enter a congregation affected by clergy sexual abuse to bring this word of hope and promise.

Listening, supporting, affirming in a non-anxious manner are the most important ways to enter a congregation just traumatized by clergy sexual abuse.



The role of those who offer assistance is not to take over the ministry, or to make decisions about how to respond to the crisis, or to make judgments about the future. Rather, the role of those who seek to help is to:

- offer (practical) assistance,
- build up and affirm the gifts, skills and leadership already present,
- respond to requests to help with problem-solving (reflective listening),
- provide a safe “container” (emotional zone or relationship) in which leaders can vent their feelings and questions,
- provide spiritual leadership, perhaps including preaching, leading worship, intercessions, and Bible study.

It is also helpful to provide information, and education to assist the congregation to interpret the significance of these events. “What happened?” is the first question. “Why did our pastor leave? Why did our pastor have to leave?” is a matter of their urgent concern. What is clergy sexual abuse? Why is this not “just an affair”? These are key questions.

The ELCA offers two resources about clergy sexual abuse to assist in the interpretive and educational task. The first is a one page summary (cf. What is clergy sexual abuse? page 3) designed for use as a handout to members, or for enclosure with letters of notification of the charge against the pastor and/or the pastor’s departure from the call.

*Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse* is another helpful resource. This 62-page book gives a comprehensive yet easily readable explanation of the dynamics that are set up when sexual boundaries are violated in the context of a pastoral relationship. It is written to provide information accessible specifically to those who are experiencing the disruption of a crisis and who need clear, concise explanations. It has an extensive bibliography for additional resources. Produced by the ELCA Division for Ministry, it is available for \$2.00/copy from Augsburg Fortress, (800-328-4648). Order code #69-8110

Many synods provide copies of *Safe Connections* to leaders of congregations where a pastor has just resigned because of a complaint and/or has been charged with clergy sexual abuse. Many also provide it to those who come forward with complaints of abuse, and to members of their families. It is often helpful to have a common frame of reference in describing the problem, the dynamics of the pastor/parishioner relationship, and the effects of clergy sexual abuse on its primary victims.

Initial efforts toward interpretation and education will need to be repeated many times and in a variety of contexts. It is helpful to provide copies of interpretative materials in church libraries or tract racks, making it safe and easy for people to get access to important information in their own ways. We each process information in many different ways. A graceful offering of these resources—print, video, conversational—available over time, in a variety of formats, honors this diversity and helps the whole congregation move toward healing. A bibliography is included at the back of this resource. It includes materials about other kinds of abuse, as well. Often, the experience of clergy sexual abuse raises questions and stirs up anxiety about other forms of abuse. Many congregations will become assertive about policies and procedures to prevent future abuse.

Earthquakes have different consequences in different places, depending perhaps upon the distance of the site from the epicenter, the lay of the land or the kind of topography, the soundness of the structure, the quality of building materials, the establishment of the structure on its foundation, any history of damage from previous quakes or other circumstances, the design of the structure and other, often invisible variables. We cannot predict with certainty just what effect the same temblor will have at various points. One house may slide down the hill while its next-door-neighbor is left standing. Maybe one had a better footing on the foundation to begin with, or maybe that is just the way the ground shook.

It is not necessarily true that all strong congregations will be able to withstand the trauma of clergy sexual abuse with relatively little structural damage. Sometimes, depending upon how the ground is shaken, even the sturdiest and best-designed, well-equipped and maintained institution is rocked to its core.

Even the strongest and “best” of our congregations experience clergy sexual abuse as a catastrophic event that disrupts and disorients, undermines and up-ends the lives of individuals and communities once dependent upon a trustworthy, predictable integrity of witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, expected of those called to public ministry in the church. Foundations are shaken, walls are broken, cracked or destroyed. Cracks and fissures open up under and around and even within those affected, distorting and confounding structures that once seemed inviolable.

A congregation may experience the trauma differently this year than it did when it happened there before, many years earlier. Or differently than it experienced and reacted to another trauma the year before.

Depending on the strengths of current leadership, patterns of communication and relationship within the congregation, whether its “emotional system” is healthy, boundaries are clear, individuals are strong and able to handle anxiety with maturity, the shame present within the congregation, its past history of abuse and betrayal (of many kinds), its sense of itself as a survivor or a victim (e.g. self-perception or history of triumph over adversity), the carefulness of a healing process, and many other variables,—the congregation will rise to this occasion and emerge stronger than before, or not.

At whatever moment the crisis erupts, most of these variables are operative simply to the extent that they are, for better or worse. The one variable that we can effect is the intentionality and carefulness of our work to bring healing.

Some congregations are mortally wounded by clergy sexual abuse. Some flounder for years, even generations, unaware of what it is that has unsettled and undermined their sense of mutual trust and their ministry. In many places, the abuse is never spoken of, never confirmed.

In some congregations the abuse is dismissed as “the pastor’s affair,” and their mistrust of subsequent leaders and of one another is never seen as a consequence of this abuse of power and betrayal of trust. Strange and unfocused conflicts between members and their next several pastors, and between members themselves are common.

Some congregations have an uncanny way of setting up future experiences of betrayal of trust by moving too quickly through the interim process and jumping into a relationship with a new pastor who also abuses power, perhaps in sexual or other ways. Some congregations have a long history of this yet may have no idea at all why it is happening, or what the first event was.



One parishioner told us of the incidence 20 years earlier of clergy sexual abuse in his home congregation. It was never named, never dealt with openly. Conflicts and lack of focus, a lack of enthusiasm and vitality continue to thwart that congregation to this day. They are dying.

Another congregation experienced clergy sexual abuse early in its life as a mission congregation. The matter was never identified or cared for in an intentional way. Issues of trust, betrayal, misuse of the pastoral office were not part of any conversations about what happened. Many of the members were young Christians and had little idea what to expect from pastoral ministry or the Christian community. Many were overcome by suspicions and rumors. A great number of them left that congregation and left the church altogether. The congregation itself had no institutional memory of health, openness or honesty. It stumbled on for a few years before disbanding. Similar situations in other mission starts had the same tragic outcome.

One congregation we studied had a history of “eating pastors.” They went through a stormy succession of quick, frustrating pastorates with previously effective clergy. Factions dominated decision-making. Trivial matters became the precipitating issues in major conflicts. They cancelled the coffee hour. No new members joined in over two years. As it turns out, several decades ago, their pastor had been sexually involved with several women. The matter was never openly discussed, the pastor was not forced to resign by any formal charge or process, but left in the heat of an “undisclosed conflict” with several members. Current conflicts tended still to fall along old battle lines, with family members of former victims siding against family members of former council leaders and defenders of the pastor in every single new fight.

In many of the congregations that experienced clergy sexual abuse but never dealt with it, related issues continued to plague their life together. Boundaries of privacy were either disregarded or rigid beyond belief. One congregation refused to socialize in any ways—no Harvest dinner, no stewardship supper, no Easter breakfast, no bowling league, no retreats, no adult outings, a slim crowd at youth events.

Another congregation never said a word to its new pastor about a past problem but simply withheld all authority and respect. No one ever called for counseling, no one would set foot in the pastor’s office, no one invited the pastor to their home. In fact, that pastor found out, no one in the congregation ever invited anyone else from the congregation into their personal world.

Issues related to confidentiality, respect, hospitality, generosity, confidence, commitment, and authority surface in surprisingly creative and disturbingly relentless ways. Control issues are problematic. Permission to exercise authority is withheld from elected leaders. Decisions are undermined and second-guessed. Financial giving and the giving of time and talent falls off.

Some pastors who follow after clergy sexual abuse simply want to get on with the ministry and “let bygones be bygones.” If the healing process has not been undertaken before their arrival, it is not going to happen now. It is a new day, and all that, and they want to move on! Some congregations are eager to find such pastors, leaders who will help them varnish over their injuries and skip on to other issues.

Other pastors who follow after clergy sexual abuse find they have no choice but to deal with its aftermath. They sometimes call themselves “after pastors” and have become quite intentional about the tasks of ministry that are helpful to promote healing. Their work in congregations may be as unwelcome as it is necessary. They need lots of support from synodical and other leaders who understand the dynamics they are dealing with and the difficult challenges they face.

## **Responding to abuse from long ago**

We found many situations where abuse from years and years ago had yet to be officially surfaced, disclosed, and dealt with. These situations are all the more problematic because new conflicts may have arisen that eclipse the initial one in severity. Alliances have hardened along conflict lines. Attitudes have become firm and unforgiving.

Some victims may feel safely forgotten, having found healing elsewhere or not, free from the risks of exposure that further disclosure might bring. They are likely to feel great ambivalence about the congregation's attention to this subject. They would wish it had been taken care of long ago and now, let well enough alone. On the other hand, they still long for healing through their church and for a sense of justice. Indeed, sometimes it is a victim's own process of healing, through outside therapy or a healthy pastoral relationship, that prompts the congregation to face this part of its past. He or she may bring the matter to the bishop's attention and then feel the hornet's nest of reaction within the congregation.

Any attempt to resurface old issues of clergy sexual abuse should consider first and foremost the needs and concerns of the primary victim(s). While the problem does not belong to them alone—it does become the problem of the whole church—it is, without doubt, a disaster of far greater magnitude for them personally and the stakes for any disclosure must be counted carefully not only for them but by them. Else, they become victims once again.

Another complication in old cases is the fact that it is almost a guarantee that some members know about the abuse and have, for any variety of reasons, been party to keeping it a secret for all these years. This secret has given them a sense of power, oddly enough, and revealing it will damage their sense of status in the community. It may also have the effect of harming their reputations as it becomes known that they participated in a cover-up of misdeeds. They usually have deep ambivalence about making wider disclosure. They seek relief from their burden of terrible knowledge even as they cling to their special privilege. They fear the disruption of acute treatment of this old wound, yet in some deep place, they long for healing.

Most of the same guidelines will apply to these situations, as to those where the abuse is recent. In all situations, the guideline about having someone other than the incumbent pastor make the disclosure is absolutely essential. If that condition cannot be accommodated, it is unlikely a wise idea to proceed. Likewise, it is essential for the victim(s) to be party to any decisions to make disclosure. Care should be given for their well-being during the period of the disclosure. If their family members are not yet aware of this history, they should be given opportunity to learn what is necessary and to receive care in advance of the disclosure. As always, it is important to respect the confidentiality and the person of the victim(s) in making a disclosure. In all such cases, we especially recommend careful consultation with the synodical bishop and, perhaps, other conflict resolution specialists who have expertise in dealing with clergy sexual abuse.

## **Consequences of clergy sexual abuse to those directly involved**

(Subsequent chapters will discuss these matters in some depth. These paragraphs are simply an introduction.)

Those directly involved in sexual contact with the pastor are gravely wounded by this deceit and betrayal. They often feel desolate. Right at ground zero, they may be completely devastated. The ground has given way and all is shattered. Some are swallowed up, as others are literally buried in debris. Some run away, some even die.

Their injuries from this abuse may be compounded by earlier wounds, often the very hurts and concerns that prompted them to seek out the pastor or to be vulnerable to the pastor's inappropriate attentions. They may feel intense shame for having been the one "chosen."

Complicating their problem is the likelihood of their being blamed for what has happened and being driven out of the community. Their trust in the church, and even in the God who was so terribly mis-represented to them, is seriously compromised. Their recovery will depend not only on the care they receive personally, but on the way the congregation as a whole responds to this disaster.

The offending pastor is also badly hurt. The offender usually believes that the cause of the pain and injury in his or her life is the disclosure of the relationship, or the disciplinary or other practical consequences that follow, rather than the abusive relationship itself. The pastor may be unaware of earlier factors in his or her own life that have contributed to this egregious behavior, factors that are themselves sources of distress and injury in the pastor's life. Because most pastors who offend do not make confession, accept full responsibility for their actions and acknowledge the depth of this sin, whatever its sources in their life, they do not experience healing. Whatever is wrong remains broken, split off, or hidden for a long time.

The pastor often becomes the object of great concern and sympathy from members of the congregation, colleagues, friends, and others. They may insist that the allegations are false. This promotes denial within the pastor, and creates a climate of disbelief, unwillingness and a lack of necessity to treat the problem seriously.

Close to the epicenter of this crisis are family members of the primary victim(s) and the offending pastor, their close friends and colleagues, congregational staff and key lay leaders. They may experience very serious consequences. They are often ignored in the efforts to minimize and clear away evidence of the destruction. They also often are the very ones who are providing emergency assistance to the primary victims and the offending pastor. They may wave away initial offers of help for themselves, preoccupied with the troubles of others all around them. They may collapse later, even as others are rallying.

Nevertheless, their trust has been shaken to the core. Close relationships of intimacy have been betrayed and boundaries broken. They feel personally ashamed, guilty and responsible, for a variety of reasons, and may, therefore, feel the need to suffer. They are most likely to say, "If only I had..." It is also common for them to feel angry at the external authorities and "the church" whom they believe could have and should have prevented this. The spouse of the abusing pastor commonly expresses deep anger at the bishop and those who intervene, disclose, impose discipline or other consequences, and toward the victim. It feels "safer" to them, at this moment of crisis and uncertainty about the future, to be angry at others, rather than acknowledge their feelings of betrayal about the intimacy of their marriage relationship.

If the abusive relationship has gone on for some time, and if they have had knowledge of it for any period of time, the disclosure may feel like an indictment of them, too. Whether any such blame is ever articulated, they often internalize it and, therefore, express great resistance to making their secret information public. Sometimes, however, they feel relief and gratitude instead.

Individuals in the congregation will be affected variously and for reasons that are at least hidden and often remain a mystery even to them. Factors such as their own past history of abuse and betrayal, experiences of and feelings about the church, current circumstances, their sense of involvement or marginality, expectations and their sense of what they needed from the church and its pastor(s) will play a role. As with an earthquake, it is impossible to predict accurately where the damage will be worst; one individual will collapse while another is virtually unscathed.

It is important to not overlook or belittle the consequences felt by those even quite far from the center of congregational life. It is also difficult to know for sure just who was involved in a sexual relationship with the pastor, or another relationship of betrayal and compromise. Those who are recovering from other abusive relationships often find themselves reliving and revisiting old trauma during this time. New victims of this abuse may come forward over a long period of time, as they see how the church cares for those who came forward at the start.

New members, former members, members of the community who received counseling or other attention from the pastor, individuals whose children were friends of the pastor's children, and many other people who seem farther from the epicenter may, in fact, feel deeply the effects of this experience.

### **We've been shaken, too!**

As church leaders we, too, feel anguish and disruption, disorientation and fear whenever we receive information about clergy sexual abuse.

We may be among those most deeply wounded, in fact, as we discover this dread news about a pastor we had trusted and valued as colleague and friend. We may feel personally betrayed because of assurances given in response to earlier expressions of concern. A confusing, upsetting tumble of feelings is likely to create anxiety and anger within us.

As we begin to respond to the needs of the congregation, and to deal with all manner of things that must be cared for, it goes without saying that it is essential for us to turn to a trusted source of spiritual and emotional support through this crisis period. If we don't already have a spiritual director or pastor, or trusted colleague or friend, it is not too late. Asking for the prayers, wise counsel, and support of such ministers is our first step.

As crisis intervention teams move into disaster zones, they come equipped. They also come protected. While we need not shift into a defensive mode, it is simply wise to take time to gird up one's own spirit and resources in advance. We can expect that we will upset and anger people, no matter what we do! It is inevitable that those affected by the disaster will lash out, refuse to cooperate, even subvert the good efforts of those who seek to bring aid and comfort.

Our task is a daunting one. We feel conflicting loyalties and feel torn by competing concerns. We have already engaged in a caring relationship with the primary victim(s) and, perhaps, their families. It is not our responsibility to be their main source of pastoral support and comfort but we likely have spent time with them, and feel a sense of concern and compassion for them.

We likely have met also with the offending pastor and perhaps his or her family. We feel a special sense of responsibility to provide pastoral care to them but realize that it is impossible under the circumstances, so have encouraged and perhaps assisted them to secure such care from another.

## **All things to all people?**

We do not personally have to provide all things to all people. We know this. However, in times of crisis, we are tempted often to try.

In the “ambient anxiety” that attends all incidence of clergy sexual abuse, the urge to suppress that anxiety or to tend to it all personally, or to take it all personally is great. As leaders, it is our responsibility not to control this anxiety or to control this situation, but to take charge of the opportunity present in this awful moment to bring the power of God’s grace and healing mercy to frightened, angry, fearful people.

We begin in prayerful reflection, study of Scripture, with mindfulness of God’s presence and power.

We extend the care of the church to an entire congregation in crisis. We may or may not know what to expect in this case. We may or may not expect to find additional primary victims hidden in the shadows. This may be one of our favorite congregations or one we always fret about. We may feel good about their chances for recovery and about the resources they have to deal with this, or not.

We move toward those we are called to serve, having some idea of how this catastrophe is likely to have affected them, yet open to learning the particularities of this specific event.

## **“Non-anxious presence”**

We bring a non-anxious, well-prepared and well-trained presence, ready to listen, to support, to affirm, to offer, to problem-solve, and sometimes, to simply sit and be attentive.

We pray with and for those in crisis, we read and meditate on Scripture with them, we bring God’s Word, and we worship with them in hope and trust the God who will not fail them.

We have a plan, we act, we have resources, we have teammates, we have a commitment. At the same time, we have flexibility.

We laugh, we are playful, we rest.

We bring options, ideas, possibilities.

We bring others who will serve with us, with them, in the course of healing.

We are honest, promising only what we feel confident we can deliver. We are truthful, refusing to sanction deceptive rumors and half-truths. We are careful and mindful: avoiding triangles, reactivity, and other unhealthy patterns of communication.

We find appropriate ways to care for our own legitimate, important needs.

We are determined, following through on our commitments.

We stay centered in the Gospel—in word and deed. We bring to life the promises of grace: God’s freely given love and mercy, through Jesus Christ. We witness to the power of God’s intent to bring justice, peace, freedom, forgiveness, and release, deliverance and healing to all concerned. We believe it will happen!

Driving through California, one cannot help but notice signs on bridges alerting citizens to “earthquake retrofitting” activity. Construction goes on all over the state to equip bridges and buildings to withstand the “next big one.” Cranes and earth-movers are evidence of the state’s determination to make good this intention. It is expensive, time-consuming and risky. But the citizens of this state surely know the stakes and the benefits. They want to be prepared.

In the church we are doing what we can to keep the “earthquake” of clergy sexual abuse from occurring. However, it is impossible to guarantee prevention and it is likewise impossible to predict where it will happen next.

Therefore, our efforts to promote healing in congregations where abuse has occurred are the best way we know of assuring that, even when it happens, clergy sexual abuse does not have to foreclose the future. Individuals do find healing and new life. Congregations can survive, even thrive, after healing from this terrible disruption.

It was not possible to conduct a study to provide hard data about the numbers of total ELCA congregations to have experienced clergy sexual abuse. However, based on several factors, it is safe to say that as many as one in ten congregations have had this experience at one time or another. Many of these congregations are still languishing. Their strong, vital ministry is as urgently needed today as that of any congregation in our church!

The time we spend now to prepare to help them in healing is time devoted to mission and vitality in the future. As you read these pages, you may begin to identify resources on the territory of your synod, or elsewhere in the church, who can assist you in planning your response and providing it. If you wish to consult with us, please contact any of the ELCA churchwide offices noted on the title page of this resource.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **USING CRISIS INTERVENTION TEAMS**

An accused pastor has resigned, or agreed to take a leave of absence from the congregation. It is a traumatic moment for the pastor, the bishop, and probably others. It is about to become a traumatic situation for the congregation now, too, that will take months, even years to resolve.

When an accused pastor has resigned or otherwise leaves the Call, the congregation is thrown into crisis. A jumble of needs, some mundane and immediate, others quite profound and far-reaching, will compete for attention.

It is impossible for the bishop or the bishop's staff to respond to and meet all of the needs of the congregation. Anxiety about this can create stress within the bishop's office and within the congregation. An atmosphere of resentment, frustration and shame overwhelms good intentions and thwarts their common purpose.

In recent years some synods have developed crisis intervention teams to assist the bishop and the synodical staff in responding to congregations in crisis. These teams may include area pastors and lay leaders, and may utilize the skills of some professionally trained counselors and organizational consultants.

Such teams are utilized at the invitation of the local congregation, at the suggestion of the bishop. Some congregations will find this a useful and welcome opportunity, others will choose to utilize local leadership, in partnership with the bishop's office, as appropriate.

The purpose of the team is certainly not to replace local leadership, or even temporarily to take over the ministry of the congregation.

It is the sole purpose of the crisis intervention team to assist and support the local leaders in their work, and to do so only at their invitation and direction, with the congregation establishing limits on the scope of this work.

Under the models we've seen, team members would not expect an honorarium for this work. They would not be contract staff or paid consultants for the synod or for the congregation. They would serve, as church members do in a variety of tasks throughout the larger church, as volunteers with special skills to offer a specific situation. (This does not preclude the use of contract staff or consultants for other purposes.)

As we have seen with natural disasters, it is often helpful for those responding "on the ground," within the crisis area, to have support from outside personnel, especially at the onset of the crisis and recovery period. Often, these community leaders are themselves deeply shaken or wounded by the disaster. Their proximity to the scene may keep them from being able to respond freely or safely. They need help! Many bishops would wish to provide this ministry directly, or to provide it from their staff, but it is usually not possible for this to happen, certainly not over an extended period of many days.

The description of possible tasks to be undertaken by crisis intervention team members will help to clarify the rationale and value of such a team. This work does not replace the other ministries of the bishop's office to the victim(s) and to the offender, or other related tasks.

This team is primarily dedicated to assisting the local congregation in its response to the crisis as it affects the life and witness of the congregation and its members.

The process of identifying and preparing individuals for such a ministry takes time and may involve expense. The results are worthwhile! Attentive and extensive early intervention and response to the crisis caused by clergy sexual abuse promotes trust and healing within the congregation and its readier return to full ministry.

The long-term recovery of the congregation will be affected by the ministry given at the start of the crisis. A careful, early intervention and response provides an interpretive context for the congregation to understand its situation, gives members reason to have hope and trust in the church and its leaders, and upholds and encourages the local leadership as they plan for the next steps. Even so, the congregation will experience disruption, betrayal, confusion, and deep anxiety. But they occur within a larger context, already, of compassion, understanding, and hope. This context has a helpful impact!

Several synods are developing crisis intervention teams (calling them by different names, and sometimes with other functions in addition to these). These emerging models demonstrate the variety that is possible and the creativity within our church for fine-tuning a response to local conditions.

These teams usually include individuals with relevant professional and personal skills, clergy and laity, women and men, racial and ethnic diversity.

[The following pages are designed for possible use in training sessions for these teams. The pages may be photocopied or made into transparencies for such a purpose.]



## **Crisis Teams Care for the Congregation**

Several synods are developing crisis intervention teams of clergy and laity who are prepared to accompany the bishop into the congregation, or follow shortly after to provide several kinds of care. Crisis intervention teams are trained for this special ministry which extends the care of the bishop's office in the congregation in the days immediately following the departure and disclosure.

Their tasks may include:

- assist the bishop with a disclosure meeting that includes time for parishioners to begin to process the information
- meet with staff and lay leaders, separately and together, subsequent to their meeting with the bishop, as they begin to respond and make plans for ongoing ministry
- meet with small groups, e.g. confirmation classes, youth groups, Bible studies, choirs, teachers, Stephen Ministers for interpretation and support
- preach and preside at worship the first Sunday or two after the departure of the pastor
- provide immediate pastoral care for those who have urgent or chronic needs, and provide ministry for weddings, baptisms, funerals, and special events that must go on

The long-term recovery of the congregation will be affected by the ministry provided at the start of the crisis. The congregation will experience great disruption, to be sure, and the feelings of betrayal, confusion and loss will continue for some time. However, where a strong and helpful early intervention and response occurs, parishioners have cause to continue to trust and find meaning in the congregation.

## **Crisis intervention teams undergird, not replace local leadership**

The purpose of the crisis response team is not to take over the ministry or the decision-making activities of local leaders. They enter only by invitation and work with local leaders, often going together to meet small groups, or providing suggestions, where requested, for making decisions.

They provide breathing room, giving local leaders a chance to rest and receive ministry at a time when much is required of them and when their own faith is being tested and their emotions are conflicted. The team can bring a sense of security and connectedness to the larger church, a glimpse of hope for the future, a steady and reliable presence at a volatile time.

The crisis intervention team gives the bishop a strong option for extending the ministry of the bishop's office, without having to commit synod staff or the bishop's continued presence on the scene. Most plans involve having this team in place, on site, for roughly 72-hours, perhaps over a long weekend.

A clergy member of the team may return the next weekend if weddings, baptisms or other special events are scheduled. And such a person might return again for funerals, emergencies and so forth, until a regular interim is available.

At all times, it is clear that the team is in place at the invitation of the congregation and with the sanction of the bishop. Members of the team, lay and clergy, would be appointed by the bishop and receive training through the synod for precisely this work.

It also must be clear that this team is a crisis response team, not the providers of long-term healing care. Their work should be interpreted to the congregation as only the first step. This is not a quick fix. The next steps are just as critical as this one.

## **What would the crisis intervention team do?**

A possible list of responsibilities includes:

With the staff

- meet with the congregational staff for support and to help establish covenants among them for such matters as:
- honesty, confidentiality, avoiding gossip and speculative talk, work assignments and time off
- help congregational staff identify needs for ongoing support and possible providers, e.g. neighboring pastor, counselor or consultant, and help initiate contact with such people both for the staff as a unit and for individuals as appropriate
- provide spiritual leadership to staff, including time for private prayer and conversation and corporate time for prayer
- help staff to identify current ministry needs, e.g. planning for Lent, upcoming council retreat, where the pastor's leadership and/or presence was essential, and to begin thinking about ways to get those things done
- encourage staff to set priorities and create realistic work plans and assignments for the next several weeks
- help staff think through the questions of "what to say," especially in response to telephone inquiries
- relieve staff of responsibility for responding to the media
- work with staff to identify individuals who received counseling from the pastor, so far as possible, and contact them, if no boundaries of confidentiality are thus broken, to provide basic disclosure and, possibly, a referral (Some synods have a letter drafted from the bishop and sent out and/or available in the church office for this purpose)
- identify the community involvements, on behalf of the congregation, of the pastor and make contact with leaders to provide basic disclosure. If they continue to require a liaison from the congregation, make interim arrangements (e.g. a rep on the local school council or worship leader at the nursing home).
- perhaps most important of all, provide a "non-anxious presence"—concerned but not overwhelmed, confident and steady, efficient, competent, and trustworthy. It bears stating that, given the recent betrayal, it is really important to only promise to do what you will do.

## **With lay leaders**

- meet with lay leaders, as identified locally, for support and to help establish covenants among them for such matters as:
- honesty, confidentiality, avoiding gossip and speculative talk, continued leadership and presence
- help identify congregational needs for support, processing reactions and concerns, and understanding what clergy sexual abuse is and why their pastor had to leave
- help in the process of identifying area resources for the congregation, e.g. consultants, counselors, trained lay or clergy leaders, who could lead forums, cottage meetings, council retreats, meet with small groups or individuals, and staff
- provide spiritual leadership, leading devotions in meetings and being available for prayer and conversation with individuals
- help them identify immediate ministry needs, (may be done in conjunction with staff, at least in part), including worship plans and upcoming festivals, observances or special events, and working especially to identify those responsibilities that the pastor carried alone (e.g. visitation, counseling, supervision of staff, confirmation, Bible studies) and identify ways to meet those needs until the interim pastor is available
- help identify individuals who expected ministry from the pastor in the near-term for weddings, baptisms, hospital or crisis care, shut-ins, counseling, baptismal instruction, and assist making plans to provide that care. Some of that ministry may be provided by a crisis team member.
- help identify groups or constituencies within the congregation that especially need attention, e.g. confirmation class, teachers in Sunday school or pre-school, regular volunteers, choirs, new members, Stephen Ministers, Bible studies, women's circles and the women's organization, senior citizens, youth groups (including elementary age), shut-ins, and help with plans to care for these groups. A team member may meet with some of these groups or individuals in the 72-hour period.
- respond to pastoral care emergencies within the congregation, as requested, while on site
- help identify the pastor's community involvements, on behalf of the congregation and assist with short-term plans to cover those responsibilities
- help identify those things the pastor always did that nobody else did, or even knew about, e.g. turned on the heat, arranged for a piano tuner, gave \$10 a week to the homeless guy who always stopped in, sent a welcome letter to all visitors, and begin making plans to cover those responsibilities

## **With the congregation**

- preach and preside at worship (if the bishop does not, or perhaps on the subsequent weekend); deal specifically and pastorally with the realities of the current situation
- take home communion to shut-ins, as requested
- visit the sick, officiate at funerals, as requested
- teach confirmation, lead the Pastor's Class, and other such duties, as requested
- confirm to upcoming wedding parties that ministry will be provided and explain how to continue planning
- respond to any pastoral emergencies, as requested, including the possibility that additional victims could come forward, or inquiries are made on their behalf
- provide spiritual leadership and a "non anxious presence"
- provide information about the synod's policies and procedures regarding clergy sexual abuse, discipline, the interim period, and a future call process, where requested. May include providing information about how to contact the bishop in the event other victims come forward.
- model a spirit of respect and concern for the victim(s) and their families, including a stated commitment to maintain confidentiality, avoid gossip and speculation, and to uphold them in prayer; the same is certainly true with respect to the pastor and family
- "direct traffic"—help folks know where they can get help and information as needed

## **With the wider community**

- direct media inquiries to the appropriate, designated spokesperson.

(While most press requests should be directed to the bishop's spokesperson, it is not a bad idea for one person in the congregation, e.g. an elected lay leader like the council president, to have a prepared response for media inquiries. The congregation may wish to have its own press statement, in addition to the synod's, and it should be drawn up in consultation with the bishop's office. In any event, the local press spokesperson—not a crisis team member, and not a staff member—should be thoroughly familiar with both press statements and simply reiterate what they say whenever queried. The spokesperson might have two or three sentences prepared to use in response, "We are deeply concerned about the victim(s) and their family...we are saddened by this news about our pastor...our prayers are with these families, for their healing..." "We are committed to working through this traumatic time and are confident that God's grace will sustain us and the important ministry we have in this community..." [See pages about Press Strategy for details]

- respond to inquiries from neighboring congregations and clergy with basic disclosure information. Likewise, to local service institutions or community groups with which the congregation has a relationship
- provide basic interpretation of clergy sexual abuse and the church's commitment to integrity of ministry and safety for all who seek to participate in the church and receive ministry
- provide basic interpretation of and information about the church's expectations of ministers, the discipline process and the synod's commitment to support the congregation through a crisis and interim period, and to the calling of a new pastor
- model a spirit of honesty, respect, dignity, and concern for the congregation, the victim(s), the pastor, and their families

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **SYNODICAL STAFF MEET**

### **CONGREGATIONAL LEADERS**

“Hello, this is Bishop...I am calling to talk with you about a very serious matter...”

Contact between the bishop and the congregation’s lay leadership about allegations against the pastor of clergy sexual abuse usually begins with a telephone call.

The first thing the congregation needs is information. Reliable, timely, truthful information from the bishop is essential. It need not be an extensive disclosure but it needs to be clear and compelling about why the pastor is gone (or going, or the bishop is taking some action). It is about:

- integrity of the pastoral office and activity
- safety
- abuse of power
- betrayal of trust
- commitment to healing

All of these are key words and concepts to articulate from the beginning.

When the synod has a plan for responding to such crises, the ministry of the bishop’s office and others who are available to extend care may be offered during this first contact.

A meeting time is established and a plan for communicating the news to other key leaders is set up.

It is very helpful for the bishop to arrange to meet with these key leaders, and also with other rostered leaders on staff in the congregation, as soon as possible.

The conference dean, another synodical staff person, or another person utilized by the bishop for this work can accompany the bishop.

Material on the following pages is provided for possible use in conversation and/or planning sessions with congregational leaders and staff, working together to outline responsibilities for the days ahead.

## **Meet with Congregational Leaders**

In advance of disclosure to the full congregation, it is best to meet with lay leaders.

Do not disclose more information to them than you are prepared for the wider community to hear at this time; it is impossible to hold people even to their own best intentions of confidentiality in such matters.

Provide opportunity for them to hear the basic information, ask questions and process their responses.

You may want to have additional staff from the bishop's office or other support for them at this time, depending on the circumstances.

It is important at this time for them to have a sense that

- the synod will not abandon them
- neither will the synod overrun them and take charge
- synod staff and/or other appropriate individuals will be available to support their decision-making and actions in the days and weeks ahead, and to make suggestions
- the pastor is responsible for the misconduct, not the council, the call committee, or any other leaders
- their ministry will continue despite this crisis
- their ministry is still valuable, they are valuable; they are not forever bound by their pastor's misbehavior



## **What do local leaders need to provide their own congregation?**

- a commitment to refrain from gossip and speculation, mean-spirited conversations, and divisiveness
- a commitment to take the crisis seriously and provide resources to deal with it, including for the continuing church staff
- a commitment to move forward in trust and confidence that God will continue to go before them
- a commitment to provide appropriate disclosure, to not cover-up the facts that can be known
- information in a timely manner about plans for interim pastoral ministry, and the ongoing work of the church
- information about ministry activities needing coverage
- presence in worship and at other congregational activities
- information about where to take additional concerns, and how other victims might bring their information forward (when requested)

## **What does the leadership need to do first?**

1. work with the bishop and the bishop's office on plans and implementation of plans for the congregational disclosure
2. work with the bishop to arrange for pastoral care coverage, worship leadership, administrative leadership as needed
3. plan a process for the congregation to deal with the clergy sexual abuse, including forums, educational resources, cottage meetings, availability of counselors or trained response team members

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SYNODICAL LEADERS CARING FOR STAFF**

It is important that other staff in the congregation, including pastoral staff, rostered or non-rostered lay ministers, support staff and custodial staff meet separately with the bishop and/or bishop's staff as soon as possible. Depending on the situation, this meeting may occur just prior to, or just after the meeting with congregational leaders.

The staff probably needs to be part of at least some of the meeting with congregational lay leaders. However, both groups are likely to need time just for themselves to respond honestly to the information.

#### **What do the staff members need?**

- Information about the situation in a timely manner, including basic points to be provided in the disclosure to lay leaders
- Information about what happens next, the extent of their responsibilities for responding to the crisis. Clarity about their role and the roles of others, e.g. bishop's office, crisis team, lay leaders, in the short-term and longer-range
- Opportunity to react and respond to the news in a safe environment, where they are not simultaneously expected to be providing support and care for congregation members

[There is also a page listing staff needs in the Crisis Intervention Teams section of this resource and additional comments in the Pastoral Care Issues section, specifically related to staff issues]

## Staff members need support

All members of the congregational staff, and perhaps especially other pastors on staff, feel like the bottom has dropped out of their professional lives. At the start, it seems as if this will go on forever. They feel conflicted, torn between wanting to reach out and care for the needs of the congregation and caring for each other and their own deeply wounded spirits. They need:

- Support and encouragement from the bishop's office and others, including crisis team members, area pastors and lay leaders, and perhaps counselors or consultants

Staff often become scapegoats for the anger and are recipients of the "ambient anxiety" that is free-floating throughout the congregation. They may be worried about their own safety or tenure, losing support for specific projects, losing friends or trusted colleagues.

It is almost impossible to overstate the difficult position church staff find themselves in during this crisis. Secretaries and others who meet the public, answer the phones and interact with disaffected members are put in a terrible spot and feel isolated and vulnerable.

Besides which, their own conflicted feelings of loyalty to a former colleague or boss mix with feelings of anger and betrayal, anger at the synod or system, and their own free-floating ambient anxiety. These are often ignored or repressed as they respond to the urgent cries of others.

Support from the bishop's office may take the form of a recommendation of a counselor or consultant who can meet with staff members on a regular, on-going basis. Their healing is likely to take longer than others in the congregation.

What else do congregational staff need?

- Release from the responsibility of bearing the bad news to the congregation. This especially sets them up as scapegoats and targets for anger and anxiety, resentment and mistrust.
- Probably, some extra time away from the congregation at a point down the road when it can be spared, for reflection, recreation, and restoration.
- "Space" or permission to not get over this too quickly; while they don't need to wallow in it, the trauma requires time and work for recovery. Frequently, congregational staffs report being expected to be over it more hastily than is realistic.
- Respect and acknowledgement for their work; honor, trust, and affirmations are likely to be slower in coming from lay members
- Safe places to acknowledge their hurt over Christmas gifts that may not come this year, salary increases not given and other benefits not conferred by wary and anxious laity; some intervention and support may be appropriate
- Regular meetings off-site for support and communication, apart from the conduct of business; times to play together
- Regular, weekly days off, all regular vacation and continuing education time. This is absolutely NOT the time to stop this.
- Opportunities to share what they are learning, to give back
- Opportunities to acknowledge sad and glad anniversaries, e.g. when the pastor resigned, when they first met with the bishop, and opportunities to observe with simple rituals the passage of time, e.g. cleaning out the pastor's desk; moments of growth and healing; opportunities to be honest about their feelings

## **Congregational staff need special support**

Not only will it be difficult for some parishioners to trust the pastor who follows the pastor who committed the sexual abuse, it may be hard for them to trust and cooperate with the present staff. This is especially true about other pastors on the staff. Women pastors may be viewed with suspicion by some who identify them with the victims, or with the victims' cause and more easily trusted by others now more wary of men in authority.

It is also possible that one or more staff members was involved in assisting the victim(s) to come forward, and they will be extremely vulnerable to scape-goating and a wide variety of undermining behaviors.

It is also possible that one or more staff members was a victim of the pastor's clergy sexual abuse, or of other forms of abuse of power that often accompany clergy sexual abuse. They may have come forward to the bishop or not. Their experiences may be known to some in the congregation or not. They will feel all the more vulnerable if their employment was threatened by the offending pastor, or their personal safety was threatened by the offending pastor.

It is also possible that one or more staff members was aware, vaguely or definitely, that the clergy sexual abuse was occurring. Their issues of guilt and responsibility need attention.

During the interim period, ministry activities and programs, funding and participation are thwarted and threatened. Morale and confidence wane. Much of the ambient rage is taken out on the remaining staff, on worship attendance and participation in education, and fulfillment of ministry commitments. Staff often have more work to do, with less reward and joy, at the same time as they deal with all of their own issues.

Church secretaries and custodians are often overlooked in the care plans provided for congregational healing. They are the very ones to have developed daily, often quite intimate relationships of sharing and camaraderie with the offending pastor and are most deeply affected by the disclosure and departure. They need specific time and attention, the offer of a listening ear periodically, counseling or a support group.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **WHEN DISCLOSURE IS MADE TO CONGREGATIONS**

### **When is disclosure made?**

As soon as possible after one or more of the following have occurred: the pastor

- admits to clergy sexual abuse and/or
- resigns the call and/or from the clergy roster of the ELCA following allegations of clergy sexual abuse, or
- goes On Leave From Call or is temporarily suspended from the call following the filing of formal discipline charges following allegations of clergy sexual abuse, or
- is removed from the clergy roster or suspended as the result of a formal ELCA discipline proceeding, or
- faces criminal or civil action related to allegations of clergy sexual abuse.

This disclosure may be regarding behavior that has occurred in the current congregation or regarding behavior of the past, or both. In such cases, it is usually helpful for disclosure to be made in all of the congregations, agencies or institutions served by this pastor, especially if it is known that incidence of clergy sexual abuse occurred in that setting. Consideration of this option will involve consultation with bishops of other synods the pastor served and officials of any agencies or institutions the pastor served.

### **Who makes the disclosure?**

- The bishop when at all possible
- An assistant or associate on the bishop's staff, if it is impossible for the bishop to be present

### **Who does not make the disclosure?**

- An interim, supply, or intern pastor
- Another member of the congregation's staff, clergy or lay
- A neighboring pastor, unless the Dean of the Conference is the only synodical leader available to do it
- The successor (called) pastor to the accused
- A lay leader of the congregation
- An outside consultant or counselor

This disclosure is made by the bishop for several ecclesiastical and strategic reasons. While it has been the local congregation's sole responsibility to decide to retain and then to support the ministry of a particular pastor in that setting, an allegation or charge of clergy sexual abuse violates not only that congregation's implicit and explicit expectations for pastoral ministry, but

the behavior violates the constitution of the ELCA. Synodical bishops are constitutionally responsible for discipline of rostered leaders, and thus to report on related matters to the church. Further, this is an occasion for the bishop to extend the pastoral concern of the whole church to this congregation. Strategically, it is a conflict of interest for any individuals within the congregation to be associated with providing this information to the congregation. This is true in cases where the behavior happened in a previous pastorate as much as in cases where it has just occurred. This guideline is so important to the long-term healing process, and to the effective ministry of any current pastors or lay leaders it should be waived only in the most pressing circumstances.

### **Who else may be present?**

- A trained consultant or assistant prepared to work with the congregation
- Counselors, therapists, advisors
- Members of a synodically trained team of pastors and laity who will work with the congregation during the first days of the crisis

### **Who is not present?**

- Members of the press
- Members of the community at large (normally)
- Primary victims of the abuse and immediate family (normally)
- The accused pastor and family (normally)

### **What is disclosed?**

- The fact that the pastor has:
  - been accused of, and/or
  - admitted to, and/or
  - been found guilty of clergy sexual abuse

OR

- The fact that allegations have been investigated and deemed credible and worthy of further disciplinary action,
- The fact that one or more complaining witnesses have prepared a sworn affidavit detailing allegations of sexual contact with the pastor.

It need not be disclosed that the relationship involved specific kinds of sexual contact but it is appropriate,—and usually very important, as the congregation comes to terms with the gravity of the alleged offense and the reason for grave consequences,—to clarify that the sworn statement alleges that intimate sexual contact has occurred. If the sworn affidavit states that sexual intercourse or other genital sexual contact occurred, it is appropriate to disclose this information. In such a disclosure, the bishop is not indicating that a finding of fact has been determined with respect to these particular allegations but that the complaining witness has made a sworn statement to this effect and this statement has become a matter of record.

- If the pastor denied the allegations, that will be disclosed
- The status or the disposition of the allegations, any discipline action pending or completed, or that the pastor resigned after being informed of the allegations and learning of the bishop's decision to file formal charges based on information from the investigation and/or the recommendation of a consultation panel.

### **What other facts are disclosed?**

- The gender of the complainant
- Whether the relationship was heterosexual or homosexual
- Whether the complainant(s) was/were a minor or an adult at the time of the offense
- Whether the behavior occurred recently, several years ago, or many years ago
- Whether or not the sexual relationship continued over a period of time (give general timeframe or length of relationship)
- Whether there is one or more complainant
- If criminal charges are pending or have been filed
- Whether the complainant(s) was a member of a congregation served by the pastor or a person for whom the pastor was providing pastoral care; whether the behavior occurred in this congregation or a previous call.

### **What other information is provided?**

A statement that the victim(s) is receiving appropriate care

A statement about intending to protect the safety of the victims, including refraining from gossip or speculation about their identity

A statement that the pastor is receiving appropriate care [at...or is doing...or is planning... whatever is appropriate]

What will happen next within the congregation:

- including immediate routine pastoral care needs,
- worship leadership and administrative oversight
- care related to the crisis at hand

“This church takes charges of clergy sexual abuse very seriously and seeks to make the church a safe place”, using language that sets the charge in the context of abuse of power, betrayal of trust, integrity of the pastoral office, and the church's concern for justice and healing.



## **What materials may be distributed or made available?**

- A brief description/definition of clergy sexual abuse (cf. One page resource included in this material, page 3)
- Copies of *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*
- Copies of the *Synod's Sexual Misconduct Policy* and, if the matter was subject to formal discipline proceedings, a brief overview of that process, and *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*

## **What information is not provided?**

- Any information that would identify the victim(s) or point to certain individuals as possible victims
- Detailed, speculative, untrue or irrelevant information about the nature of the sexual activity, when or where it occurred

## **How is the disclosure made?**

Disclosure usually happens in ordered stages that include:

- lay leaders of the congregation, especially the lay vice-president or president of the congregation council and the executive committee of the congregation
- the congregation council
- pastoral and lay staff colleagues of the accused
- the entire membership of the congregation via mail with basic facts, and a follow-up meeting to provide more information and interpretation as soon as possible

A telephone call to notify key leaders may precede a meeting with them.

Several of these steps may take place on the same day, within hours or even minutes of each other, especially contact to staff and council.

A letter to the congregation from the bishop may be accompanied by a letter from the lay president or vice president.

A letter to the congregation that may include information about steps already taken (e.g. a meeting with the council) should not be posted until after those actions have indeed taken place as described and/or the council has been consulted.

Worship normally is not the appropriate time for a disclosure; however an announcement might precede worship. A meeting before or following worship works well for some. If possible, the bishop can preside and preach at worship on the Sunday of, or just following the disclosure. If devotions are part of the meeting where disclosure is made, the bishop or an assistant to the bishop should offer them.

## **When is information disclosed beyond the congregation?**

After leaders and staff of the congregation are informed, and depending upon the circumstances; at the same time as a letter is being sent to the entire membership of the congregation, a press statement may be given.

It is important for the trust and morale of the congregation, and for their ongoing relationship with the bishop's office, that letters to the congregation have had a good chance to arrive to all local addresses before issuing any press statement.

Depending upon the circumstances, the Conference Deans can be notified at the time members are receiving their letters.

It is helpful to the morale of neighboring pastors and other rostered leaders in the area if the bishop sends a letter to them with the same basic information as provided to congregation members as soon as possible.

If the press call and request information before you are prepared to provide it, do not deny the facts if they have them. You can explain that your office is responding carefully and will have a statement for them shortly. You may explain that it is important for the church to receive the information from the bishop, for the sake of that pastoral relationship, first, and then you will provide it for the wider public. Do not say "no comment." Don't count on your remarks being "off the record."

If the situation is an especially volatile or high-profile one, you may want to have a press statement ready to go as soon as it is clear that the pastor has either resigned or been removed.

Designate a spokesperson from the bishop's office and direct all requests to that person. Encourage the congregation also to designate one person, an elected lay leader is strongly preferable, (not a staff person) and inform the members to direct all press inquiries to that person.

# CHAPTER 6

## MAKING DISCLOSURE TO THE WIDER PUBLIC

### Community Press Strategy

Prepare a press statement as soon as you know what you plan to disclose to the congregation. However, do not send it out.

Your press statement should include the facts of the matter, including:

- the name and job title of the pastor
- the nature of the allegations  
(cf. What is disclosed, pp 33-34)
- the action taken by the bishop and/or by the pastor in response to the allegations  
(e.g. bishop brought charges, pastor resigned facing charges, admitted sexual misconduct, pastor was removed, suspended...)
- if pastor denies allegations, that is stated
- the number of complainants
- the synod has a policy; the synod used their policy
- the allegations were investigated (if they were)
- what will happen next/commitment to healing

### What additional information can be provided?

It is very helpful for the sake of the church's mission in the community for your press statement to include:

- a statement about the church's commitment to the integrity of ministry and to safety for all individuals who come seeking care, concern about abuse of power and betrayal of trust in the pastoral office
- a statement that briefly notes the church's serious concern about clergy sexual abuse, and the ways we have worked to be responsive and proactive (Some statements have listed resources such as *Safe Connections...*, and training for pastors as examples)
- a statement of concern for the victim(s) and their families, indicate they are receiving care
- a statement of concern for the congregation, and for others who may be especially concerned; indicate the synod's commitment to assist them in healing
- a statement of concern for the pastor/accused and his/her family, indicate they are receiving care
- a brief, factual summary of the pastor/accused's service in the church (Dates, places, job titles; no editorializing or comment praising the person or his/her ministry)
- what comes next for the congregation, e.g. immediate worship and pastoral care needs, crisis care, interim and a word about ELCA process and polity and calling a new pastor
- expression of confidence in those who will lead the congregation through the interim period 37

## **What is not disclosed or provided in any way?**

- do not give information that identifies or points to the identity of the complainant(s). If, in an interview, you are pressed to do so, or to comment on particulars (e.g. the location and precise period of time of the behavior), you can reiterate that the church's primary concern is for the safety and the healing of the victim and you cannot provide any information that might compromise that.
- do not ever just say, "no comment," or "I can't comment about that." There is a reason we can't or won't say certain things and it is important to briefly explain that reason. Do say, "I can't comment because..." Better yet, find something else you can say Don't dodge the question, however. Do speak to it directly.
- do not speculate about why the behavior occurred (e.g. the pastor was going through a divorce) or comment on the character of the pastor/accused or the victim(s)
- do not praise the pastor/accused's ministry using language that is more expressive than simply, "a good pastor for many"
- do not praise or compliment the pastor's integrity or nobility in responding to the allegations (e.g. by resigning) unless you also praise and honor the complainant's courage and integrity in coming forward
- do not comment on the future plans of the pastor/accused (he/she can provide this information if it is requested)
- do not comment on the details of the investigation. You can say that you investigated carefully, followed due process and the synod's policies and procedures carefully, fairly, and completely
- do not become defensive if questioned about the accused's public reaction to the allegations; just reiterate your policy

## **What to do with the press statement?**

In most situations it is not necessary and not appropriate for the synod to issue a press release before it is solicited. But...

Have your plan and your information ready to provide as soon as it is requested. Reporters work on deadline and they will ask someone else if they can't get what they want from you.

Designate a spokesperson from the synod office and provide their phone number with your statement. Make sure that person is always available—at home, on weekends—while the story is "hot".

Have the spokesperson become familiar with everything in the press release, or press statement. Restating what is in the prepared statement in response to questions is the safest and most effective way to stick to your message and avoid getting entangled in other arguments or tangential issues.

Always remember that you can answer questions by restating what you just said, or what is written down. Do not speculate or get off into matters that are not facts.

Do not ever say “no comment.” Do not ever believe that you can really say something “off the record” to a reporter.

Do not make suggestive comments, thinly veiled threats or stabs at identifying the complainant(s).

Do not speculate about the motivation for such behavior on anyone’s part.

Do not deny knowing something that you know. If you know it, however, and cannot reveal it (like the identity of the complainant or the hometown or other revealing information), simply reiterate the part in your statement about concern for the safety of the victim(s) without commenting on their information.

# CHAPTER 7

## HOLDING A CONGREGATIONAL MEETING

### Living with the truth

Disclosure is telling the truth about what has happened. The next step involves each person honestly acknowledging their reactions to this truth.

Each member of the congregation will need somehow to do this. It may come naturally in the context of a staff gathering, a council meeting, a regularly scheduled small group, Bible study, confirmation class or choir rehearsal. Some will need privacy and more time alone.

It is important for the sake of the congregation—for its unity and mission—as it experiences and responds to the impact of this trauma, that members cross these routine or natural lines and come together in a plenary session to listen, talk, and pray. Groups are often gathered around affinities and common perspectives; it is especially important in the wake of this crisis for people to hear other voices and to be heard by others, as well.

If the congregation continues to process the information only in private or only in the context of existing affinity groups and “camps” within the community, specific reactions may harden and create deeper rifts and serious conflicts in the future.

Do everything you can to encourage a broad-based congregational meeting as early as possible after disclosure.

### Setting up the congregational meeting

In small to medium-sized congregations, it is likely that a large cross-section of concerned members can gather all together in a parish hall.

In a larger congregation, it may work better to have two or more identical sessions that members can choose.

Or, depending upon space accommodations, two concurrent meetings might be held in different rooms, with some reporting back and forth at appropriate times.

All of these options are preferable to lots of small meetings that are likely to draw people primarily according to existing affinity lines.

Disclose

React

Respond

Plan

The congregational meeting might occur at the same time as, or immediately following, the disclosure. Some prefer this option; others believe it is probably better to provide a period of several days between the disclosure and this gathering.

## **Purpose of the congregational meeting**

The congregational meeting is designed carefully to allow members to:

- react honestly in expressing fears and concern
- shape their ongoing responses with integrity

The meeting is an opportunity to:

- ventilate feelings
- gather more information
- receive support
- hear the perspectives of others
- ask “what if” questions
- experience some of the stages of grief
- set the offending behavior in the context of pastoral ministry, as a betrayal of trust, abuse of power, breach of the integrity and purpose of the pastoral office
- grow as a community through a common experience
- begin to think constructively about the future

## **Participation in the meeting**

If all members of the congregation are unable or unlikely to attend, it is important to have participation from all strata and groups, constituencies and even “cliques” within the congregation.

No one will be expected to be a representative of anyone else; however, individuals may be encouraged to share what they learn at the meeting with those they are close to.

Do whatever is necessary to let every member know

when

where

how long

what is involved with this meeting.

An active communication strategy is essential. Information about this meeting might be included in the letter of disclosure sent to all members. If the congregation has an active constituency of “friends,” and other stakeholders, you might include them now or at a future time.

Never assume people are not interested because they are relatively inactive, new, or marginal. They may be the ones who most need this event.

Those on the margins may have been victimized in some way, if not even sexually, by the pastor. If they choose to attend, it can be an important step in their healing and return to active participation.

## **Facilitators and small group leaders for the congregational meeting**

Each congregation has unique resources in and around it to assist in times of crisis, such as this. It is important for the congregation's lay leaders to take a key role in planning for the process of healing to begin.

Your synod may have identified people who can lead a congregational meeting, such as LSS staff, other consultants, a cadre of trained synodical volunteers, the conference dean, synodical staff, or local counselors. Staff members of the congregation should not serve in this way, or as small group leaders for the congregational meeting.

If a synodical "crisis intervention team" is available, those people can help lay leaders to identify individuals within the congregation who might serve as small group leaders for a congregational meeting. Otherwise, the council or other key group can recruit small group leaders (that may or may not include council members).

Small group leaders for the congregational meeting need to be good listeners, fair and open-minded, not strongly identified with any faction or perspective related to the issue at hand, assertive and capable of keeping the group to its task, and compassionate.

Small group leaders for this congregational meeting do not themselves need to have expertise about clergy sexual abuse. Their job is not to teach but to make sure the conversation is fair and kind and open. If it is possible for them to read something about clergy sexual abuse in advance, it will be helpful. (e.g. *Safe Connections*) Some congregations have asked their Stephen Ministers to serve in this way. Or lay members with training as counselors, teachers, human resource and organizational development specialists. Or simply those who are wise, sympathetic, strong, and well-regarded by others.

If possible, it is a good idea for the small group leaders to meet, however briefly, with the overall meeting facilitator in advance. Some congregations invite their leaders to a small-scale version of the same kind of meeting of their own, in advance, to have a chance to process some of their own reactions and express their concerns before having to concentrate on facilitating the process for others. This is very helpful and a good investment of time and energy, for them and those they will serve!

## **Planning the congregational meeting**

Sunday afternoons work well in some settings. You may wish to schedule this meeting for mid-afternoon through supper, say from 2:30 until 7:00. Saturdays are good; an evening start is not ideal.

Plan on about four hours for this whole process to work best.

Encourage everyone to make the commitment for the entire time.

If you include a meal, make it very simple and, if at all possible, served by non-members, so everyone can fully participate in all of the parts of the meeting.

It is better to have the meeting in the parish hall, using tables or several circles of chairs. Meeting in the church's own building is important symbolically: "We tell the truth here and deal with difficult but important matters here." It is better not to meet in the sanctuary or another



formal setting that is not conducive to free conversation.

The meeting is planned cooperatively by the bishop or someone designated by the bishop (may be a synod staff member, crisis intervention team or appropriate committee member, or a consultant), lay leaders of the congregation and any outside consultants or counselors chosen by the council to participate.

Lay leaders may identify congregational members with gifts for facilitating small groups during the meeting. They will need to have a brief meeting for orientation prior to the congregational gathering.

Invite one or two local counselors or therapists to be present, not to provide leadership but simply to observe and to be available to any experiencing visible and significant distress.

Prepare a resource list to be provided to members at the meeting, including information about church-related, community, and other local mental health care providers. The number of a local hot-line for sexual abuse concerns is helpful information to some.

Take care with “creature comfort” issues: snacks, beverages, tissues, resource materials, enough markers, room temperature

Make sure all technical materials are in good order. Plan on using an easel or chalkboard, microphone, podium and head table, and, perhaps, a VCR or overhead projector. Identify in advance one or two quiet or private rooms where individuals may retreat.

Most of your heroic measures—having therapists on hand, the phone number of a crisis hot-line, private space—will not be needed. However, it is far better to be over-prepared and able to respond appropriately than to be distracted by the stress of a wrinkle unprepared for. On the occasions when such measures are used, they have been absolutely essential, not only for the individuals who needed them but for the sake of the whole group’s process. They send a message, also, of serious concern for all.

Make sure the facilitator for the meeting is skilled at doing this kind of meeting, with this particular issue-abuse of power.

[To be sure, there are not many people around with special training to do this work, yet. However, as you study this resource, and become clear about the issues related to clergy sexual abuse, you are gaining skills to do this work. As you train and teach others in your synod, you prepare them to do it. Synod staff, group process leaders, conflict mediation specialists, and other consultants with skills in teaching and facilitating groups can become very helpful in this area. Most conflict mediation/management specialists traditionally have not trained especially to deal with abuse of power and betrayal of trust issues. As they add this essential, specific content to their basic training, they will be very useful in these cases.]

### **Is this an open meeting?**

It is essential for the healing process that all members of the congregation are aware of the meeting, with reasonable advance notice, and have a reasonably fair opportunity to attend.

This is not a secret meeting. It is not closed to certain circles of the church’s membership.

Depending on the nature of the charges in question, parents and congregational leaders can use

discretion in deciding about the merits of having high school youth participate in this meeting. Young people are more savvy than we often know, not only about sexual matters but about interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, and matters of trust, betrayal, and integrity. It can be very helpful for their sake if they can participate, and their contributions are often valuable to the whole group.

Normally, it is not inappropriate for active “friends” of the congregation (e.g. those who attend and participate regularly but, for some reason, are not officially members) to be part of such a meeting.

However, this meeting is not open to the wider community.

Do not invite or inform the press of your meeting. If the press learn of it, explain that this is not a public meeting for the purposes of conducting business. Do explain its purpose in the healing process.

This is a gathering of the community to speak honestly and compassionately together about a difficult matter as it affects them.

Explain that, for the safety of church members and the sake of the community (the church congregation), the meeting is not open to the media. (If any members are also journalists, you may want to speak to them in advance about this concern. They are welcome to participate, but not to report out in any way, except to say it occurred.)

## **THE MEETING**

### **Disclosure/telling the truth**

The bishop, or someone designated by the bishop opens the meeting with very brief devotions.

A lay leader may introduce the bishop or designee, and/or the meeting facilitator.

[Congregational staff (rostered or lay) may be viewed (fairly or not) as having an “agenda,” a stake in the outcome, or may be identified with the offending pastor or the victim(s).

Therefore, it is best to not have another pastor of the congregation or any other staff member serve in a leadership role in this meeting, even as host. An elected lay leader at the highest level is best for this role.]

A summary of the disclosure is given. Basic facts are told and the truth is provided. [Cf. Chapter 5 for specifics.] It is not necessary to provide this information in written form.

If this is the first time a public disclosure is given, it is best if told by the bishop. If the bishop has provided a disclosure at a special meeting earlier, it is appropriate for the leader of the meeting, or for another synodical leader to make the disclosure statement.

If the bishop previously made a disclosure statement to the congregation, and is not available at this meeting, it is still best for congregational staff members to be released from this responsibility. An elected lay leader can make the disclosure statement at this time, provided the person can make such a report dispassionately. Care must be given to the objectivity of this report.

If an outside facilitator makes the disclosure statement at this congregational meeting, after the bishop or other synodical official has made a disclosure at an earlier meeting, it will be important to the overall success of the process if it is nevertheless understood that this is the congregation's information now and is being provided for the congregation's benefit at the request of congregational leaders. It will not be helpful if it appears that the basic information being disclosed has not been heard by the leadership of the congregation; or that it is not their decision to make this basic disclosure to the congregation.

Questions for clarification are appropriate.

Answers to questions about the specific effect of the abuse on this complainant, and similar questions, are normally not provided, unless they are catastrophic and known to some.

If a question is asked for which an answer is known but not appropriate to disclose, even if several people seem to know, it is not necessary or appropriate to confirm it. It is possible to say, "for the sake of the safety of the complainant..." or whatever is specifically relevant. Try to explain why you won't answer such questions.

"No comment" is not helpful in this setting, either.

Rude and outrageous comments and outbursts are not uncommon. It is helpful for the leader(s) to refrain from feeding this reactivity by registering an angry or spirited response. Reflective, thoughtful responses—not passive acquiescence or vigorous denunciations—demonstrate respect for individuals and compassion for their underlying concerns without shaming them. Defensive, furious reactions to the anger that is out there will only feed the reactivity in the group and allow that reactive energy to control the agenda. The "non-anxious" presence is crucial at such times!

## **React**

The point of the meeting is not, finally, to convince everyone in the congregation to adopt a common view of what happened, what it means, and why the consequences are reasonable and fair. The point of this meeting is to provide a place to exchange views in a fair manner, to listen, to react, to express feelings, anxiety, and opinions in an open manner, and to signal the congregation that respectful openness in ongoing interaction is the healthiest way to get through this crisis.

Following the period of time set aside for disclosure-related presentation and questions, a skilled facilitator leads the group through the process of reacting and responding.

Several ground rules and expectations are stated:

- Respect for the person speaking; no interrupting
- Refrain from accusations, ridicule, or demeaning acts
- Agree about expectations of confidentiality  
(It is not realistic to impose too strict a standard, especially in the plenary setting)

Ground rules for small group or table conversation will be stated:

- Each person is free to speak or not speak
- Everyone who wishes to speak shall do so once before others speak again, or the group becomes focused on one particular point in response to an early speaker
- Confidentiality shall be maintained according to a standard the entire group agrees upon at the start of their conversation. (Be clear: does this mean you do or do not even tell your spouse?)

The overall process for the meeting is explained.

Schedule and other housekeeping matters are cared for at this time.

Beginning the conversation

Depending on the situation, (size and other dynamics of the group), it may work for participants to be invited to speak in the plenary setting about their initial feelings regarding the situation: regret, gratitude, worry, anger, denial of wrong-doing, fear for future ministry or for vulnerable individuals.

The well-known stages of grief are evident, plus others:

- denial,
- bargaining,
- ambivalence/distancing/disassociation
- shock and disbelief/numbness
- confusion
- shame
- pre-occupation with minutiae
- blaming/scapegoating anger
- cynicism
- depression and sadness about the situation
- desolation and fear about future relationships, betrayal righteous anger (more related to issues, the problem, systemic concerns)
- stoic determination
- acceptance and integration: let's make a plan!

It is important for the leader to affirm without judgment, positive or negative, these expressions as honest reactions to the news.

## Small group discussions

Small groups are an essential part of this process.

Group leaders from within the congregation do not need special training about clergy sexual abuse, but it is helpful for them to have read resources such as *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*.

Groups may divide naturally, or if possible, encourage participants to be part of a small group that will include some they know well and others they don't know, or who are not part of their usual circle.

Ideally, a mix of familiarity and the unknown—safety and risk—in this setting provides for the new and different perspectives we hope participants encounter, yet within a context of respect and comfort.

The groups may convene around tables in one large room or move into smaller rooms around the building. The second option is usually best unless the tables are fairly far apart. The quality of the discussion is strongly affected by the physical arrangements: crowded, noisy circles that are interrupted frequently and do not provide a sense of safety or confidentiality are not conducive to the kind of conversation you are working so hard to encourage.

The small groups begin with a reminder about the “ground rules” and expectations and a question to each participant about their willingness to keep them.

If the agreement about confidentiality seems unlikely to hold, it is better to be honest about this upfront than to set people up to be betrayed later on. Certain revelations may prove all but impossible to hold confidential. Be clear about this.

Most important: encourage a spirit of respect and openness, to believe that others can have different perspectives that grow out of their very different life experiences and these, too, are honest, honorable and useful. This is hard work!

A word here about dialogue and group process. Honest dialogue is almost impossible to accomplish. However, it is a rich resource that is always transformative for everyone involved, whenever it truly occurs. In a dialogue:

- no one is superior or inferior to others,
- no one is right or wrong,
- each contribution is valued as a part that helps to constitute the whole,
- each person has a piece of what is needed by all,
- each participant “owns his or her own stuff,” and
- each participant uses “I” statements.

While the purpose of these small groups is not necessarily a transformative dialogue, but, rather, simply the honest exchange of important, vulnerable feelings, experiences, ideas, and hopes, it is true that the eventual integration and acceptance needed for healing, both individually and corporately, is certainly promoted by this quality of interaction.

In many congregations, this is the very first experience many people have of honest, disciplined conversation about such difficult matters. The added value of this process is creating a shared experience, and new insights, trust and respect that become the basis of new relationships and patterns in relationship, greater health in other decision-making, and deeper compassion throughout the congregation.

After clarifying these ground rules and expectations is time for the group leader to invite members to express their feelings in reaction to this news.

Expressions of shock, disbelief, denial, disgust, hurt, cynicism, acceptance, rage, betrayal, uncertainty, ambivalence, and many other emotions might surface.

Some may wonder if it is okay to share, or even to hold, positive personal memories of the pastor and his or her ministry.

Wistful remembrances and statements of confusion about “how can this be happening?” are common.

Some will be defiant in expressing gratitude for the pastor’s ministry and complain about the injustice of these consequences.

“Why does it have to have such a result?” questions are common.

It is an important part of grieving to remember the good, the positive, the life-changing moments. Some will wonder if this taints the baptisms or weddings performed by the pastor. Some will express fury at having allowed this person to get close or to provide an intimate form of ministry such as a family funeral.

Others will focus on the questions related to process, justice for the pastor and will question the veracity of the complaint.

Some will express “what if” statements: what if he hadn’t even come here, what if the call committee had done its job better, what if he or she...hadn’t gotten that divorce...worked so hard...lost their child in that accident, etc.

Others will blame the bishop, the council, the call committee, the pastor’s spouse, the victim(s).

It is common for church members who looked up to and even loved their pastor to express sentiments that include:

- mitigating
- minimizing
- rationalizing
- negotiating
- scapegoating
- obfuscating/splitting hairs about the nature of the offense

The group leader takes careful notes (without attributing names) and speaks only to give brief answers to questions of fact.

When everyone has had a chance to speak, short responses to one another may be given, or questions asked for further consideration.

“I statements” are still preferred.

This is not the time to begin resolving issues.

The group leader concludes this session with an expression of thanks and respect to the participants for their willingness to share honestly and to listen respectfully and express care for one another, and a reminder about the commitment made to confidentiality.

## **Plenary presentation**

Plenary group time follows immediately. Members may comment about how their process felt, but not sum up the substance.

A brief presentation from the leader outlines the stages of grief and their relevance to this experience.

Emphasize importance of respect for the different places people are at with their grief at any given time, the ways we bounce back and forth, not necessarily progressing through the stages, but moving across them, in a circle rather than on a ladder. It is normal to feel first one way, then another. We learn from others and we are supported and challenged by others. There is no one right way to react to this.

Bishop Chilton Knudsen (Episcopal Diocese of Maine) has created “The Healing Wheel”—a helpful diagram, that illustrates the stages of grief in a circular, pie-cut (not a linear) image. We may enter the circle at any point, and any point is a “right” one to start with. We move around the circle, not down a fixed, progressive, relentless line toward healing. We move or skip across the wheel, not always in a progressive circle. We may have one foot in two different parts of the circle at once, or like the game of Twister, we may be wobbling on several different sectors of the circle at a time. All of us are together on the wheel.

Some of us will stay in one part of the circle, or grief process, for a long time, while others will practically skip right over it. Some of us will have huge slices of the circle that are for one aspect of the grief process, like denial or depression, and tiny slices for other aspects. And we will all experience it differently.

This helps to emphasize the reality that there is no one right place for everyone to be at the same time except that everyone is somewhere on that wheel. That is the basis for our empathy.

A copy of the healing wheel may be requested from this author at the address on the front page of this resource. All synods of the ELCA received a copy of the healing wheel from this office in an earlier collection of materials.



## **Take a break!**

It is important to schedule time for breaks in this meeting. A few people will leave. Say a word about what is coming up next, before you adjourn, stressing the importance of sticking with the whole process. Allow for about 20 minutes, possibly providing a snack.

(It is best not to have taken a long break earlier because it disrupts the connection between getting information and expressing feelings about that information. Reacting to the disclosure information is key, and reacting to it in the context of the small groups, rather than in selfselected circles, is most helpful. And then, providing some immediate interpretation of the kinds of feelings and reactions expressed in the group affirms the variety of expressions and reactions in the group.)

Quiet, taped music is a helpful background for this time, and offers not only a chance for relaxation but for participants to use other parts of their intelligence. It can prompt creativity and reduce stress.

## **Response**

Plenary presentation follows this break. The leader provides a context for understanding about clergy sexual abuse. This is not the four-hour workshop; this is the fifteen to thirty minute synopsis.

A brief paper, What is clergy sexual abuse? may be summarized and distributed.

Pages from Safe Connections can be distributed, or over-head transparencies can be made from specific pages and shown. (e.g. pages 27-30, 31-34, 36-37, 49-52)

The key issues to identify include:

- Betrayal and misuse of the purpose of the pastoral office
- Abuse of power and the resources of the pastoral office
- Betrayal of trust in a pastoral relationship
- Betrayal of the congregation's trust
- How is this "not just an affair?"
- How is the pastor always in charge of the pastoral relationship even when he or she loses control over the projections, expectations, provocations and other behavior of the parishioner?
- What are this church's expectations of pastors?
- What is the purpose of church discipline?
- How are discipline and forgiveness mutually inclusive, not mutually exclusive? Why do we need both?

A promise to provide more information, including other opportunities for discussion, is usually welcome.



*Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse* is published by the ELCA for precisely this purpose. It is available as described at the start of this resource, or perhaps from your synod office. Congregations often make several copies available at this meeting for members to take. Pages may be copied and distributed or used as overhead illustrations.

Specific cases involving pedophilia, criminal sexual assault or other violence, severe mental breakdown or suicide will require interpretive comment specific to the circumstance. It is very important to clarify differences between pedophilia, ephebophilia and homosexuality. If it is known that the complainant was an intern or staff colleague of the supervising pastor, these unique power dynamics must be interpreted, probably by someone expert in a relevant professional discipline.

This educational material will not result in a magical resolution of grief or misunderstandings. It is an essential context and it is important for these things to be said out loud and in the hearing of a significant number of the people.

Naming reality is part of the cathartic healing process and it is a building block for justice, too.

Some questions for clarification or development are in order but it is not advised to enter into lengthy discussion or to over-develop any one of the points at this time. Agree to follow-up later.

It is tempting for some people to use their heads instead of their emotions and seek to engage in arcane discussion of psycho-dynamics or biblical views on sexuality or such matters. If serious questions and concerns are evident, they may become the subject of a subsequent meeting or adult forum.

## **Shift gears**

It is time, then, to move from this more didactic material back to matters of feeling. The size and dynamics of the group will dictate the choice of plenary or small groups for this. Invite reflections on what has happened, by asking questions such as,

- Why does this sort of thing happen?
- How do gifted leaders fall into such behaviors?
- What does it mean for the ministry here?

What other questions come to people's minds?

What are they wondering about?

Worried about? Confused? Disappointed? Hurt? Angry?

You are looking for responses, personal reflections, not answers.

Use the same dialogical process and ground rules as before. You may find that people are moving in and out of different stages, (or perhaps better to call them expressions of grief.) You may want to note this briefly.

The purpose is to provide a time to set this experience in some context, to hear and learn from the reflections of others. It is not to make sure everyone understands clergy sexual abuse, power

differentials or mental illness. However, conversation is allowed, after all have spoken that want to, and the group is welcome to respond to questions raised by others, to offer their own ideas and to make suggestions, respectfully. Group leaders can help keep this from becoming too didactic. Keep people saying, “I feel...” “I think...”

From this, move into reflections about the spiritual impact of this experience, or the spiritual resources they bring to it.

- Where is God in all this?
- Has it affected their faith?

This may be the place where questions of forgiveness come up, if they haven’t already.

What is the most important theological—or faith—question in all this?

What is the most important theological—faith—issue in this?

What of the meaning of community in Christ?

- trustworthiness
- faithfulness
- grace
- forgiveness
- discipline

What about the distinction between being a member of the community and a privileged leader, with unique resources, in it?

What does grace mean for them now? The cross? Resurrection? The ministry of the Holy Spirit?

Is anyone thinking about the victim? Their struggle, their need for compassion and solidarity?

What does this mean for outreach?

A bit of guidance is appropriate if the group is speechless; silence, of course, is good, too, for a period of reflection.

## **Make Plans**

Looking ahead is the last step for this meeting. This may be done after another break. It may be done over the meal, or just after a short break. This is not the time for long range planning but for identifying issues, questions, concerns that will require attention.

- What is the impact of this on our congregation?
- What is likely to happen as a consequence?
- What are some needs that require immediate response, either related to the crisis or in the absence of this pastor?
- What do people fear will happen?

- Who needs reaching out to? Who can do what?
- After the earthquake, the group may assess damage:
  - Is anyone still buried in the debris?
  - Who will find and care for them?
  - What walls have tumbled or cracked?
  - What bricks are missing?
  - Is the power still out or surging out into a vacuum?
  - Are lines of communication ruptured?
  - Where are the fractures in relationships?
  - What gaping holes are there to be fallen into?
  - What is waiting to trip us up?
  - Is the structure basically sound?
  - Who ran away in fear?
  - Can we help them come back?

These and other questions may occupy the group in plenary, or at tables. It will be important to record and report out these findings and recommendations.

The group can then decide who is taking responsibility for the next steps: the council? a special task force? Not the staff on their own! Will a consultant be engaged?

## **Wrapping it up**

Topics and/or resources for future meetings might be proposed.

Some congregations invite a victim from another situation, one who now considers herself or himself a survivor of clergy sexual abuse, to provide that perspective and to help the congregation identify ways to care for the victims in their midst.

Other issues might include:

- boundary setting,
- re-establishing trust,
- realistic expectations of pastors,
- healthy partnerships, and
- vulnerability.

Many congregations will come to conclude, at some point, that they want to look at making sure they provide a safer environment throughout the congregation, not only in the pastor/parishioner relationship. This is a fine idea. Some will seek guidance about establishing policies and procedures regarding lay volunteer contact, especially with children and youth. Some will seek

to create guidelines or codes of ethics regarding relationships between lay members about such concerns as confidentiality, gossip, fulfilling pledges and promises. All of these are appropriate directions to go. However, sometimes a congregation will move off in one of these directions so quickly as to create distance and distraction from having to deal with unfinished sorrow and anger, confusion and concern regarding clergy sexual abuse. It is good to be aware of these potential dynamics and to encourage attention, first of all, to matters related to the integrity of the pastor/parishioner relationship. All else can follow from that in due time.

## **A prayerful conclusion**

It is especially important for this gathering to be concluded with prayer, thanking God for the gifts of those present, their time and commitment, for the firm foundation of our faith, for courage and faithfulness, for new life, for grace and hope, for the promises of forgiveness and peace, for healing and for the gift of making witness to the gospel in community with God's people, and for our unity in Christ.

Scripture texts may be used as a blessing and dismissal.

(cf. Romans 15:5-6  
1 Corinthians 15:58; 16:13  
Colossians 3:12-17)

Thank the people for coming, for what they have given to the church, for what they gave at this event, and for their commitment to the future. Thank those who gave leadership and assistance. Thank the bishop and the synodical staff, and others in the synod who have given assistance.

Say a word about expectations:

- keeping faith with the process and the agreements made
- about the next steps—what will happen now?

Encourage them to keep one another, the victims, the pastor and their families, the bishop and staff, and all else concerned and involved, in their prayers.

- Go in peace!
- Love and serve the Lord!

## **A few final comments...**

It is important to not include prayers that give praise and gratitude for the ministry of the pastor without also remembering to give prayers of thanks for the courage and faith of the victims, and to ask God to continue to heal and care for them, and for their families.

Victims usually choose not to attend these meetings. If they do, they may be invisible, or silent. If they are present, and you know who they are, keep a watch to assure they are not being assailed. If they ask if they should come or not, it may be best to recommend they save their participation for another time, unless their own healing journey is well-underway. Even so, this kind of conversation is likely to be very painful. While respecting the victims and their families, it is important for members of the congregation to have their own opportunity to interact honestly with this crisis. Victims who choose to attend will need to agree to the same ground

rules of respect, even for those who are at points in their own process that might prompt them to make statements that are very hurtful for the victim to hear, e.g. about what a loss this is or how wonderful the pastor was. For that reason, victims often choose not to attend this kind of meeting at this time. Ideally, at some point down the road, they will all be able to sit down together, grieve honestly and openly together, and be reconciled. These same dynamics apply to the family of the offending pastor.

If the synod has chosen to use a crisis response team, it is ideal if this meeting can occur during their ministry. They can be group facilitators, or recorders as others lead. They will be very helpful to lay leaders who debrief the gathering and plan their next steps.

## **CHAPTER 8**

# **ADDRESSING PASTORAL CARE ISSUES: SOME INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS**

### **Impact on individuals**

Each person in the congregation will experience the aftermath of the clergy sexual abuse and the departure of the pastor in their own way. While it may be difficult for those who provide pastoral leadership in the aftermath of this “earthquake” to meet the needs of each one personally, it is very important to provide opportunities for each person to express their concerns and to be heard.

In the same way that clergy sexual abuse will have very different consequences in a variety of different congregations, because of factors in those congregations such as history of abuse or betrayal, history of health or conflict, emotional strength and capacity to withstand difficult challenges, strong leadership skills, external resources, and other variables, so it goes with individuals within those congregations.

Likewise, inasmuch as the same events can cause different trauma in different places simply because that’s the way the ground shook, so it is with individuals. It is impossible to predict with precision, and it is inappropriate to judge, the different ways different people react and respond to crisis.

It is impossible for us to know for sure who it is, in any given community, who is suffering the most. We may assume it is the person who looks most upset, while we miss knowing about the silent agony of one who cannot speak up. We may assume we know who is most vulnerable, and many times we are right. But, we might not know that another is secretly suffering in exactly the same way.

Therefore, it behooves us to be tender and careful of all individuals who have been affected by news of clergy sexual abuse in their congregation or community. We just don’t know who is reliving old wounds, or whose deep scars have been torn open again.

Some individuals will appear to be strong at first, and highly skilled at treating the wounds of others, only to collapse later. Some will have strong, emotional reactions at first, but then find and draw upon their deep inner resources. Some who appear unscathed are, in fact, numb. Or they are so cynical as to seem disinterested.

It is not uncommon, when someone we know experiences a particular kind of crisis, for others who have had a similar experience to come forward for the first time and tell of how they faced this problem. It is often healing for both parties to this conversation to share their stories and to draw strength from one another. However, in the case of a sexual trauma, it is still unlikely for individuals who have had similar experiences to feel safe and free to come forward in this same way. The intimate nature of their suffering, and the stigma and judgment we impose on them is often intimidating enough to reinforce their silence.

When individuals who have experienced abuse and betrayal in their life come face to face with information about clergy sexual abuse, it stirs up all of their old pain. We need to know that

such individuals will always be part of the communities we serve and seek to reach with these ministries of healing. We cannot expect that they will feel safe in coming forward with their stories, yet we must always know they are there.

As we work in congregations in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse, we can be persistent in suggesting that pastoral care is available, that referrals to counseling are available, and that healing is possible!

Issues about trustworthiness, wariness of power, concerns over faithfulness in commitments, worry about confidentiality, consistency, boundaries (too close or too loose), and matters related to integrity are common for individuals who have been abused in some way. These issues will become reactive for them now, again, even if they were not a primary victim of this abuse. It will have an affect on their relationship to the community, but we can also express concern for the impact it will have in other aspects of their lives.

So far, this resource has been primarily about the needs of the whole congregation, the system, the community. Beyond our interest in the way that individual reactions to the abuse do have an impact on the congregation as a whole, we want to honor our common conviction that the healing love of God is extended in unique ways to specific people with their own particular needs.

Thus, while not intending to provide an extensive brief on pastoral care and counseling, we want to say something about the particular pastoral care needs of different individuals, and groups of people, within the congregation. We especially recommend other resources, including those listed in the extensive bibliography at the end of *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*.

Individuals who were directly involved in a sexual relationship with the pastor, and are still part of the congregation, may be hidden in the mass of sorrow and confusion. One or more of them may be known to the bishop; others may still be hidden. If the sexual abuse that occasioned the pastor's departure occurred in a prior ministry setting, victims in the current congregation may be reeling in silent and invisible grief and utter disbelief. If the reported sexual abuse occurred in this setting, it is not unlikely that other victims are yet to come forward.

These individuals and their families are top priority for pastoral care. Care can be extended to them in a number of ways, even before or without ever knowing of their identity.

Family members of the offending pastor often are still in the congregation. While the object of great sympathy, people often feel conflicted about how best to reach out to them and, consequently, these good intentions are left unrealized.

Congregational staff members, rostered and lay, full and part-time, feel a flood of confusing and often conflicting emotions. At the same time, they are called upon to provide extra measures of leadership, support, and work volume. These caregivers are often left to fend for themselves.

Lay leaders of the congregation bring a variety of reactions, including guilt, anger, denial, fear, burn-out, and worry. Those who served on the call committee that brought the offending pastor into the congregation may be feeling overly responsible (and may have been blamed for the problem by others). Mutual ministry committee and council members may feel they let everyone else down.

Listening carefully and responding with compassion, openness, and honest concern to these people is the most important aspect of pastoral care. Some may be invited to meet in small groups with others who have similar concerns and experiences. It is helpful for them to see how they can continue to be there for support of one another through the months to come. Guidance in these initial conversations, modeling of a non-judgmental, accepting, and respectful atmosphere, and giving clarity about expectations for these ongoing conversations will provide tools to the congregation to assist in their healing.

In the first days and weeks after the departure of the offending pastor, pastoral care may be extended by the bishop's office in several ways:

- A member of the bishop's staff may be available to meet with concerned individuals on a sign-up appointment basis.
- Members of the synod's crisis response team may meet with individuals and/or arrange for appropriate pastoral care for them.
- Neighboring pastors who have demonstrated skills in this ministry may be asked to provide this pastoral care to one or more individuals.
- Lutheran agencies and institutions with mental health services, ELCA pastors in the area who are CPE supervisors, pastoral counselors, or trained chaplains may be requested to be available for groups or individuals.

It is our strong recommendation that all who enter the congregation to provide this pastoral care be versed in the dynamics of clergy sexual abuse, besides other kinds of congregational conflict and organizational dynamics.

The issues involved when a pastor has violated the boundaries of trust and expectation, and has abused the power of the pastoral office are not exactly the same as other types of congregational conflict.

Many congregations have discovered that these unique dynamics and concerns are not addressed when a traditional conflict mediation or family systems approach to conflict resolution is engaged without a particular sensitivity to the unique issues that are part of the problem of clergy sexual abuse.

This same recommendation applies with respect to any consultants or counselors engaged to assist the entire congregation in its healing work as a whole.

It is also recommended that close personal friends and colleagues of the offending pastor not be among those who bring this ministry; indeed they will need to receive ministry at this very point. Those who come to provide pastoral care are most effective if they feel free to hear all points of view without feeling defensive for the offending pastor, the profession, or the church. Their role is not to judge, correct, or reprove, but to listen, receive, support, and guide.



## **Pastoral care for the offending pastor**

Pastoral care for the pastor who has engaged in clergy sexual abuse is a serious and important ministry.

We do not include a special section about it in this resource for two primary reasons:

- care for pastors who have committed clergy sexual abuse is a complex matter. It often involves difficult, psychodynamic issues that are integrally related to traditional, apparent spiritual and pastoral care issues. This matter requires its own careful treatment. In fact, such treatments are in existing literature. Replicating that work and offering our own treatment is beyond the scope of this effort.
- this resource is specifically about healing within congregations where abuse has occurred. Healing for pastors is a matter distinct from the focus of this material, which is the congregation itself and those who continue its life and ministry. We do treat the subject of clergy families because they often remain, all of them or some part of the family, at least for a time, within the congregation and have an impact on its healing process. It is sadly true that the families of abusing pastors are generally neglected in most other treatments of this general subject.

## **CHAPTER 9**

# **ADDRESSING PASTORAL CARE ISSUES: FOR PRIMARY VICTIMS OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

It is helpful for the primary victims of clergy sexual abuse to meet directly with the bishop at some point. Many bishops see this as a meeting to establish the veracity of the complaint and to clarify matters related to the charge against the pastor. And so it is.

At the same time, this meeting is an occasion for the bishop, as a representative of the church, to express deep pastoral concern for the victim. The victim may or may not feel comfortable talking in detail with the bishop about his or her intimate relationship with the pastor. If others have heard this story, it is not necessary for the bishop to hear it again. It is a sign of pastoral concern for the victim to not require a recital of painful information one more time.

Many victims, rather than tell about the intimate details of the abusive relationship, would like to tell the bishop about the pain this abuse has caused in their life, and that of their loved ones. This is an important moment for pastoral care! Listening, hearing, receiving, and responding in tenderness and respect is vital. Trust is fragile. Yet, victims of abuse often come forward because they need to know that the church will take steps appropriate to keep others from being hurt. As we listen graciously to their stories, or to their concerns, we are encouraging them in their faith.

The bishop is not, however, the primary provider of pastoral care for the victim. The bishop can encourage the victim to find a trusted source of pastoral care, or perhaps can make some suggestions. It is important for the victim to make this decision personally, to not feel coerced or compromised in this decision in any way. This is an important part of the healing process.

Pastoral care is not the same thing and does not take the place of counseling or psychotherapy, where indicated. If counseling is desired, the victim will want and need to make this decision personally, and to choose licensed, trained professionals with special skills for psychotherapy.

Pastoral care is for the purpose of connecting the life of the victim to God's provision of grace and mercy, healing and justice. Pastoral care shines the spotlight of God's love on the particular wounds and needs of the individual. It seeks to remind and assure the victim of the promises of God and of the way these promises are relevant to the specific needs she or he is experiencing.

This pastoral care connects the person in need to the larger church in the sense that pastoral care is offered and extended by one caring minister, on behalf of the larger community. At a time when victims feel terribly isolated and are cut off, a caring minister can serve as a bridge, or a messenger, between the victim and the larger church.

Pastoral care is for the purpose of addressing spiritual questions and concerns and for emphasizing the church's ongoing compassion and acceptance of those who have experienced hurt and grief.

The following comments are relevant to situations where the abusive behavior has happened quite recently, and in situations where the abuse occurred some time ago and is now being addressed.

## **Caring for deeper emotional distress**

Issues of personal and family history, deep emotional distress or disease, personality and character disorders, and other mental health issues are most appropriately referred to trained mental health care workers. This trauma may have exacerbated certain underlying conditions and long-term problems.

Most likely, there is both a cause and effect relationship between the clergy sexual abuse and other emotional issues in the person's life. However, it is not appropriate for those who are bystanders to speculate about these relationships. They are likely to be far more complex, and different, from what we may tend to assume.

While it is not inappropriate for the synod to express its concern for the well-being of these individuals by recommending psychotherapy, it is not the responsibility of the synod or the church to provide for a comprehensive course of therapy to continue into the indefinite future.

Some synods express their tangible concern for victims of clergy sexual abuse by offering to reimburse the expense of a reasonable period of psychotherapy intended to deal directly with the matter of the clergy sexual abuse. Such offers are made freely by the synod, as it is able to do so, and need not be subject to formal agreements between the synod and the recipients of such care.

It is not the responsibility of the synod to provide recommendations or referrals to psychotherapy or counseling. In fact, it is important for each person to feel free to make decisions about the best provider of care for his or her needs. Synods may, however, offer suggestions if they are requested, providing several ideas for the potential client of the service to pursue. In the event of a crisis, the synod may be called upon for recommendations and specific information about particular providers. In all such cases, the potential client, and/or members of their family, are free to make a personal choice.

In some situations, it is best for the victim to not receive care through an agency or institution of the Lutheran church. In some cases, it may feel like a conflict of interest—that the institution where hurt was experienced is now seeking to provide care to heal that hurt. Some victims fear that their therapists may have a reporting relationship (direct or indirect) to church officials, or that the church stands to profit financially from fees generated by this service. In such cases, it is probably better for the individual to choose a provider with no ties of any kind to the Lutheran church.

Others, however, find that it is precisely the connection of this healing enterprise to the church where they found offense that is instrumental to their recovery process.

The most important criteria for consideration will include:

- the level of trust and personal rapport,
- the provider's understanding of the dynamics of clergy sexual abuse, and
- the provider's understanding of any specific mental health issues of the potential client.

It is helpful for the provider to have basic understanding about how the church is organized, the faith of the church, and its importance to the client.

## **Pastoral issues for victims of clergy sexual abuse**

Victims of clergy sexual abuse may remain in the congregation after the offender has left and the abuse has been disclosed. Such individuals will be on tenuous ground indeed. The bishop, staff, crisis intervention team and/or continuing pastoral staff may consult to determine the best way to meet the pastoral care needs of victims.

“Hidden victims”

If it is suspected that additional victims have yet to come forward, a strategy may be devised to send appropriate “signals” to them, about how their experience will be heard and what will be the response.

It often works well to simply indicate the availability of the bishop, an assistant or synodical response team member or other caregiver who is prepared to receive information about experiences members have had with the pastor.

It is usually not helpful to the victim for someone to come along asking about possible involvement with the pastor.

Victims are feeling a sense of shame and powerlessness about their relationship, even if clergy sexual abuse has been publicly described as being the responsibility of the pastor, as manipulative and deceptive. Even so, they feel shame and guilt about their involvement. It will take them some time to decide to trust pastoral leaders, especially those with significant authority, with their information.

Because they feel powerless it is very important to not reinforce this feeling by taking away their power to speak only when they are ready to speak and to whom they trust will understand and respond carefully.

If you are aware of a victim and if the victim has not come forward to the bishop, you may help him or her learn how the synod will respond to the information and to her or him as a person. You may alert the bishop’s office that some additional information may be forthcoming but not provide the name or other identifying information at this time. You may ask how the synod will respond to the complainant.

The synod’s policy and procedures for responding to complaints of clergy sexual abuse guide the process of their response.

Victims of clergy sexual abuse feel extremely vulnerable, fragile, and often experience a bottoming out of their self-esteem. Whomever they choose to trust with information about their experience needs to receive it with respect, tenderness and focus on the needs of the victim

“What do you need?” is the primary question of the initial conversation.

Judgments are withheld; expectations or demands for the victim to feel or behave in one way or another are not appropriate.

“I am so sorry this has happened to you,” is a statement that every victim appreciates hearing. It is especially important for them to hear it from someone in the church, someone with some authority in the church. It does not imply that the church is responsible for what has happened, but that the church is aware of the damage done by such relationships and that it was wrong. It is a critically important step toward trust-building and healing.

Many victims need counseling or psychotherapy in addition to pastoral care in the congregation.

Indeed, it is a further experience of betrayal for individuals who are not qualified to care for the deeper emotional distress to represent themselves as adequate to meet these needs. Helpful suggestions of counselors, or the telephone number of area mental health referral services are appropriate and should not terminate pastoral contact with the victim.

Victims of clergy sexual abuse often feel extremely isolated, even in the context of active involvement in congregational and community life.

It is so important for them, then, to not feel abandonment or rejection by pastoral care providers. Weekly telephone calls, regular, monthly conversations in a safe place (it may not be the pastor's office or the church building if sexual contact occurred there) are important ways to reinforce a sense of care.

The victim will benefit from efforts by the bishop, interim pastor and others to guard their dignity and privacy, and will be empowered in their healing as the church continues to interpret the clergy sexual abuse as a violation of the victim and of the office of ministry.

While strongly urging members of the congregation to refrain from gossip or speculation about victims of the abuse, it is simply realistic to tell the victim that it is impossible for the church to guarantee that his or her name will always be kept private. It is very difficult to maintain strict confidentiality in human communities.

Prayers for those who are exploited, violated and betrayed will be noted and are very helpful. Sermons that deal with relevant issues, without violating the confidentiality of the victim's story, are important for healing.

As the church receives and respects the victim's story, and even tells it on his or her behalf, that victim will gather courage and strength to move forward.

Many victims find that telling their story is a form of experiencing it all over again. We often refer to this as "re-victimization." It is important, then, that victims not be asked to retell their own story, especially in any detail, more than absolutely necessary. And it is important for them to decide how much to tell in any given conversation. The trauma of going over and over it is a form of re-victimization and is to be avoided. Victims need to feel safety in relationship to those whom they tell, and to know their story will be protected from revelation or gross misunderstanding.

Betrayal of trust and violation of emotional safety are devastating effects of clergy sexual abuse. A victim of clergy sexual abuse has experienced the manipulation and redirection of a relationship he or she had reason to believe was directed to their good, for their benefit, toward an end that instead was intended to serve the personal needs of the pastor.

Trust in authority, trust in the community, trust in the church, and even trust in God are thrown into question. Self-doubt also threatens to overwhelm even the most stable of individuals; "how could I have misjudged this? How could I let myself get used in this way? I thought I was a good judge of character, of behavior, of motives—where did I go blind?"

The shame of being used, deceived and manipulated is enormously damaging. Victims of clergy sexual abuse are the most likely people in the congregation to pour out their anger at what has

happened to them in self-directed, self-destructive ways. That is why it is so very important for those who respond to them to not collaborate in this shaming exercise. They were deceived, manipulated, used. It is important for them, and for us all, to be angry about that.

Self-loathing, self-recrimination, self-hatred are all common reactions. The cognizance of personal vulnerability is terrifying. Proximity to danger sends even the hardest person into reverberations of shock and horror.

Short of trying to provide psychological counseling or psychotherapy, pastoral care providers can acknowledge the reality of these reactions, can help the person to name and perceive them and to feel their impact. And then, can offer respect, compassion, and honesty in both listening and pointing to deeper truth.

Helping the victim to name the experience as clergy sexual abuse is a powerful step toward healing.

Acknowledging that it happens as a result of the offender's skill and determination to succeed in directing the relationship in this way, and not because the victim was absolutely stupid, blind, and immoral, is also very important.

Most victims will find, at some point on their road to recovery, an appropriate recognition of their measure of personal responsibility for the behavior. It is not more or less responsibility than is truly their own.

However, this painful, even shameful, acknowledgement will be part of their journey of healing, and if it is to be truly helpful, it will come out of their own processing of the events, not at the imposition of judgment by anyone else. Some victims will come to understand that, because of age and any number of other dynamics in the relationship, they were totally powerless to stop the abuse. Other victims may come to see that they had more power in the relationship than they knew how to use at the time and will accept a measure of responsibility for what occurred.

But in every case, that determination will come in its own good time, as part of the healing process. At the start, it is important for the victim to be free to perceive what was done to her or him and to acknowledge it as a violation.

At this same time, the pastoral care giver can reassure the victim that God never intends God's people to suffer violation and betrayal. What happened is not God's desire. This is especially important news to those who were seduced into a relationship that was described explicitly to them as "God's will."

## **Spiritual concerns for victims of clergy sexual abuse**

The spiritual concerns at stake for victims are several, including:

- trust in God's goodness and power
- guilt
- shame and self-loathing
- loss of faith community and support
- trust in church teaching and authority
- trust in the power of the Gospel to overcome sin

Pastoral care for victims of clergy sexual abuse can address these spiritual issues at the same time psychotherapy and other forms of counseling are engaged to address deeper personality or other issues.

There is no magical or surefire formula for providing this pastoral care. The most important thing, however, is to make a commitment to doing it and then to find the most appropriate way to keep faith with that commitment.

Extensive bibliography regarding this topic is found in the back of *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*, or at the end of this resource.

# **CHAPTER 10**

## **ADDRESSING PASTORAL CARE ISSUES: FOR FAMILY MEMBERS OF VICTIMS AND OFFENDERS**

### **Caring for family members**

Pastoral care for family members of the primary victims and the offender of clergy sexual abuse is an intentional act of compassion, understanding, and respect.

These lives are in serious crisis and things are made worse because of the public nature of their suffering.

Many of the same issues that affect victims also affect their own families. Many of the same issues that affect victims also affect the families of the offender.

Many of the same pastoral needs expressed, or experienced (whether or not they are expressed) by the offending pastor are also the needs of their family members.

It may be helpful to meet separately with them, as well as together. Family members may appreciate suggestions for psychotherapy.

Again, there is no one magical way to respond to these deeply wounded individuals. The temptation often is to do nothing, for fear of not doing the right thing or for fear of becoming overwhelmed by the enormity of their need.

Family members are sometimes hard to reach. Our access to them, and their access to the pastoral care of the church is often filtered, or guarded, or even rebuffed by their loved one. The victim's bitterness toward the church may discourage his or her family from reaching out or accepting care from the church.

Family members of the offender may feel especially bitter and betrayed. Our concern for them may be misrepresented, hidden or refused on their behalf by their loved one.

Once the matter is out in the open, it is helpful to them if the bishop, or someone asked to do so on behalf of the bishop, will make a direct contact with members of these families with an expression of pastoral concern.

We sometimes shirk from reaching out either to the family of the offending pastor or to the family of the victim out of our own sense of disloyalty to the one if we express care for the other, or out of fear that it may seem so to them or to others. We know it does not actually make sense to feel this way, but we are intimidated by these feelings just the same. Other factors also are at work.

We also may be worried about fairness with respect to the extent of what we are able and willing to do; we ask, "how can I provide this to the one family if I know we cannot provide this level of care to the other family involved?"

Family members of the accused feel profoundly neglected. They may be dealing for the first time with the allegations or knowledge of infidelity, the shame of public disgrace, the loss of home, privilege, community, income, security and their planned future. They may be feeling



anger that they dare not direct toward their spouse, because it would seem that the two of them are now alone against the world. It is entirely common for the spouse of the accused to express far more anger at the church because of this surprise intervention than at their spouse for the offending behavior. They may be more defensive, or in greater denial about the behavior—either that it occurred or that it was abusive, or both—than the pastor himself or herself.

They, too, are victims of betrayal and deceit but there is no public mechanism of justice to help satisfy their need, short of divorce. And this step often feels too huge just yet, if ever, and is entirely unimaginable at this point.

They may experience many of the same spiritual crises that the primary victims and their families feel. But they are not able to acknowledge them, even to themselves, and not able to reach out and seek help. It is likely that their experience of betrayal and deception will continue on for some time, at least until the acute crisis is over.

It is not possible for the bishop or the synodical staff, the interim pastor or the crisis intervention team to meet all of the pastoral care needs of this family. It is essential, then, that additional people be identified and offered to them as providers of care. They, too, must have the freedom to choose whom they will confide in.

Some synods have an Employee Assistance Program which may be accessed on their behalf. Others may need help negotiating about insurance coverage for mental health care.

It is worth taking some time to encourage them to seek and accept a pastoral relationship with someone specially prepared to deal with such situations.

This is one example of a time when our ecumenical partners can be very helpful to us and to members of our church. It may seem completely unimaginable to family members of the offending pastor to ask for and to receive pastoral care, and thus to expose intimate family information, to another ELCA pastor—a colleague, friend or supervisor of the pastor. Many pastors and their families can receive essential care in such crisis times from pastors of other denominations.

Too often, pastoral concern is quickly extended to the offending pastor and his or her family by a sympathetic colleague, neighboring pastor or friend who aids them in denying the reality of what has occurred and otherwise misrepresents the situation. They need, instead, honesty and clarity along with compassion and respect as they face an unexpected future.

A newsletter from the Spokane Council of Ecumenical Ministries and its program of ministry to clergy families in crisis may be helpful. *Connection: Clergy Families in Crisis* is designed to share insights and resources for clergy families facing misconduct, divorce, abuse and everyday trials of family living. It is available at 245 E. 13th Avenue, Spokane, WA 99202.

Anger and shame may send many family members racing headlong away from the church. Tenacity and imagination are crucial to continuing to provide care for them.

## **Shame sends family members of victims underground**

Family members of victims also feel anger and shame, and many of them either leave the church altogether or go underground. Their reactions may be as intense as those of the primary victim. Their needs for support are not readily met by a congregation that may be wary of their family and angry at what has happened. Or their needs may be entirely invisible to the congregation.

They, too, may be blamed for the relationship of their spouse, parent or child with the pastor. They are not likely to have affinity groups to turn to. Other pastors in the area may be reluctant to reach out to them. They are isolated.

While the pastor/offender's family often pulls together through the initial crisis, in a defensive posture, the victim's family often pulls and breaks apart. Trust, faith, and forgiveness are sorely tested.

Pastoral care for this family is essential.

This may be the first time they hear about infidelity to the marriage covenant or the sexual activity of their young adult child. They feel angry at their partner or parent or child, even as they feel angry about what was done to their loved one.

This relationship, or the revelation of it, may exacerbate other tensions in the family, in their intimate relationship with the victim, and/or stir up their own issues related to betrayal and abuse. They may have secrets of their own that are now threatened by this information.

They experience the stress of not wanting to blame the victim yet feeling the momentum of their anger nudging them in that direction. They often express even stronger feelings of anger, then, at the offender than does the primary victim. It is safer for them to express raging anger at the offender than to admit and express any anger at all toward their loved one. And it is less likely for them to have other, conflicted feelings about the offender (they did not fall in love, for instance, or think they had, with the offender, for example). They also may have sensed from their partner, the primary victim, that the victim needs his or her partner to carry and express enough anger for the both of them for the time being.

Primary victims, as the center of many people's attention for the moment, may actually experience healing in advance of their family members. It is important to remember that we are, in fact, caring for a family system. If we truly intend to be effective in bringing healing to the primary victim, it is important to express care and encourage healing for the entire family.

Parents of both victim and offender are frequently overlooked in all of our concern. As likely as not, they are faithful Christians, regular church-goers, and more perplexed and anxious than anyone else. It is an important part of this process to consider an appropriate way of reaching out to them.

It is always the prerogative of the primary victim to give information about the relationship to other members of his or her own family. It is helpful for that to happen in such a way that the family members' pastors, or other supportive people, are quickly available to bring support and comfort to them, if desired. It is most appropriately the victim's decision about whether and when to bring in such people, and to inform them of the situation.

Family members often feel the additional frustration of not being in control of anything. It is their spouse, mother, daughter, son who is directly in the center of the synod's concern, and who may be invited to make requests and suggestions about appropriate responses. Often, the family is frustrated by their supporting role and lack of decision-making power. Sensitivity to this is helpful.

In considering the pastoral and other concerns of family members, of both victims and offenders, we may be mindful that the spiritual concerns identified for primary victims are relevant for family members as well.

These spiritual concerns include:

- trust in God's goodness and power
- guilt
- shame and self-loathing
- loss of faith community and support
- trust in church teaching and authority
- trust in the power of the gospel to overcome sin

The pastoral issues of offenders are likely to be important concerns of their family members, also.

At the very same time many victims, we hope, are finding the church's leaders to be a source of support, as they come forward with the complaint of clergy sexual abuse, the family members of the accused may feel like this very same group of people have pulled the rug out from under them. It is so difficult to believe this awful truth about their loved one, they blame not only the victim for coming forward, and for the behavior itself, or for making up this terrible story they hope is untrue, they also blame the bishop for believing it and for "overreacting" to the information.

The discipline process is commonly viewed by family members of the accused as especially punitive. And it is not hard to understand why they might think so. They experience the consequences—they lose a great deal. It is, however, not their own behavior that has been judged and deemed inappropriate to trust with pastoral authority. Their own souls do not have to wrestle in the same way with these consequences and the weight of guilty conscience. They don't need the discipline in order to ensure they behave in safe and appropriate ways. They only experience the harsh reality of a lost income, lost home, lost status, lost community, and, worst, the threat to their marriage.

They, too, must struggle with the question: can I trust this man or woman—not as pastor but as spouse? Or parent? Or child?

But they do not have an easy way of resolving or answering their questions and concerns. Their world has turned upside-down in a few short minutes or hours and nothing is for sure, any more. When the person you normally turn to in a crisis is the person whose behavior has now precipitated the crisis, things feel as though they will never get better.

Much of what these family members hear about the church's view of this problem, of the bishop's conversation with the accused and the resulting action, and of other practical matters, such as recommendations for care and counseling, insurance options, etc., is filtered through the interpretation provided them by the accused. They feel the stress of wondering if this information is true and worthy of their trust and, at the same time, feeling as if they must trust their partner's interpretation because it now seems to be all they have left. They are in a terrible bind.

As this church continues to respond with greater sensitivity to all those who have had their lives affected by clergy sexual abuse, we may choose to become even more intentional about finding ways to extend the healing love of the gospel to these deeply wounded individuals and families.

# **CHAPTER 11**

## **ADDRESSING THE PASTORAL ISSUES: OF CONGREGATIONAL STAFF MEMBERS**

### **Caring for staff members**

Staff members in the congregation are deeply stressed by the departure of a pastor after clergy sexual abuse. They are pressed upon to provide leadership and pastoral care at the same time they are feeling deep personal needs for support and guidance.

They feel betrayal and anger, confusion, perhaps guilt, fear for their future employment in the congregation and worry about the welfare of all individuals involved.

They may feel especially conflicted loyalties, to the departed pastor, to the pastor's family, and at the same time, perhaps, to victims within the congregation who are known to them. They use words such as "sorrow, despair, paralysis, and anger" to describe their situation and their feelings, and they wonder how to enter this new period of time with integrity and wisdom.

More comments about caring for staff are found in the sections of this resource, "Synodical leaders caring for staff" and "Using crisis intervention teams."

It is a temptation for synodical and congregational leadership to forget or to downplay the importance of caring for this cadre of people. There are so many others who seem so clearly more vulnerable and more wounded. Perhaps we hope the staff members are strong enough to take care of themselves.

Indeed, they may wave us off, at first, urging us to join them in taking care of others. The benefit of our attention to their needs, however, is seen not only in the healing that occurs in their own lives, personally, but in the quality of their leadership to the congregation in the short-term and over the long haul.

They will be caught in a number of difficult binds over the next several months. It is not uncommon for them to be scapegoated for the misbehavior of the pastor, if not directly, then by a curious meandering logic that cites their weaknesses or their inattention as one cause of the offending pastor's misconduct.

It is especially difficult for them to balance the concerns for primary victims and the concerns of the larger congregation, as the congregation tends to blame the victims, and by extension, all those who care for them.

Church secretaries are in a particularly difficult place. Often without other professional support groups or networks, and on the very frontlines of communication in the congregation, they feel the brunt of much anger, raw curiosity and misunderstanding. They may have been among the first to discern a pattern of deceit or inattention to duty or questionable behavior by the pastor. They may have been enlisted in an effort to cover-up what they were told was an appropriate relationship or appropriate behavior pattern. They may even have been threatened by the pastor. They may feel guilty for not speaking up, or ashamed for not "catching" what was happening, or have a vague sense of anger about having been betrayed by the pastor whom they trusted to be about the appropriate business. They may worry that others suspect them of complicity in the abuse, or that they, too, were inappropriately involved in sexual contact with the pastor.

Secretaries and other staff feel used and manipulated. At the same time, after the disclosure, they may feel professional pressure to maintain a dispassionate attitude, to listen without comment or judgment to the concerns expressed by others. They may experience blame or backlash, and they may feel wary of trusting any one who has authority over them in the congregation. They may be drawn into various groups, or camps within the congregation.

Pastors on staff, who continue to serve in the congregation, may get the full brunt of the misplaced anger or anxiety from members, the withholding of trust and respect, and the imposition of unreasonable and unexplained new standards or restrictions.

They always face greater work loads as they seek to pick up the uncompleted assignments of the departed pastor along with new assignments related to the healing process.

They will be called upon to interpret the events, often cast in a mediating role between the synod and the congregational members.

Pastoral care and support, attention to work and work loads, advocacy for appropriate time off and away, education and assistance for their work to interpret the crisis to the congregation, and generous measures of respect and concern are very important to help these key leaders remain healthy and able to provide strong ministry.

The bishop may meet with them on occasion, or assign this work to a staff member. Pastoral counselors from the LSS or a similar system, neighboring pastors or area spiritual directors may be helpful. Some communities have access to the skills of trained congregational consultants who might provide support to this staff.

Again, it is important for such individuals to have appreciation for the special dynamics at work in cases of clergy sexual abuse, beyond basic skills in conflict and organizational management.

Some synods have developed groups of pastors serving after clergy sexual abuse who meet regularly for education and support. They may have structured, educational workshops, use case-studies, or simply spend time telling their stories and sharing ideas.

When the congregation projects significant anger onto the remaining staff members, the synod can provide helpful support and guidance by arranging to meet with council and other leaders, and recommending additional healing work for the congregation to do.

## **CHAPTER 12**

# **ADDRESSING THE PASTORAL CARE ISSUES: OF CONGREGATIONAL LAY LEADERS, MEMBERS, AND THE WIDER COMMUNITY**

### **Caring for congregational leaders**

Issues of guilt, anger, self-recrimination (“I should’ve seen this coming”), and betrayal have a serious impact on many congregational lay leaders. Their spiritual issues are not unlike those of the primary victims and the families involved, and may be almost as profound.

Many former church members will confess that the sexual abuse of a former pastor, perpetrated not on them but while they were serving on a congregation council or in other leadership roles, created such dissonance and cynicism that they left the church. Bitterness, powerlessness, cynical mistrust of authority, faithlessness and generalized sadness or depression often characterize such persons.

Church leaders need opportunities to express the full range of their feeling: sadness, confusion, anger, fear, worry, and the rest. Spontaneous conversations in the course of other business, over lunch or in appointments are helpful ways to engage their reactions and concerns. Respect and compassion, again, are key.

A tone is set for this kind of engagement by pastoral leadership, both in the first days of the crisis and in the ongoing ministry, by prayers and preaching that express honest reactions to confusion, betrayal, abuse of power, and fear. Providing biblical and theological framework for their spiritual work is essential.

Pastoral care to congregational leaders may be provided during the interim period by a neighboring pastor, dean, synod bishop or staff member, or to groups of leaders by qualified counselors and/or consultants. If the synod has a crisis team, these people can assess the needs and identify a plan for leaders to continue to express their concerns. Education about clergy sexual abuse is a part of the pastoral care plan. It helps to identify and sort out the issues and clarify who is responsible for what behavior.

Forgiveness and discipline often become confused. Laity may have difficulty with the dire consequences faced by the pastor, knowing their own shortcomings and seemingly less severe consequences.

Many congregations become preoccupied with sexual matters during this period. Their own sexual sins or areas of ambivalent concern often shade their responses to the pastor’s misconduct. Some people act out sexually, as if in defiance of rules they feel are puritanical; others become puritanical and very rigid about all boundaries related to physical expression. Some leaders experiences the pangs of conscious and feel distress within their own intimate relationships. Others find that this experience stirs up old memories of abuse, betrayal, sexual violence or indiscretion. It is a very live, reactive, or charged time in the congregation.

Many pastors who perpetrate clergy sexual abuse are, in fact, winsome and popular leaders.



They are hard for congregations to feel angry at. The anger, then, finds its focus in a million other things: one's own intimate personal relationships, congregational minutiae (everything from hymns to the schedule for Easter worship to the strength of coffee to color of choir robes!), other members, continuing staff, the synod, and, most painfully, anger at God.

Pastoral care of congregational leaders will involve a process of helping them to understand that, while their pastor did many things well, and they can continue to feel affection and gratitude for that, their pastor also engaged in behavior that they have good reason to feel angry at. The key to their healing will involve providing support and safety for them in their journey toward anger at the pastor's abuse.

### **Caring for congregation members and the surrounding community**

Congregational members will experience the clergy sexual abuse and the departure in very different ways. Some will be relatively unaffected. Some, even those rather distant from the center of things, instinctively will have seen it coming and will be quickly at peace about it. Others, also at a distance from the center of activity, will be devastated.

Many members will stop coming to worship. They will experience a confusing complex of reactions that, in part, lead them to question the validity of worship when, after this pastor's meaningful leadership, it all seems so un compelling to the pastor himself or herself. Was the preaching really true? Was the sacrament even valid?

Cynicism and hostility toward the church and the faith can result. The altar or table around which the pastor led the people in thanksgiving for the body and blood of Christ is now tainted with deceit and mistrust. The stains of the pastor's own behavior are spoiling the experience of community and sincere prayer. Some members feel that the pastor's sin is somehow their sin as well.

Much of this is unconscious and needs careful interpretation. Providing trustworthy care is a critical part of this healing process. Helping members to understand what has happened, and how it has and has not affected the quality of the ministry, is crucial. Honesty, reliability and faithfulness are essential.

Over-reactivity is a common consequence in congregations after the departure of a pastor for clergy sexual abuse. Heightened sensitivity about decision-making, even for small matters, such as moving furniture or changing the newsletter format, creates rigid, unrealistic and often unexplainable requirements, like litmus tests of loyalty and wisdom. Some members may generate harassing letters or telephone calls to council members, staff or the synod office. Some make threats and even disrupt meetings and worship. The insidious effects of gossip and bitter, derisive conversation may be worst of all. It is as if the infra-structure of the congregation is being corroded, eaten away by toxic acid.

Through pastoral preaching and leadership, the congregation can be helped to understand that the object of their anger is the clergy sexual abuse. This is not to vilify the pastor but to provide a true focus for the feelings of betrayal and hurt, confusion and disappointment.

Pastoral care in this case will involve learning about the dynamics involved when power is abused, when clergy are invested with divine-like characteristics, when manipulation and deceit are exposed, and when whole communities are caught up in feelings of betrayal and confusion.



It may also involve setting guidelines for conversations and discussion that include basic rules of fair communication and respect for others, throughout the congregation.

The pastoral leaders can model this process by their own commitment to honesty, carefulness in talk, compassion, refraining from gossip and speculation, and being willing to work at deeper understanding and clarity of issues.

Pastoral prayers in worship after the departure of a pastor for clergy sexual abuse have typically concentrated the community's attention on the offender and his or her family. It is appropriate and important to pray for them. However, it is also important to pray for the victims, for their families and then for the whole congregation. It is important to acknowledge prayerfully the impact of this experience on the whole congregation. "Help us to understand, to grow, to keep our faith in You...."

Often, prayers about the community will focus on their need to forgive the offender. This may be saved until a later time when the congregation has a clearer notion of what is to be forgiven. Prayers for healing for the offender, and certainly for the victims and the congregation are most appropriate at this time.

Some congregations seek a rush to reconciliation with the offending pastor. This is premature until the pastor has acknowledged the offense, has accepted full responsibility for his or her behavior, has acknowledged the damage done to the victims and expressed remorse for that, and has acknowledged that the offense was a grievous harm to individuals and also to the integrity of the pastoral office.

Many offenders mitigate their apologies with excuses and often veil their expressions of regret in recitals of personal problems. Certainly, the church can feel empathy and compassion for their concerns; however, the clergy sexual abuse is behavior that is always beyond the bounds of appropriate use of the pastoral office and the pastor is always responsible for maintaining that boundary. If the pastor cannot acknowledge that responsibility, and the harm done when that responsibility is breached, it is not likely the pastor is ready to be reconciled. Likewise, the congregation will be revictimized by the incomplete process. Many will perceive it for what it is: an attempt, however unconscious or well-intentioned, to manipulate the church's drive toward forgiveness and reconciliation and create a de facto exoneration of the pastor's misconduct.

If the church truly believes in the power of God's forgiveness and the possibility of human forgiveness, then it can extend this gift to one who is actually guilty. We cheapen our confession of faith in the gospel if we assume that those we forgive must, after all, be found without fault. The power of forgiveness can truly transform us when, after accepting full and unmitigated responsibility for our sins, we are forgiven!

Pastoral leadership and teaching about forgiveness and reconciliation in these situations can provide occasions for congregation members to seek forgiveness and release, and offer this same gift, in the context of their own family, social, public and other important relationships, past and present.

In many congregations, there is need for forgiveness and reconciliation among members. This occasion may provide a good opportunity for that process to begin.

## **Pastoral care as public witness**

Clergy sexual abuse shines a spotlight on the local congregation that it most certainly does not want. News coverage of the charges, the departure of the pastor, related conflicts and the synod's response are embarrassing to congregation members.

Honest, forthright responses to the situation, however, provide an excellent opportunity for the church to demonstrate what we are really about: integrity, honesty, compassion, justice. The story of a community pulling together to face an uncomfortable truth, speaking the truth in love, reaching out with compassion to victims of betrayal and injustice, caring for those who have offended, moving with courage and faith into an uncertain future—these are compelling stories of witness to the gospel. From the first moment of the crisis, the church's response will impact how the community gets the news and what that news is.

As much as the media loves a juicy story of deceit and corruption, conflict and fighting, it also loves the story of courage and determination, honesty and commitment. Most churches flounder in the aftermath of this crisis. Create a true story of a congregation that beats those odds, and tell it.

People are attracted to integrity, to communities that hang in there, that overcome adversity.

This situation can provide a teaching moment for the community, to learn about what is and what is not the purpose of ministry, what is and what is not the prevailing culture of the church (to close ranks around the powerful or to seek truth and justice?) What is and what is not the message of the Gospel itself?

Without exploiting the crisis and those most deeply hurt by it, the church can send a message of healing and hope into the community through careful press statements. A later invitation to come and prepare a feature story about the church's response to this crisis is a good witness. Follow-up stories, news releases at the time of a new pastor's installation and stories about the ministries of the congregation can send a message of hope.

Pastoral leadership within the congregation and to the larger community by interim pastors, synodical leaders and others can signal the church's commitment to the ministry of the gospel in this place and can provide interpretation of the experience and the church's response.

Sometimes there are victims of the clergy sexual abuse out there, beyond the congregation, in the larger community. Members of neighboring congregations, unchurched community members, and even community leaders may have been victimized by the pastor. Honest, careful interpretation of the events in the public media will send a message that the church has compassion for all who are suffering and desires their healing.

As the healing process unfolds, individuals in the community who have suffered in the past from betrayal of trust and the misuse of power, who are victims of sexual violence or injustice, incest, or harassment may come to the congregation, seeking to draw upon its resources of ministry for their own healing.

Clergy sexual abuse is a betrayal of the trust placed in the pastor by the congregation. It deeply wounds the primary victims, those who have had sexual involvement with the pastor. It also is a wound that harms the congregation as a whole—or as a system—and creates a situation of confusion, hurt, disappointment, shock, anger, cynicism, and fear.

The congregation's trust in their pastor to use the resources of the pastoral office only for the purposes of serving the gospel has been betrayed.

In congregational life, as in all human relationships, trust is essential. Someone has described trust in the church as "the skin on the body of Christ." It holds us and protects us. Betrayals of trust rip open this delicate, dynamic fabric of life.

As we know from our stewardship of the physical body, healing must happen from the inside out. A false covering, a quick fix, a clumsy graft over the wound will not heal the damage done to underlying tissue, muscles, and vessels.

So it is with the healing of trust. Trust must be rebuilt from the inside out.

Succumbing to the temptation to hide or quickly close up the wound of betrayal creates the possibility for it to fester, become infected and resistant to long-term healing. The wound must be cleansed first, and carefully tended. Creating a process of healing provides a complete cycle of recovery that may deal with underlying concerns and leave the congregation stronger than it was before.

Those who minister in congregations after incidence of clergy sexual abuse have learned through painful experience that some things are more helpful than others to this healing process. We benefit from their hard-won insights and wisdom.

These next few pages will help to identify issues and steps that may be helpful in restoring trust and healing the wounds of betrayal and abuse.

It is important for the healing process that congregation members come to some understanding about what clergy sexual abuse is. It is not, as is usually first assumed, "just an affair" with the pastor.

## **CHAPTER 13**

# **UNDERSTANDING CONGREGATIONAL DYNAMICS AFTER CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

Clergy sexual abuse is a betrayal of the trust placed in the pastor by the congregation. It deeply wounds the primary victims, those who have had sexual involvement with the pastor. It also is a wound that harms the congregation as a whole—or as a system—and creates a situation of confusion, hurt, disappointment, shock, anger, cynicism, and fear.

The congregation's trust in their pastor to use the resources of the pastoral office only for the purposes of serving the gospel has been betrayed.

In congregational life, as in all human relationships, trust is essential. Someone has described trust in the church as “the skin on the body of Christ.” It holds us and protects us. Betrayals of trust rip open this delicate, dynamic fabric of life.

As we know from our stewardship of the physical body, healing must happen from the inside out. A false covering, a quick fix, a clumsy graft over the wound will not heal the damage done to underlying tissue, muscles, and vessels.

So it is with the healing of trust. Trust must be rebuilt from the inside out.

Succumbing to the temptation to hide or quickly close up the wound of betrayal creates the possibility for it to fester, become infected and resistant to long-term healing. The wound must be cleansed first, and carefully tended. Creating a process of healing provides a complete cycle of recovery that may deal with underlying concerns and leave the congregation stronger than it was before.

Those who minister in congregations after incidence of clergy sexual abuse have learned through painful experience that some things are more helpful than others to this healing process. We benefit from their hard-won insights and wisdom.

These next few pages will help to identify issues and steps that may be helpful in restoring trust and healing the wounds of betrayal and abuse.

It is important for the healing process that congregation members come to some understanding about what clergy sexual abuse is. It is not, as is usually first assumed, “just an affair” with the pastor.

Clergy sexual abuse is abuse because it is the misuse of power and resources given to the pastor by the church, both implicitly and explicitly, for one purpose: to make Jesus known. It is abuse because it is a violation of the boundary that has been set around that position of power, for the sake of the gospel—for the integrity and safety of its witness to individuals by other individuals. It is sexual abuse because it somehow involves sexualized activity, contact, energy, interest, or intent. Sexual abuse is sexual activity that occurs in relationships that are not appropriately sexualized relationships.

Consult the two-page summary, “What is clergy sexual abuse?” found on page 3 of this resource, or *Safe Connections: What Parishioners Can Do to Understand and Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse*, written specifically for use by laity as an interpretive guide to this problem. Order information is found in the front of this resource.

## What does the wound of betrayal look like?

When trust is betrayed, congregations may experience any or all of the following:

- wariness of those who have similar roles or authority as the offender had,
- wariness of those who have similar personality characteristics, or other attributes as the offender, such as:
  - behavior, mannerisms,
  - character, style, hobbies, special interests
  - even size, voice, or appearance
- feel uneasy and unsafe in the church building, for example:
  - in the pastor's office,
  - in the sacristy,
  - receiving communion,
  - greeting a pastor after worship,
  - in the confirmation classroom or
  - council meeting room or even in a hallway
- have trouble concentrating during worship, listening to sermons and even looking at the pulpit;
  - have trouble making eye contact with other pastors
- development of rigid and unrealistic, odd and unreasonable, often arbitrary and even unnecessary boundaries, rules, procedures, and expectations,
  - and over-reacting to any violations—way out of proportion to the apparent problem
- overreactivity to concerns seemingly unrelated to the offense,
  - e.g. schedules (office hours)
  - appearances
  - budget and the costs of personnel
  - program ministry planning and related matters
  - materials (curriculum, a new computer), program plans
  - mission priorities
- obsessive micromanagement of issues such as:
  - how furniture is arranged in the pastor's office,
  - who is in the building with the interim or new pastor,
  - whether or not the pastor's office door can ever be closed,
  - the pastor's schedule,
  - whether or not the pastor can call on members in their homes;
- the subsequent pastoral leaders feel as if dozens of people are always looking over their shoulder and second-guessing their work—and they probably are!
- excessive attention to and concern for the healthiness of the subsequent pastor's marriage and personal affairs;
  - the congregation is often intrusive and anxious about the new (or continuing staff) pastor's personal life

- boundaries in the congregation, between members and pastor, and between members themselves, are either unusually loose and relaxed, violated frequently, or they are strict, tight, and rigidly maintained
  - high reactivity throughout congregation; over-reactions and over-reaching
  - overfunctioning in matters of basic routine ministry
    - altar guild frets excessively over details,
    - extravagant preparations for stewardship dinner
- i.e. compensating for feeling out of control by exercising extreme control, way out of proportion to their general importance, over simple, basic matters
- projection of anger and other negative emotions on other people and other matters, e.g.:
    - victims,
    - the order of worship or hymns,
    - all women or the feminist movement,
    - the synod
  - heightened sensitivity and overreactivity to behavior or concerns related to the betrayal (e.g. sexuality in general, or in the case of embezzlement, to all financial matters)
  - failure of nerve to make important decisions for future ministry
  - fall off in worship attendance, financial giving, participation in leadership (e.g. council, committees, teaching)
  - conflict about mission priorities, program plans, and ministry activities;
  - failure to commit to work through conflicts
  - overreaction, with surprisingly harsh consequences for relatively minor infractions of community rules, expectations and procedures, many of which might be unspoken and unwritten
  - blame of synodical or other church leaders; cuts in benevolence
  - shame, that is manifest in many ways: congregational withdrawal from ecumenical activity, advertising, outreach, retrenching and retreating from ministry activities
  - paralysis, shock, inability to do anything; constant repetition of the same stories, recital of unbelievable facts, or statements of disbelief

- act out against others, repeating the cycle of betrayal even in the simplest of churchly activities and expectations:
  - “forget” to be thoughtful,
  - leave people out,
  - breach confidentiality
  - gossip
  - meanness
- failure to follow-through on assignments,
  - show up as promised,
  - continue long-established patterns of service and commitment
- pastoral leader is shut out of key power relationships
- the informal meeting in the parking lot or on the telephone is where the real action is, where decisions are made
- gossip, bitterness, factionalism; cliques harden,
- truth becomes less important than rumors, speculation, supposition, and blaming
- friendships break down and community spirit of care fizzles out
- worship patterns may change, e.g.:
  - the passing of the peace is omitted,
  - intercessory prayers become perfunctory
  - public prayers omit names of people to pray for,
  - the common cup is “retired”
- people agree to do less and blame more; bickering over details
- obsessive focus on some one mission priority to the exclusion of attention to everything else, often something new and outside the congregation (e.g. missions abroad or an external community project) and usually involving old cliques of people rather than fluid and new configurations of participants
- obsessive focus on some theological issue or question of biblical interpretation that may or may not be directly related to the source of the betrayal and misconduct; often it is tangentially related and in some way targets victims, women, the larger church, or sexuality
- suspicion of new lay leadership,
  - replacing burned-out old leaders but withholding of authority from them,
  - challenging and attacking their plans and proposals,
  - undermining their decisions, and
  - not cooperating or participating in their activities
- misplaced anger, wariness and non-cooperation with continuing church staff,
- setting new policies that reveal a lack of trust and respect, especially toward other pastoral staff and toward women

- unrealistic expectations of continuing staff, e.g.:
  - giving up vacation time, days off, continuing education, withholding salary increases and other benefits;
  - denying requests for support to deal with the crisis withholding
  - support to carry out other ministry tasks
- hasty moves to circumvent normal call process and quickly call a new pastor; categorically reject the idea of an interim, “We need to get on with it!”
- idealizing the former pastor, or a pastor or a period from the more distant past; or idealizing an interim leader, latching onto the first healthy-appearing person to arrive on the scene
- drop in quantifiable and objective reporting (failing to file parochial reports)
- perplexing and unfocused outbursts of energy, may be productive or destructive, or both; manic behavior
- mean-spirited revelations of unethical or questionable behavior of laity; digging up and dishing out old dirt on others, also including staff; dredging up old business, old conflicts and grievances within the congregation
- attempts to triangle outside leaders, consultants, staff, new pastoral leaders, and other members in problem-analysis and problem-solving
- lots of secrets and pseudo-confidentiality (“I shouldn’t tell you this but I think you need to know...”)
- irresponsible attitudes and behaviors, lackadaisical and indifferent attitudes toward fulfilling assignments; hesitancy to accept new responsibilities

## **Congregations experience grief**

Congregations experience grief in ways not unlike individuals. The personality of the congregation, or its dominant style, may move through the stages or manifestations of grief (not necessarily in this order):

- shock/disbelief
- denial
- bargaining
- scapegoating/blaming
- depression/withdrawal/sadness/resignation
- anger at the actual problem
- acceptance/learning to live with what happened and looking to the future with openness and hope



## **Congregations in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse**

The congregation might actually get “sick,” and its individual members may experience more physical symptoms of disease and distress than normal.

Feelings—about everything, related to the abuse and totally unrelated, about things profound and things trivial—are right on the surface, raw and often unevaluated.

Some people will dwell on the crisis events and others will refuse to even think about them.

Some parishioners will treat the offending pastor as a martyred saint and others will act as if he or she never existed, speaking the name, if at all, in hushed tones.

The energy of the congregation will go underground, finding outlets either in subterfuge or in ministry that is unofficial, perhaps external to the life of the community itself.

Sometimes this is not intentional or even conscious behavior—it just happens and then becomes a pattern. It may go unnoticed for some time without outside intervention.

Members in many congregations where there has been a serious breach of trust often slide into unhealthy behaviors, even during the period preceding the disclosure of misconduct and departure of the pastor. Something unhealthy is happening beneath the surface and people are, unconsciously, beginning to react, adjust, and cope with it.

Strong, healthy individuals can be deeply affected by the betrayal and abuse of power and search out new ways of behaving in order to compensate for the feelings of chaos and confusion. Some may engage in truly dissociative behaviors and may be clueless as to the source of their distress.

Some congregations have had unhealthy patterns of functioning and communicating over a long period of time, prior to this incidence of clergy sexual abuse, prior to the tenure of this offending pastor.

Some congregations will recall instances of betrayal by former pastors. This may have been sexual misconduct, financial misconduct, or other kinds of abuse. Victims of that former misconduct may have been hidden in the congregation for decades and now find they feel edgy and distressed about it, as if it happened just yesterday.

Some congregations almost seem to be magnets for unhealthy pastors, and seem drawn to call individuals who are likely to violate appropriate boundaries of all kinds. Consequences of these past violations are likely to resurface during this period.

“Battle lines” of conflict may form in reaction to this crisis along the lines of old, forgotten alliances. People who have been working together in harmony during the recent period may find themselves inexplicably at odds again, drawn down into old patterns of mistrust and misunderstanding.

Those who feel depressed, deflated, and discouraged are likely to withdraw and, apparently, gratefully turn over the leadership to those who are less affected, or to those who cope with the crisis in a different way. Often, they turn to new members of the congregation with great enthusiasm at such a time and encourage them to new levels of participation and leadership.

At the same time, these “old” leaders may not truly invest their authority with this new leadership, thus thwarting and undermining their work. The new leaders may misunderstand this situation, and misunderstand even their own coping behaviors, and attempt to “fix” the new problem, not realizing it is still the consequence of the old problem—burn-out of former leaders and related issues—that is truly subverting their leadership. These new leaders may ignore the signs of distress still present in the congregation because their own attachments to the offending pastor were not as great and their sense of betrayal not as deep. Confusion and greater dissension result.

Some people will seek to exploit the crisis and re-emerge as insurgent leaders.

And some people just thrive on crises and look for ways to exert their energies. They may or may not be helpful!

## **Reactions/responses**

Members of the congregation are likely to respond to this crisis as they would to crises in their family, personal, or work life.

Some will rise to the occasion,  
some will drift off,  
some will dig in and get to work on it,  
some will get sick,  
some will blame others,  
some will stand around and watch,  
some will flail and flap their arms unproductively,  
some will intellectualize, instinctively reach for a stack of books to learn everything they can,  
some will shout, “Help!”  
some will cower,  
some will look for the most helpful way to care for others.

“What...is...happening!?”

“Oh no! I can’t believe it! This is happening!”

“This isn’t happening. I know this isn’t really happening.”

“What *is* happening?”

“This should not be happening.”

“Make it stop happening NOW!”

“Maybe we can stop this from happening.”

“Can you stop this from happening?”

“I knew this would happen.”

“I told you this would happen.”

“I can’t believe this happened.”

“This didn’t happen.”

“Its not our fault this happened.”  
“This is all our/my fault that it happened.”  
“How could they let this happen?”  
“Oh, this is terrible, this has happened.”  
“It was inevitable, for this to happen.”  
“It will happen again.”  
“Oh, well, it happened”  
“Let’s see how we can stop this from happening again.”  
“Thank God it doesn’t have to happen.”

All of these statements are normal reactions to the experience of clergy sexual abuse and the departure of the pastor. They may be expressed at any given time by anyone in the congregation. One or more of them may come to express the dominant response of the congregation as a whole to the crisis. Individuals may be extremely intolerant of people who express different reactions, or who move through these stages in a different order or at a slower pace.

### **Cleansing the wound of betrayal**

Honest expression of feelings and thoughts in an environment that is safe and respectful has the effect of cleansing the wound of betrayal. The suggested plan for a congregational meeting (see the chapter 7, “Holding a Congregational Meeting”) right after the disclosure, or as a part of it, only begins this process.

Many congregations assume that once this meeting has taken place, it is time to move on, to put the lid on this kind of expression. However, we don’t work that way.

We each take time to move through our response to difficult situations, to process information, and to integrate it. And, again, we all do that differently.

Some congregations will choose to have several meetings specifically called to address this crisis, to express reactions and respond.

Some will choose to plan educational events that primarily provide parishioners a safe way of taking in new information (e.g. what is clergy sexual abuse, what is an appropriate boundary between pastor and parishioner, what is the purpose of the pastoral office?).

Some will reserve the prerogative of thoroughgoing evaluation and reaction to this process, to those on the council and/or committees.

Some will depend on existing small groups and networks for all of this work. (The drawbacks of this approach are discussed on page 40.)

Some will make careful plans and be explicit about their expectations for this process.

Other congregations will do nothing intentional but simply assume and hope it is happening.

Some congregations will integrate the healing process subtly into other agendas.

All of these approaches have some merit. Each congregation must choose the way that fits its style and needs most appropriately.

This does not mean resorting to its most comfortable, but unhealthy patterns of behavior. The council can be encouraged to stretch, to exercise the option that pushes it realistically toward greater health.

If the congregation has always handled crises in one way, and feels dissatisfied with the results, this may be a good time to try another approach, or to offer complementary alternatives.

Cleansing the wound involves identifying the variety of reactions/responses to the crisis. Identifying them without blaming people for them is important. Blaming and shaming people about their responses stymies their recovery and that of the whole congregation.

Unhealthy patterns and behaviors can be questioned respectfully. It goes without saying that it is impossible for leaders to stop such behavior simply by declaring it off limits. Accusations and denunciations are not effective.

However, it is possible both to model appropriate responses and to identify why they are helpful. “Loving the sinner while judging the sin” is the aim in this process.

Whenever possible, encourage congregation members to make agreements about how they will receive and respond to each other.

Sometimes it is impossible for even a small group of leaders to agree to fair communication and respectful interaction. In these highly conflicted situations, where the damage is so severe, the pastoral leader on site may simply need to work for some period of time at restoring a minimum threshold of trust by providing faithful, compassionate, honest pastoral leadership in worship and in personal contact with key leaders, then move on.

## **Promote healthy interaction**

After the initial congregational meeting, healing can occur whenever members are gathered at council meetings, Bible study, committee meetings, educational or social events, always beginning with prayer for God’s Spirit to guide and enlighten the conversation.

Guidelines for communication at all such events might be encouraged as follows:

- sit in circles or around tables, not in rows
- encourage those present to make “I” statements, and to
- be specific, cite specific instances or examples, rather than make generalizations about problems
- avoid “cross talk,” e.g. applause, interruptions
- check with previous speakers to make sure you heard correctly, especially if you are inclined to disagree
- encourage the telling of stories, sharing of experience not just about the pastor or the perception of abuse but about other life experiences that might promote understanding, empathy, growth
- suggest other means of expression, e.g. singing, art, dance, poetry where appropriate
- identify rumors, ask for rumors to be told, check them out, ask why they might be out there, what to do with them, how to respond to the elements of truth in them
- encourage accountability for information, both in keeping agreed upon confidences within groups and in bringing outside or other information to the group

## Spiritual consequences of the betrayal

In her pioneering work in our church, Pastor Mary Ann Moller-Gunderson identified several spiritual losses experienced by victims of clergy sexual abuse. These apply to personal victims and to the congregation as a victim. Pastor James Stein elaborated on these consequences in his Doctor of Ministry thesis, *Bridging the Gap: Restoring Trust After Sexual Misconduct*. These losses include:

- Loss of the church as a safe haven

The pastor's office, sacristy, choir loft or even the altar may have been the place where sexual abuse occurred.

Heightened sensitivity about these spaces, a sense of desecration and violation, danger, disgust and fear may keep members from feeling free to enter in trust and expectation that the church building itself is a sanctuary.

One of the changes needed in some congregations is a remodeling, repainting, rearranging these places, and even a rite that reclaims them for sacred purposes.

Portraits of the offending pastor may need to be removed or moved to a less prominent place, and other items in the church especially associated with him or her may have to go, at least for a time.

Locks, computer passwords, combinations and such may need to be changed, if only for the symbolic value of creating an extra measure of protection. In some cases there is actual danger in not making these changes an urgent priority.

- Loss of the congregation as a faith community

The sense of shame and responsibility that victims feel about what was done to them often seals that feeling inside and stops the flow of community and concern. Congregation members may feel these same reactions. Doubt and fear of blame and retribution compel silence.

The congregation ceases to share its common faith and, instead, silently shares only its common shame.

Words of faith and belief, hope and trust go unspoken. The community may, in fact, cease to be a community that truly has faith in God's gift of salvation.

Restoring the life of the community is critical. Creating safe and reasonable places for honest expression, for studying and sharing the promises of scripture and the tradition of faith, for worship and for ministry to others, for fun and for prayer help restore this faith community.

- Loss of confidence in the teachings of the church

Can the church's tradition and its teaching be worthy of confidence if one charged to be a faithful steward of that message has caused so grievous a wound?

Confusion about matters such as forgiveness, repentance, ethical responsibility, and justice abounds.

Opportunities to learn about the church's concern for justice, to alleviate suffering, for healing and its bold and courageous ministry in the past help to counteract this lack of confidence.

Acknowledging failures in church practice, and lifting up the quietly faithful witness of the few (e.g. the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany) can help members to see the human dynamics at play in their current situation, and the importance of not giving up.

- Loss of faith in God

How can God allow this to happen? Many feel that the entire ministry of the offending pastor was a mockery, a sham, and that the God who was the subject of that ministry is, in fact, no God at all.

The wound of sexual abuse is traumatic because it is a wound that affects us at a place so intimate, so fundamental to who we are, yet so hidden and so confusing, it is as if we have been violated by One who knows us in that inmost being, God. Rejecting God or choosing to deny the possibility of such a God are options chosen by some congregation members.

Ministry through worship and pastoral care that shines the spotlight of God's saving mercy and creative love and unconditional grace on God's people can help people to regain their faith in God's power and work.

Scripture is full of stories about human failure and the way it tests the faith of those nearby. And scripture is full of stories about God's determination to not let evil and disobedience have the last word.

Healing, justice, wholeness, and community are God's unfailing desire for the human family.

These several losses may be experienced and expressed in a wide variety of ways, often by surprising people or groups in the church. Attention to these underlying concerns, rather than to the presenting issues or symptoms, will facilitate healing. Attending to the symptomatic concerns, however, is not necessarily frivolous or over-reactive.

Rules, directives, regulations, and control are commonly seen as necessary correctives to the violation of clergy sexual abuse. However, more than rules and regulations, it is the process of reflection and trust-building that will restore confidence and health.

There are some practical responses that help, too, and these might include the following:

- Painting the offices or the whole building,
- changing the order of worship,
- getting a new chalice, new stoles or chasubles,
- removing doors, adding doors, changing locks, getting more lights,
- starting a Bible study,
- having an adult forum series on church history or Lutheran identity,
- starting small groups and/or a coffee hour,
- making sure to always include a brief order for confession and forgiveness, using words of absolution,
- include the passing of the peace,
- quietly moving to weekly or mid weekly Eucharist at one service,
- reaching out to victims of other kinds of violence and exploitation,
- changing the gender balance on the congregation council

all of these may be among the legitimate responses to the underlying feelings of loss and betrayal.

Naming what is going on, honest conversation is essential!

## **CHAPTER 14**

# **OFFERING PASTORAL LEADERSHIP IN CONGREGATIONS AFTER CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE**

Pastoral leaders who are prepared to enter a congregation following clergy sexual abuse can do a great deal to help that congregation to heal. Whether for a very short period or a longer period of several months, skilled leaders can facilitate the healing processes, including those described in this resource.

In some congregations a long-term interim with specific skills and preparation for this ministry is essential to guide a healthy process of recovery. A strong leader and/or leadership team can help the congregation attend to the necessary tasks of healing, and, at the same time, continue to conduct its ongoing ministry.

Rather than obsessing about these tasks, a skilled leader actually frees up energy for other ministry. This leader knows how to see the healing process “built in” to the day-to-day function of the congregation.

If a long-term trained interim is not available, it is well worth considering even a short, intensive interim period of ministry from such a person. That minister might then be on call to the pastor who follows, or to the lay leadership in the event of a long vacancy served part-time by a neighboring pastor and supply preachers.

Synods may consider training and developing a small cadre of individuals with these skills, including those On Leave From Call, individuals with calls to specialized ministry and others with the flexibility to provide this interim leadership. This group may or may not overlap the group of individuals trained to provide immediate crisis intervention ministry. Deans of synodical conferences may be asked to be part of any training and to play a part in the healing ministry.

### **Goals for pastoral leadership after clergy sexual abuse**

The primary goals of pastoral leadership in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse include:

- establish trust
- establish a spirit of honesty and respect
- establish worship as safe space for all
- provide a “non-anxious presence” (competent/well trained, well-differentiated, grounded, not reactive, not anxious)
- claim the gospel resources that promise and promote healing
- listen attentively
- provide fair and open opportunities for communication
- avoid identification with factions and cliques, avoid triangling



- discourage secrets and withholding of important ideas and concerns
- empower victims and their families to move forward toward healing; avoid blaming the victim(s)
- avoid fixation on the previous pastor, living in the past and becoming trapped in either blaming or idealizing (two poles)
- avoid seeking to have one's personal needs met through the congregation

In her classic work, *Suffering*, theologian Dorothee Soelle identifies the movement of those who suffer from the depths of despair to healing. In her typology there are three distinct phases of suffering:

mute/silence                      lamenting                      changing

Individuals move through these three stages and so do communities.

## **Mute/silence**

The congregation at first feels numb, speechless, powerless. Whatever responses do come tend either to be wailing, moaning, or explosive. There is a sense of isolation, brooding, turning inward on oneself. Ideas, issues, questions are disorganized and jumbled. The mood is one of passive, submissive reactivity, or flailing, concussive reactivity. The pain seems unendurable and unending.

Basic functions like thinking it through, sorting out the issues, beginning to talk about it, identifying what needs to be done, and seeking help are impossible as the congregation is overwhelmed by the trauma. It is like that dream we have sometimes of being endangered but rooted to the spot, paralyzed, our screams dying in our throats. In the dream we usually wake up at this point. In real life, we come unstuck when someone reaches us in this deep pain and gently takes a hand, offers a look and a word of compassion, and guides us slowly forward.

Giving language to the mute is one of the most important gifts of ministry to suffering people. One cannot put words in their mouths, but it can be helpful to be suggestive, to name feelings, problems, fears, concerns, sources of anxiety and anger. The other essential ministry at this point is holding out the hope that things can change, the suffering can be alleviated, and healing can occur. "It doesn't have to be this way. And I will help you move to a place where it is not like this anymore."

{When the movement from numb brooding or explosive reactivity is not facilitated in a positive way, the consequences are repression, neuroses, and, for some individuals, criminality. The suffering does not go away or resolve itself naturally over time in such a case, it simply goes underground. These are the congregations we know of that experienced clergy sexual abuse ten, twenty, fifty years ago but never disclosed or discussed it. Members and former members of these congregations tell us that they have never recovered, never returned to vital, healthy mission.}

## Lamenting

The second phase is that of lamenting, crying out in pain, crying about the pain, identifying the pain or the source of the suffering. It is also the cry for help.

It is emotional, also reactive, but now with focus and energy. “Do something!” This is the psalmic period and many of the psalms from scripture are poignant expressions of the pain and concern felt so keenly by individuals and whole communities who have suffered defeat, betrayal, abandonment. Using the psalms is a great comfort and a great gift, a step toward claiming the power of God to bring justice and healing into the situation.

Also involved in this phase is the learning/education activity, cognitive activities that help name and make sense of what has happened. This is the time for analysis, elucidation, clarification.

This phase is often skipped over in the rush toward action. However, this phase is essential if the action that follows is to have integrity, focus, and success.

The community needs this phase in order to claim the insights gained and then use them to make their own action plan, rather than accept one imposed on them, however well-meaning.

During this phase the expressions of hope will sound utopian, unrealistic. However, they express the deepest and most honest longing of the heart and they need to be honored. As more information is integrated into the analysis of reality and the prospects for the future, the expectations will naturally become more realistic.

Also during this period, the feelings of suffering will be intense. It is odd that our capacity to describe what is wrong also intensifies our experience of pain because of it. The veneer or, as Soelle describes it, the camouflage over the wound is taken off. Repressed feelings and ideas now have permission to affect us. And it may again, at first, seem overwhelming. It is tempting to retrench, and some do. This is a natural reaction. Continued tenderness and encouragement is important for the process to continue.

It is important for those who dare to express their suffering to know that they may do so safely. The pastoral leader can create environments of safety for the community and for its various individuals by modeling respect, trustworthiness, and by identifying limits and boundaries around how we treat the expressions of others.

It may also be necessary to create an environment that encourages a person to feel safe even from his or her own reactions to these unusual expressions of angst. Self-censorship is often more limiting than that imposed externally. Some individuals will seek out private opportunities for expressing their responses and, as much as possible, these desires should be honored.

Of course, we all differ in our preferred style of expressing pain. And we all have different pain thresholds. The pastoral leader can encourage healing of the whole community by naming these differences, honoring or respecting them, and providing for the appropriate and safe expression of these different styles.

Naming reality for another person is a tricky endeavor. It is always suggestive, tentative, never directive or definite. A range of reactions, feelings or responses may be identified. Options and possibilities are raised up. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It is exceedingly rare that we “know just how you are feeling.” Better to say that “some people feel...and others feel...” and so forth. Then, listen patiently and see what comes.

Using the psalms and providing plenty of time for silence in worship during this period is helpful. You may identify several psalms for individuals to read and pray during their own devotions.

## Changing

The third phase in Soelle's typology is changing, action, organizing, movement. This usually occurs in community, rather than isolation. The first steps in this direction may be taken by individuals or in small groups. These groupings may reflect personality style, readiness to move forward, more so than traditional groups within the congregation.

All of the analysis moves toward action that first of all addresses and alleviates the immediate causes of the suffering, and then, often, looks to change the conditions that created the cause of the suffering. Thus, churches in this phase often include policy development and requests to the synod to do better screening and preparation of pastors.

Education to prevent future suffering and planning to deal more proactively with future problems often ensues.

Ideally, local congregations reach out with deeper compassion to the victims of the abuse, their families, perhaps also the family of the offending pastor, and the pastor himself or herself. At the end of this phase reconciliation may occur. [That will depend, in no small measure, on the healing and therapeutic work the offender has been doing and his or her readiness to accept responsibility for the abuse, repent, sometimes offer restitution to the victims, and to seek forgiveness.] In any case, one of the significant actions taken may be forgiving the offender, letting go both of the pastor and the pain, and moving forward in creative ministry.

Some tangible actions and changes—signs that healing is occurring are detailed in the chapter about *Signs of Healing*. These include a return of joy, humor and gratitude, increased socializing, resumption of important practices interrupted by the crisis, faithfulness and accountability in assuming responsibility for ministry tasks, and the ability to focus on mission and future mission planning.

Pastoral leadership can encourage these processes by noting them as they occur, acknowledging and affirming movement forward, and even celebrating certain milestones.

Patience and acceptance of these stages, as with the stages of grief, creates a climate of safety and expectation in the congregation. When the pastoral leader is nonplussed by expressions of sorrow or fear, or provides helpful and respectful interpretation of certain outbursts, members are encouraged to find ways to integrate this into their own processing of the events and to receive others with dignity and compassion.

Some congregations include expressions of these phases, such as psalms or prayers written by members, in newsletters or corporate worship. Some continue to have meetings where individuals can express both their concerns and their faith that healing is happening. Some congregations observe the anniversary of the former pastor's departure (or another significant date) with a prayerful vigil.

The pastoral leader can encourage and facilitate these steps forward with suggestions, example, helpful resources, and permission.

The pastoral leader is a “midwife” of the new life that emerges through this process. Provide an environment that promotes health, offers resources (tangible and intangible) to assist others, and acknowledge the positive developments. Be prepared to respond to new crises, isolate and stop infections from spreading, and, in some cases, let go of those who will not participate in the movement forward, to new life.

Pastoral leaders promote healing in ways that include:

- don’t make promises you can’t keep
- identify appropriate boundaries, articulate them and keep them
- claim appropriate authority and relinquish inappropriate authority behaviors of the former pastor; do not abdicate appropriate authority or symbols of that authority
- bring in consultants, experts, and other pastors, counselors and teachers to teach and serve the congregation, not only about this problem but regarding other ministry areas, as appropriate
- do not represent having more competence or skills for specific kinds of ministry than are true; do not attempt to do everything
- create climate that identifies, then discourages passive/aggressive behavior
- create climate that is intolerant of gossip, rumors, secrets, innuendo, generalized criticism and meanness
- check out rumors, name them, “shine light” of truth on them, deal forthrightly with rumors, gossip and myths during council meetings, committee meetings, staff meetings and other settings [publish a “rumor of the month” feature in the newsletter, with true or helpful information to counter it or confirm it]
- set an “open meetings” policy and publish minutes/reports; letters from the lay leadership about decisions, deliberations and processes toward healing sent periodically to all members, reports during worship or coffee hours or special meetings are helpful
- maintain a “need to know” boundary around information that identifies victims, etc. rather than a “want to know” boundary
- explain the “why’s” about decisions and policies and procedures, not just the end results
- be aware of the heightened sexual tension in the congregation and avoid externalizing your own sexuality
- avoid reactive, defensive behaviors when conflicts arise
- name, identify everything under the sun, both good and bad
- acknowledge the irony that crisis presents both danger and opportunity. (The Chinese word for crisis means both)
- distinguish between safety needs and comfort desires

- be mindful of the aura of clergy power, how we affect people, how you use and carry power, and what projections are set in motion, including the sexual quality and attraction of power for some people
- encourage people to tell you when you are hurting, invading, evading or overwhelming them, and to do the same with each other
- always be in charge of the boundary between you and all parishioners, especially when you sense a boundaryless zone—when someone invites or allows inappropriate intimacy or encourages or allows you to usurp their power or responsibility
- bring highly conflicted parties together in settings where each agrees to at least listen to the other speak their truth, describe the reality as they perceive it
- provide ample opportunities in preaching, worship, and Bible study to reflect and grow

Many pastoral leaders who serve in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse are naturally drawn either to focus almost exclusively on the specific tasks related to healing, or to provide such exemplary leadership, the congregation will forget it ever happened. That pastor might seek to create for the congregation an entirely new way of envisioning and experiencing pastoral leadership. If the offending pastor was one sort of leader, the new leader will work to demonstrate an opposite style.

Or the pastoral leader may feel it necessary to talk constantly about the abuse, to be explicit on every occasion about the work of healing. Anxiety related to the crisis can manifest in obsessing about fixing it. This may pit the new pastoral leader against lay leaders, the bishop and others in the congregation. This can replace concern for the ongoing pastoral care needs of members and for essential ministry activities and plans.

The most important gift a pastoral leader can provide to a congregation in crisis is faithful, careful attention to the needs of its members and its mission. This includes the tasks of healing, of course, but does not exclude personal concerns and routine ministry requirements.

## **Priorities for pastoral leaders in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse**

focus on the basics—

preaching the gospel with clarity and sincerity,

offering the sacraments as often as possible (now is not the time to gear up for a big decision on increasing the frequency of communion in worship),

pray for the community and together with it,

not forgetting those who are homebound,

tending to pastoral care needs of members,

teaching,

administration and care for details.

Lectionary texts for every season provide rich material to work with in claiming God's compassion for those who suffer, God's desire for life and fullness, God's desire for justice, repentance, amendment of life and wholeness. The promise of God to bring life out of death is a powerful word of hope to people in this situation. Texts about deliverance, God's faithfulness, God's wisdom and guidance, and God's gifts of healing are very important. Jesus Christ, our salvation, is the foundation and is our deliverer. Claim this gift for the congregation and keep it ever before them.

Pastors and others who enter a congregation to provide leadership after the incidence of clergy sexual abuse will be "on trial" and, in many instances, guilty until proven innocent. Evidence of this attitude will show up in second-guessing, non-cooperation, checking-up, looking over shoulders, and anonymous notes. It is hurtful unless it is known that this is not about the current pastoral leader but about the betrayal.

The great temptation is to serve without fault, to provide ministry beyond reproach. We hate to be criticized, and we seek to avoid it by being perfect.

However, it is impossible to do everything perfectly or to conform to everyone's expectations. This is especially dangerous to attempt in a highly reactive atmosphere.

It is important not to be perfect or to even try to conform to the multitude of expectations. Modeling failure, and repentance—acknowledging limitations and failure, taking full responsibility for one's actions, accepting that behaviors can have an impact different than the one intended, acknowledging the consequences to others and expressing sorrow for them, without mitigating or excusing the behavior, and then asking forgiveness—this is an important gift to the congregation. It shows them what healthy relationships can be, and, frankly, it helps them to see the standard of accountability appropriate for their former pastor.

At the same time, the interim pastoral leader must model consistency and faithfulness. This leader must be healthy and able to withstand stormy days ahead.

Care to maintain appropriate boundaries, that protect the pastoral leader as well as the congregation, is important. This leader must know how to distinguish between and separate personal life from ministry. Constancy and clarity about boundaries regarding office hours, availability, job descriptions, space, confidentiality are crucial. A non-anxious presence means having clarity about the role, and strong personal identity, emotional health, and support systems in place.

There is a temptation to over-extension, over-availability, over-functioning. This is not helpful either. Taking over the ministry, making decisions that are properly the preserve of laity, taking on responsibility that properly or traditionally belongs to others, seeking to do all things for all people, cure all ills, bind up all wounds—these are the great temptations of the pastoral leader who serves in the wake of a great betrayal.

It is important to model and to observe for their own sake the boundaries of a day off, time away, sabbath for family and personal growth, scripture study and prayer, accepting fair and appropriate compensation, being accountable to someone (the bishop's office, the council, a "supervisor") for the ministry, and keeping to a schedule.



The pastoral leader who serves after clergy sexual abuse must know that the primary agenda for that period of ministry is the healing from the betrayal. This is not the time to launch into other all-consuming, potentially conflictual or perplexing ministry objectives, however worthy.

This pastoral leader comes to listen, to provide a safe “container” or context to work through painful material, to help guide a healthy process and clarify boundaries, to teach, to mediate, to empower.

Whether this is a short crisis response intervention or a longer-term interim, the pastoral leader will be kept at arm’s length, even by those who may appear to be welcoming and unwary. It is always possible that those who appear unaffected by the crisis simply have not gotten to the point of dealing with it yet.

Some congregations will reach out gregariously to an apparently healthy pastoral leader and seek to substitute this new affection for their grief and recovery work from the past hurt. It is important for the pastoral leader not to be seduced by this affection. The congregation can not heal if it fixates too quickly on a new outside leader, a messiah, a quick fix.

The interim leader needs to be content with a certain dispassionate distance from the congregation (which is not to say lack of concern or feeling). The interim leader must continually wean the eager congregation away from transferring their attention to him or her and back to the task at hand: dealing with the wounds of betrayal and recovery. A certain amount of transference of affection, however, may help the congregation to feel the pain of its loss and to move through the phases of suffering. The pastoral leader will need to be aware of this dynamic and not misuse it.

## **Healthy pastoral leaders needed**

It is worth thinking twice about sending as interim pastoral leaders into wounded congregations—whether for a few weeks, months, or a year or more—those individuals who currently have their own serious personal needs. It is difficult to choose not to utilize such pastors in these situations because they are often so readily available, On Leave From Call, and perhaps not available for a full-time, permanent call.

Each situation needs to be considered on its own merits, of course. But the needs of the congregation must come before the desire of the bishop to provide a ministry opportunity (and income) to any given pastoral leader. If a pastor cannot make reasonable promises of faithful reliability and concentrated attention to this ministry, and if there are reasons to believe the ministry would be impaired in some way, another choice is preferable.

We unconsciously tend to pair problems: difficult congregations with difficult (hard to place or needy) pastors. This doesn’t always happen but it happens often enough for us to flag our attention to it. This is definitely NOT the time to make that mistake!

The last thing this congregation needs is to be let down, either by the synod (who recommends or sends the interim) or another pastor. The betrayal this time might not be sexual, but rather the quality of care, time, attention, or skill. The consequences, however, will compound the earlier damage.

A well-trained pastoral leader will enter a congregation after its experience of clergy sexual abuse with a strong commitment to:

- scrupulous respect for confidentiality
- refraining from all gossip, speculation, generalizations and blaming
- not listening to secrets, not colluding in triangulation
- keeping promises, and promising only what can be fulfilled
- respectful references to all people and conditions
- good humor that does not disparage anyone
- keeping office hours, appointments, and deadlines: On Time
- providing a non-anxious presence; non-reactive presence
- preaching and teaching the message of the gospel of God's love and salvation for all in Jesus Christ
- creating an environment of safety and dignity, of hope and possibility for all
- acknowledge his or her own shortcomings and failures and to ask forgiveness
- engage in active spiritual disciplines and trust the Holy Spirit for wisdom and courage to do what is right
- seek help and support without hesitation whenever the way is unclear or the road becomes too rocky
- not expect the congregation to meet personal needs



# CHAPTER 15

## ACKNOWLEDGING THE SIGNS THAT HEALING IS HAPPENING

### Healing happens!

Signs of healing are often as fragile and tentative as the tiny shoots poking out of the dirt in early Spring. Each one is worthy of note and perhaps even a celebration.

It is important to remember that some in the congregation, and some congregations overall, will experience healing more quickly and more deeply than others.

As we spoke at the start of this resource about how different congregations will experience this “earthquake” in different ways depending upon a variety of factors, so, too, they will heal in different ways and at a differing pace, depending on some of these same factors.

There was nothing anyone could do at the time of the earthquake itself to change any of the pre-existing variables that affected the way the congregation was hit. If there had been prior experiences of betrayal, nothing could be done to change that. If the current lay leadership was relatively weak, nothing could be done to change that. And so forth.

The one variable we can affect is how we will choose to respond to the congregation, the level of support and care we will provide. And, in most of the situations we have observed, that one variable alone becomes uniquely significant in effecting a positive outcome.

It is always important to notice and to observe when the congregation has moved past a milestone, or has passed an anniversary related to their ministry, or to the ministry specifically of the former pastor.

Rites of passage in this process must not trample on the sensibilities of those still struggling, but they can serve as an encouraging marker along the way. Congregation members will pass significant anniversaries related to the abuse and departure of the pastor with varying dispositions. It is important to acknowledge these differences respectfully, including in the prayers of the church and on other public occasions.

It is also important to remember that dates on the calendar are just that; they have no magical power to guarantee that the congregation will have achieved any certain degree of closure and healing from this crisis. Arbitrary dates become deadlines in some cases.

The entire congregation may feel pressure to have moved beyond this problem by a certain date, or may impose those expectations on individuals within the congregation who are seen to be lagging behind. The fact is: we move at the pace we move.

Bishops and synodical staff also set up expectations of a time by which they expect that the congregation should be over this crisis. It is reasonable to believe that intentional activity toward a goal will accomplish that goal sooner rather than later, and it is not unreasonable to encourage the congregation to “move along.” But, again, for a variety of reasons, it is simply impossible to guarantee that the healing process will be complete in any given period of time.

It is important for synod staff to check in regularly with the interim or other new pastor, to see how things are going and what the congregation is prepared for as their next step. Be patient!

In conversations with many pastors and lay leaders in congregations where clergy sexual abuse occurred, the one thing each said without hesitation when we asked what they needed from synodical staff as time went on was this, “Please don’t ask us, ‘are you still dealing with this?’ It takes time. We don’t spend all our time and effort dwelling on this issue but the aftershocks and after-effects linger on for years, even when we’re doing a good job.”

The time it takes for a congregation to experience healing will depend in some measure on:

- the intentionality and care given over to that process,
- the training and skills provided for that purpose,
- the underlying strength of the congregation,
- the strength of the leadership—clergy and lay,
- encouragement from the larger church,
- and other factors that are unpredictable and uncontrollable.

## **Healing happens!**

One of the best signs of healing is the change in the mood of the congregation and a sense of relaxation of tension.

The pastoral leader often feels it first in a positive sense of anticipation about worship, meetings, social events. People are laughing at the jokes in the sermon, waving at each other, reaching out with words and gestures of empathy and support about many different things, not just the betrayal.

Council meetings are less tense, terse, and conflicted. Intercessory prayers are more frequent and more risking. Folks smile when passing the peace.

Silence is golden, not the calm before the storm. Joy and generosity of spirit are the harbingers of good things to come.

A return to patterns of gracious hospitality is another important sign. Members who have been wary of inviting one another into their homes and private lives are reaching out again.

A culture of friendliness returns. People come to worship and other gatherings with a relaxed, easy spirit that translates into easy-going casual conversations, introductions, and openness.

The sense of isolation, individuality, intensity, and dogged determination, and the sense overall that church is a problem to be solved, something to be got through, even tolerated for the sake of a greater good, is gone.

The congregation regains its sense of itself as a community, not a collection of atomized souls who simply happen to be in the same place at the same time.

Other tangible actions and changes—signs that healing is happening often include:

- giving is up, pledges are fulfilled, special gifts come in
- attendance is up, participation increases in worship (hymn singing perks up, people make eye contact, greet one another)
- laughing, good humor, and generosity of spirit return
- the overall mood shifts from crankiness, suspicion, cynicism, manic or depressive anger, hopelessness, and despair toward graciousness, kindness, openness, hopefulness, optimism, excitement, helpfulness, creative liveliness, and vitality
- the pastoral leader feels a sense of the burden lifting, a weightiness falls off; feelings of dread and anxiety, tension and fear are replaced by anticipation, confidence, calm, and happiness; dreams change, the body relaxes, physical symptoms of distress disappear, more smiling, whistling, and singing again
- people express a positive future orientation
- ability to focus on mission and on creative, generative projects that improve the quality of life within the congregation and its mission, and not only those that are entirely external to the congregation, (or vice versa, depending on which way the congregation had turned in its coping phase)
- risk-taking, daring, venturing ideas are given careful consideration and perhaps adopted (as distinct from manic, utopian, over reactive ideas and proposals)
- new members join and become involved
- children return to worship and to active involvement
- ability to make big decisions in healthy ways
- self-image improves; the congregation “dresses up” again, painting and other improvement projects completed, outreach and involvement in the larger community picks up
- socializing increases, new people are drawn into old circles
- a sense of mutuality and partnership is present
- empowerment is not a slogan but a reality: people effect the ideas and hopes they speak about
- women and men share leadership
- leadership positions filled by competent eager laity who follow through and fulfill their responsibilities
- ability to have a fact-based conversation about the crisis
- increased contact and cooperation between former antagonists; ancient alliances along real old “battle lines” become less important and disappear
- less stewing and dickering, more action

- less conflict about relatively obscure, picky details
- fights are fair; people aren't afraid to disagree or to fight but fight above ground, not underground, and then agree to support the consensus, compromise, or majority decision
- pastoral leaders receive praise, appreciation, respect; less second-guessing, paranoid watchfulness, picky criticisms
- staff members receive tangible gestures of appreciation, even pay increases and other increases in benefits, days or time off; Christmas gifts to staff are accompanied by notes and public expressions of gratitude, admiration, appreciation
- ability to reach out to victims with genuine concern, empathy and compassion (and to their families and closest supporters)
- ability to feel concern for the former pastor (offender) but to let go of preoccupations about the person, his or her welfare, the sad feelings of tragedy and disappointment about what happened; not caught, hooked, able to go for long periods without thinking about him or her at all
- ability to do constructive theology, to see God in their midst, to situate their story in the biblical narrative and the sweep of salvation history
- celebrations and parties feel lively and fun again
- people go out of their way to surprise one another or the whole congregation with generous gifts of ministry and other tangible support; a sense of extravagance returns
- ability to theorize about the crisis in a healthy way, to evaluate and comprehend intellectually what happened and construct plans and procedures to prevent and/or cope with future occurrence
- admitting the need for help in the healing process; willingness to receive advice and assistance graciously, and to use it
- ability to stop blaming the victims
- ability to turn their gaze inward in an appropriately self-critical way (not depressive or over-reactive but constructive) and to seek solutions to larger, underlying problems (e.g. sexism, patterns of power distribution in the culture and the church, ambivalence about authority and hierarchy, projection of responsibility, violence and injustice, alienation).

## **Healing happens!**

Healing is evident when the congregation is no longer fixated on replacing their former pastor, with a new one just like the old one—minus the abusive behavior, of course!

When the congregation expresses openness to new leadership styles, different personality styles, or personal characteristics, it may be well on its way to healing.

Many pastors who engage in clergy sexual abuse have strong, compelling personalities. They are dynamic leaders, bold and creative, colorful and fun to be around. They take risks and may be responsible for leading the congregation through significant growth and change. (Or not.)

At the same time, their deficiencies are well known and widely criticized. They may be poor at keeping on task, following through, caring for details. There may be lots of loose ends in the congregation. (Or not; it all depends.)

When a congregation is able to look for characteristics that differ from the particular strengths of their former pastor, to acknowledge the usefulness of other personality styles and leadership styles, and, at the same time, to not be completely unnerved by the recognition of some of the same weaknesses, (e.g. a messy office, or singing off key) that are not indications of the betrayal of trust or abuse of power—then, the congregation may be opening a new chapter!

They will continue to need support and encouragement; the process of “retrofitting” is almost but not perfectly complete.

New leaders will benefit from brief recitals of this painful history and the work the congregation has done to recover from it.

Attentiveness to maintaining healthy new patterns of relating and working together, throughout the congregation, will keep them strong, healthy and offering vital ministry to the gospel far into the future!

## **Afterword**

Each one of these pages is crammed full with the vivid, sometimes painful, and sometimes lively experiences of church members and their congregations. They have such hopes for their church! They have felt such sorrow in their church.

Their stories are very much their own personal grief. Nevertheless, everyone we spoke to in the course of completing this resource told us that, “If we can help others...”

A recent gathering of “after pastors” in one ELCA synod was a time for them to admit to each other the depths of their frustration and the confounding nature of this problem. Where to start?

One pastor said, “I feel like every day I am just waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

Congregations that do not experience healing in the wake of clergy sexual abuse are set up to have it happen again. And, in the meantime, the congregation lives on pins and needles, waiting for another bombshell, another aftershock, or, “the other shoe to drop.”

With this resource, the ELCA has taken a step to be intentional about urging congregations to take action to work toward healing. And, we have provided leaders some tools to assist these congregations.

The scope of this project did not give time or funding to continue to explore more carefully several related, additional topics.

If you have recommendations for additional chapters and topics, please contact the author of this resource at the number listed on the title page.

This work is not intended to be exhaustive, prescriptive, or directive. We do hope it provides a reasonable framework and a place to begin.

We do especially encourage you to consult the resources noted on the pages of the bibliography. A particularly helpful book is *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct*. Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser, editors. Alban Institute in association with the Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute, Collegeville, Minnesota. 1995. \$19.95

One final comment for those who will serve in congregations in the aftermath of clergy sexual abuse—and those who support them. I'm sure you remember the pre-flight safety announcement on the airplane; remember they always say, put your own oxygen mask on first (and then help the person next to you, in the event of an emergency). Those of us who provide ministry in these very difficult, crisis settings must remember always and everywhere to nurture our own souls, to receive ministry from others, to be faithful in our spiritual disciplines, and to rely on the unfailing power and grace of God in Christ to sustain us and heal those to whom we are sent.

Peace be with you!

## **ESTABLISHING A SAFE CONNECTION**

### What You Can Do To Prevent Clergy Sexual Abuse

1. Education! For everybody—laity, clergy, church leaders, community
2. Clarify expectations: “zero tolerance policy” of sexual contact between pastor and parishioners
3. Prepare a policy and a plan for responding to complaints
4. Skip the “laundry list of don’ts” but establish a climate of openness, trust, awareness, carefulness, and respect
5. Encourage your pastor to take care of personal needs away and apart from the congregation
6. Make sure your pastor is taking appropriate time off
7. Provide adequate vacation time for pastors
8. Provide appropriate time and funds for continuing education for your pastor
9. Provide adequate and fair compensation for pastors
10. Discourage your pastor from being a lone ranger. Encourage accountability, appropriate supervision, and collegiality. Be alert to isolation.
11. Clarify expectations of single pastors and make them known widely
12. Encourage your pastor to “get a life!” Promote healthiness and wholeness
13. Honor and respect the pastor’s family commitments and family life
14. Help establish and respect healthy boundaries throughout the congregation
15. Be clear about job descriptions, policies, schedules, and other guidelines for pastors, lay leaders, pastoral relationships, and lay volunteers

# SAFE CONNECTIONS

## UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE IN THE CHURCH

### Books and Videos

*Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*, by Carolyn Holderread Heggen, Herald Press, 1993, \$9.95 Very helpful, full of practical insights and ideas for congregations who hope to help victims become “survivors who are thriving, turning woundedness and pain into beauty and strength.” Includes chapters on the distinction between forgiveness and restitution, prevention and congregational responses.

*Beyond the News Sexual Abuse*, by Mennonite Media Productions (800-999-3534), a 21 minute video with study guide for congregational and other group use. Introduction to dynamics and issues, including clergy sexual abuse, to provide helpful context for discussion. Compatible but not required for use with *Sexual Abuse in Christian Homes and Churches*. \$19.95 (available for preview or purchase).

*Is Nothing Sacred?*, by Marie M. Fortune, Harper Collins, 1989, \$10.00. 1990 Book of the Year Award from the Academy of Parish Clergy, this book is groundbreaking in its exploration of the problem of clergy sexual abuse. The story of one congregation’s experience with an abusing pastor, and careful analysis of the issues. Fortune discusses the effect of clergy sexual abuse on individual victims, the entire congregation, and the denomination responsible for care of the congregation and of clergy on its roster.

*Not In My Church*, by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, (206-634-1903), or 936 N. 34th Street, #200, Seattle, WA 98103. 45 minute docudrama—the story of one church faced with betrayal of trust by its pastor. Excellent intro to the topic for all audiences. \$149 purchase, \$60 rental (one week), free one month preview. Both rental and preview must be secured with credit card and be reserved one month in advance. Also available: comprehensive training curriculum, includes 50-minute training video, “Once You Cross the Line.” \$375 purchase, preview arrangements as above. The Center has other excellent resources about preventing child sexual abuse and domestic violence and abuse.

*Sex in the Forbidden Zone*, by Peter Rutter, Ballantine Books (Fawcett Crest), 1989, \$5.99. Written from the perspective of a professional therapist, about the dangers to everyone involved when professional caregivers, including clergy, become sexually involved with clients/parishioners. Rich exploration of the factors leading to abusive sexual involvements and strategies to help prevent them.

*At Personal Risk Boundary Violations in Professional-Client Relationships*, by Marilyn R. Peterson, W.W. Norton, 1992, \$22.95 (cloth). An excellent, probing examination of the psychological and moral dynamics involved in professional sexual misconduct. Worth the price! Must-reading for clergy and other professionals who struggle to understand the landscape of their relationship with others, especially as regards the power of their role. Wise, hopeful and forward-looking insights.



## **Sexual Abuse Prevention Safe Connections**

*The Cry of Tamar: Violence Against Women and the Church's Response*, Pamela Cooper-White, Fortress Press, 1995. This brand new book begins with the Biblical story of the rape of Tamar, and proceeds to look with great care and insight at the terrible range of violence that is committed against women today. A specific chapter on clergy sexual abuse is rich with wisdom about why it happens, why it is abuse, why it is so harmful, why some women may be more vulnerable than others to become victims, why some pastors may be more at risk to commit this offense, and how we can work to prevent incidence of this problem. It is worth noting that this author takes a strong view, and explains it clearly, against single pastors dating members of the parish. Her words are well worth consideration.

*Sex in the Parish*, by Karen Lebacqz and Ronald Barton, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991, \$14.95. A “realistic appraisal of the complex relationships between pastor and parishioners.” Ethical analysis, detailed suggestions regarding policies and plans. Lays out an ethical framework for single pastors seeking to conduct a dating relationship with a parishioner. Provides special attention to women clergy, and gay and lesbian clergy relationships. Examines consequences of abuse while affirming sexuality as a gift.

*Healers—Harmed and Harmful*, Conrad W. Weiser, Fortress Press, 1994. \$14.00. This is, as the author states clearly, not a book about clergy sexual abuse. And it is not a simple, self-help, fix-it-up book. After working for years as a psychologist and consultant with clergy and congregations, the author became convinced that something deeper than lack of skill or commitment was preventing some pastors from effective ministry. This book sets out the psychodynamic issues at work in the lives of some clergy, wreaking havoc in their personal affairs and in their ministry. It is useful for those concerned about clergy sexual abuse who are open to or already share his premise that the harmful and inappropriate actions of the adult pastor are the product of unrecovered damage from childhood.

*Ethics in Ministry: A Guide for the Professional*, Walter E. Wiest and Elwyn A. Smith, Fortress Press, 1990, \$15.00. Case studies and analysis are woven together to present a thoughtful presentation about ethics for clergy. It is not a book about clergy sexual abuse, although this ethical breach is discussed along with others. This study presents careful consideration of the basic issues involved in a range of ethical concerns, from lying and telling the truth to finances to dating to ego-gratification. It is useful and probing about the sexual boundary and the temptations to abuse power, and so it, too, is helpful for those seeking to prevent clergy sexual abuse, and to help others understand it.

Available for order from the ELCA Distribution Center (800-328-4648):
---

*If You Have Been Sexually Abused or Harassed A Guide to Getting Effective Help in the ELCA* #69-5115

*Visions and Expectations for Ordained Ministers in the ELCA* #69-9440

*An ELCA Strategy for Responding to Sexual Abuse in the Church* #69-3584

*Mutual Ministry Committee: A Vision for Building Up the Body of Christ* #69-6735

Other resources and information available from the Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson (800-638-3522 ELCA Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy, Division for Ministry, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631

Books available from Augsburg Fortress about clergy sexual abuse,  
ethics and pastoral role and related topics: (800-328-4648)

*Pastor Power* by Martha Stortz

*Breach of Trust Sexual Exploitation by Health Care Professionals and Clergy* edited by John C. Gonsiorek

*Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman

*The Abuse of Power* by James Poling

*Incest in the Organizational Family* by William White

*Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* by Marie Fortune

*Love Does No Harm: Sexual Ethics for the Rest of Us* by Marie Fortune

*The Depleted Self* by Donald Capps

*Generation to Generation* by Edwin Friedman

*Sexual Assault and Abuse: A Handbook for Clergy and Religious Professionals* edited by Mary Pellauer and Jane Boyajian (Out of print but available for loan from most synod offices and ELCA seminary libraries)

Alban Institute materials related to clergy sexual abuse:  
Alban Institute 4125 Nebraska Avenue N.W. Washington D.C 20016 (800-457-2674)

*The Congregation Is Also A Victim: Sexual Abuse and Violation of Pastoral Trust* by Nancy Myer Hopkins

*Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Perspective* by Nancy Myer Hopkins

*Considerations for Conducting an Investigation of Alleged Clergy Sexual Misconduct* by Anne Underwood

*An Attorney Looks at the Secular Foundation for Clergy Sexual Misconduct Policies* by Anne Underwood

*Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry* by Roy Oswald

*How to Build A Support System for Your Ministry* by Roy Oswald

*Sexual Paradox: Creative Tensions In Our Lives and in Our Congregations* by Celia Allison Hahn

*Being Clergy/Staying Human* by Dorothy McRae-McMahon

*Caring for the Caregiver: Growth Models for Professional Leaders and Congregations* by Gary Harbaugh

*Who Ministers to Ministers?* by Barbara Gilbert

*The Male/Female Church Staff: Celebrating the Gifts, Confronting the Challenges* by Celia Allison Hahn and Anne Marie Nuechterlein

*Healing the Congregation A Resource* by Denise D. Tracy (Brand new and unreviewed)

## **Training materials and curriculum available for use with clergy and laity:**

*Not in My Church* 45 minute docudrama telling the story of one congregation faced with allegations of clergy sexual abuse. Accusations are brought against the beloved pastor by a former intern. We see flashbacks to her conversations with the accused, and his continuing pattern of abuse with current members of the congregation. What makes these relationships clergy sexual abuse? We learn along with the congregational committee convened to hear the initial complaint and with the regional church official responsible for discipline of pastors and care of congregations. An excellent introduction for all adults. May be used with senior high school students. One study guide is included with each video. Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, \$149 purchase, \$60 rental, Free preview (with credit card guarantee). One month advance reservation required for rental and preview tapes. 936 N. 34th Street, #200, Seattle, WA 98103. (206-634-1903)

*Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship* Comprehensive curriculum designed to prepare a person to lead workshops in a variety of settings on the range of issues related to clergy sexual abuse. Intended for participants in a trainers' workshop led by staff of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, the curriculum is sold separately. Materials cost does not include trainers' workshop tuition fee; call the Center for schedule of trainers' workshops. Includes excellent teaching video, divided up into several segments with extensive guide for discussion. Trainers' manual, one participant manual, and two videotapes (*Not in My Church* and *Once You Cross the Line*). Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence...Seattle. \$375. Free preview (see above).

*Sexual Ethics in Ministry* Eleven vignettes dramatize the dilemmas faced by clergy related to sexual ethics. Leaders'/discussion guide included. Extensive materials provide good introduction for a range of groups, including clergy, laity, denominational leaders and seminary faculty and students. Training for leaders may be available; contact the office below for details. University of Wisconsin at Madison, Health and Human Issues, Sexual Ethics in Ministry Project, Lowell Hall, Room, 324, 610 Langdon Street, Madison WI 53703. (800-442-4617 or 608-264-2195). \$249.

*Choosing the Light: Victims of Clergy Sexual Misconduct Share Their Stories* Study guide and video produced by the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Excellent introduction for congregational use. Greater Milwaukee Synod, 1212 S. Layton Boulevard, Milwaukee, WI 53215 (414-671-1212)

For the names and other information about individuals who are prepared to lead a training in your congregation, synod, region or other group, please contact the Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson, ELCA Sexual Abuse Prevention Strategy, Division for Ministry, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, IL 60631 (800-638-3522)

## **Safe Connections for children/Resources for prevention of child sexual abuse:**

*Scriptographic* booklets about child sexual abuse available from Channing Bede, Co. Simple illustrations and written text provide a good tool to use with and give to children. They have several different booklets related to this topic. Call 800-628-7733 for more information. Phones answered 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. EST.

*Hear Their Cries: Religious Responses to Child Abuse* This 48 minute documentary about the role of pastors and lay leaders in preventing child abuse includes definitions of physical, sexual and emotional abuse, signs of how to recognize possible abuse, stories of adult survivors, examples of how to respond to a victim's disclosure of abuse, discussion of theological issues, including forgiveness, and suggestions for how to work with secular agencies. Includes study guide and 25 audience brochures. Won several awards for excellence in communication and teaching. Excellent introduction and background for all adult audiences. May serve as background for the next step....

*Bless Our Children: Preventing Sexual Abuse* This 40 minute story of one congregation's ministry to include sexual abuse prevention in religious education for children. Practical methods and suggestions, actual classroom examples, and compelling explanation of why this belongs in religious education. As with previous video, this addresses the potential of preventing abuse in a range of settings, including the church. Intended for use with *Hear Their Cries* Includes study guide and 25 audience brochures. Excellent for use with all adult audiences. Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 936 N. 34th Street, #200, Seattle, WA 98103. (206-634-1903) \$185 for both videos, \$60 package rental, free preview. (Credit card guarantee and one month advance reservation required for rental and preview use.) *Hear Their Cries*, only, \$129, \$40 rental. *Bless Our Children*, only, \$99, \$40 rental. Same conditions apply.

*Sexual Abuse Prevention: A Study for Teenagers* by Marie M. Fortune. Curriculum for church youth groups or teen classes. Five sessions, each 90 minutes. Information ranging from facts and myths of sexual assault to coping with media messages about women, men and relationships. Session topics include "Rape is Violence, Not Sex," "The Good, the Bad, the Confusing," and "All in the Family." \$6.95. Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 936 N. 34th Street, #200, Seattle, WA 98103. (206-634-1903)

*Preventing Child Sexual Abuse* by Kathryn Goering Reid with Marie M. Fortune. Curriculum for children ages 9-12 for use in religious context. 13 sessions could work as SCS or in a variety of other settings. \$9.95.

*Preventing Child Sexual Abuse* by Kathryn Goering Reid. 10 sessions for use with children 5-8 years old, could work in SCS or other religious education settings. \$11.95

Both also available from the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.