

**A Restorative Ministry To Congregations  
In The Aftermath Of Clergy Sexual  
Misconduct**

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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## **SUMMARY**

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**Title: "A Restorative Ministry To Congregations In The Aftermath of Clergy  
Sexual Misconduct"**

Clergy sexual misconduct constitutes a major breach of a sacred trust. The pastoral relationship is a place where vulnerable parishioners should be free to share their deepest needs, fears and desires, without fear of being abused by their pastor. When pastors sexualize the pastoral relationship, they lose the very objectivity that is essential for meeting the needs of the parishioners who come to them for care and nurturance.

Historically denominational leaders have responded to allegations and instances of sexual abuse by clergy with denials, minimization and secrecy. These responses have left congregations confused and traumatized. Often the offending clergy were quietly removed or transferred without any information being shared with the congregations. Recent revelations from within the Roman Catholic community, has once again brought this matter to public attention. The project is intended to educate congregations and denominational leaders as to how they can respond to congregations with a restorative ministry approach, in the wake of clergy sexual misconduct, in order to bring healing and renewal to those congregations traumatized by clergy misconduct.

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## **Chapter 1: Statement of the problem:**

### **A. Background**

Clergy sexual misconduct is one of the major issues confronting society today. Across America one church community after another is being torn apart by disclosures of abuse by men well loved and respected by the churches they serve. Unfortunately, the churches have repeatedly shown themselves unable, and sometimes unwilling to respond adequately to congregational pain and their need for justice.

In the wake of recently made disclosures regarding sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, many churches are now reviewing their policies and procedures for dealing with incidents of abuse by clergy. Traditionally, religious systems have knowingly colluded in continuing the destructive and yet familiar response to clergy sexual misconduct, namely secrecy, cover-up, and denial.

The public outrage against clergy sexual misconduct is a relatively recent phenomenon, although as we now know, the behavior is long-standing because offending clergy have been protected by their institutional peers (Benyei, 1984).

The issue of clergy sexual abuse is not primarily sexual in nature, but at its core is the use and abuse of the power inherent in the pastoral relationship. We inevitably have power over those seeking pastoral service because we have something they need. Our fiduciary responsibility protects their vulnerability, for it obliges us to maintain clear boundaries and to subordinate self-interest to serving their best interest (Gula, 1996).

In the wake of clergy sexual misconduct which is a major betrayal of sacred trust, the congregation affected will no doubt experience confusion, anger, and even chaos. The

degree to which people experience these emotional responses will vary depending on how close they were to the clergy person or how believable they think the allegations are (Hopkins 1998). When the spiritual leader betrays the trust inherent in their role, the feelings of betrayal can be overwhelming, because congregations expect their clergy to be trustworthy (Hopkins, 1998).

When a minister commits sexual sins he unleashes a torrent of pain, fear and depression within the congregational system, that extends far beyond the primary victim, and impacts the entire congregation with devastating results.

In a 1992 article for Employee Assistance Program Digest, C.A. Frokey, a specialist in personnel issues, defines the difference between a critical incident or periodic crisis and a true traumatic occurrence. Both critical incidents and traumas are emotionally charged. The difference is that a crisis is expected in the course of one's daily life. Trauma is the result of an unanticipated and sudden event and always involves significant personal loss, which leaves individuals feeling devastated and out of control (Hudson, 1998). For our purposes trauma is the large-scale effects of a sudden, unexpected crisis event on a large group of people – namely, the system we call a congregation (Hudson, 1998).

Clergy sexual misconduct has very damaging and debilitating effect on everyone involved, the victims, their families, the congregation, the perpetrator and their families, and the wider community. This betrayal of trust inflicts severe wounds on many and for some it may take years before they can trust again. For others it leaves them traumatized and disillusioned about God, and the place of religion in their lives.

Sexual abuse is not just a recent phenomenon, it goes back to the Old Testament, thus it is not uniquely contemporary. The Old Testament reports that the sons of Eli were rejected because they misused their position to engage in sexual misconduct. These wicked men, who had "no regard for the Lord." ( 1 Samuel 2: 12), slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting ( v. 22).

As a pastor for almost twenty-three years, and in my recent roll as the Ministerial Director for the Northeastern Conference, my employing organization, I have seen first hand the destructive and divisive results of clergy sexual misconduct.

Historically, the leadership of my denomination has not had a clearly defined way of responding to this unfortunate and devastating experience. Judicatory officials primary response has been to try and minimize any negative consequences to the organization. One of the unintended consequences of this approach was that victims were made to feel re-victimized by the insensitivity of church officials. To further complicate matters, some offending clergy were treated differently based on their popularity and political connections within the organizational structure. This method of responding to misconduct by clergy, has left many victims including other non-offending clergy, and other victims disillusioned about the priorities of the church, whether its goal is to protect itself or to provide a safe and supportive place for those who come to their houses of worship for spiritual care and nurture.

Along with being a violation of a sacred trust which involved the violation of boundaries that are implicit in the clergy congregant relationship, and because of the



power that resides in the role of the ordained, the responsibility for maintaining the boundaries always rests with the ordained person ( Hopkins, 1998).

A few years ago, a colleague of mine found himself in what he later described as a non-abusive consensual relationship, with one of his parishioners. Being single at the time he saw no danger in dating this single female member of his congregation. The relationship escalated into a sexual one, and soon it came known among the members of the church, and was later reported to church officials, which subsequently led to his resignation from the ministry. Over the next several months a series of regrettable events took place that had a very devastating effect upon the congregation. Again church officials reacted in some very predictable ways, that was not in the best interest of anyone involved. Church officials thought that by removing the pastor the problems would be resolved, and the congregation would regain its homeostasis and continue with its mission of spreading the gospel.

However, the congregation was thrown into a state of chaos and confusion. They were left without adequate information as to the true nature of what had transpired, and how to process the sudden removal their pastor whom they dearly loved.

In the weeks that followed the church members began to polarize. Some of the members sided with the pastor, while others concluded that the pastor must have done something terribly wrong and that it warranted his removal by church officials. The congregation was left in the hands of the Board of Elders, who were ill-equipped to deal with the torrent of emotions that was manifested among parishioners. Members began fighting among themselves. Those that supported the pastor blamed the victim for

“bringing down” a good man. While those who felt that something wrong had occurred sided with the victim. Unfortunately this scenario is not an isolated one, but is typical of what has gone on, and continues to go on in congregations following the discovery of clergy sexual misconduct. And because many denominational leaders are not equipped, and in some instances are unwilling to deal with the dynamics that are involved in the congregation system following a betrayal of trust by a pastor who becomes sexually involved with a congregant, the chaos and confusion only tends to further traumatize the congregation.

It is important at this juncture for us to examine what factors are involved that causes or pre-disposes a clergy person to act out sexually with a parishioner. Clergy have sacred power attached to their role, and much of that power is unconsciously given and received (Hopkin, 1998). Although power in and of itself is not a bad thing, it can be abused if it is not handled consciously with care and discretion. And although the vast majority of clergy carry out their tasks with special care and compassion, there are indeed a few who will abuse and misuse the power inherent in their role as an ordained person. One common factor that is usually present among clergy who violate sexual boundaries is that they have violated other boundaries, namely overworking, or feeling that they alone can minister effectively to their congregation, forgetting that other pastors preceded them, and that others will follow.

**A. Specific Need:**

Clergy sexual misconduct constitutes an egregious boundary violation, and this violation is exacerbated by the fact that for most congregants, and even for the wider community, clergy is supposed to represent the safe and the sacred. Small wonder then, that learning about the pastor's betrayal of trust through the violation of sexual boundaries becomes a very traumatizing event in the life of a congregation, (Rossetti, 1992). This kind of betrayal strikes at the very core of a persons ability to believe in God and to trust the self ( Hopkins, 1998).

It is extremely important for church officials to understand that the impact of a betrayal of trust on a congregation will vary from mild to severe for members in the congregation. Part of the work of the consultants in working with these traumatized congregations will involve education around the tell- tale signs that will evidence severe trauma in individual members and lay leaders, who often have to put their grief on hold as they seek to assist others in dealing with the fall out of clergy misconduct.

Some congregants may find themselves reliving earlier experiences of abuse by a trusted and loved significant individual. When a congregant has been abused by a pastor to gratify his needs, the fall out and the harm to the congregant is enormous. The congregation suffers spiritually, emotionally, physically and relationally as they attempt to understand what has just happened, and what will happen to them and their church.

The relevance of my Project to the wider community can be seen by the recent revelations and disclosures coming from within the Roman Catholic Church. The wide spread attention given to the abuses within that religious community has had a great

impact on all religious communities. Many denominational leaders are much more aware of the potential and real harm that sexual misconduct can bring to any church organization, and efforts are on the way to educate, reform and put in place procedures to prevent or minimize the instances of clergy sexual misconduct and find appropriate ways to respond when abuse does occur.

New policies regarding ministry practice have been developed, and better methods of screening seminary candidates have been adopted. Background checks are becoming common place for many pastoral placement committees. All these methods when utilized will help in forestalling some incidents of clergy sexual misconduct.

In order for congregations traumatized by clergy sexual misconduct to begin the process of healing several important steps must be included if healing and recovery will be realized.

The first and most important step to be undertaken is that of Justice-making which necessitates truth telling as the first element. Congregations who are not told anything, will know anyway that something serious has happened, and in the absence of facts, they will surmise the very worst.

Many judicatory officials are sometimes reluctant to inform congregations when misconduct has occurred. They may want to protect them from the pain that disclosure will bring, but this action often leaves a congregation feeling belittled and patronized. Unless the facts are shared judiciously with the congregation, they may be set on a course that may precipitate and maintain a very troubled existence for many years to come.

Sometimes, because of litigation or an ongoing investigation, disclosure may have to be prolonged. However, the congregation should be informed of this and be given information as soon as it becomes possible to do so. A visit from a church official informing the congregation as to why it can only share very little information now, will enable the congregation to cope better at this time.

It is very important that intervention and support (i.e. counselors) be provided at this time to assist the congregation in processing their feelings, since experience has shown that in the wake of disclosure the confusion and chaos already present can be exacerbated. Many of the emotions expressed at this time will mirror those of the grief process. Shock and denial will more than likely be the first emotions to emerge, and these may soon afterwards give way to intense anger. Others will deny the information altogether, the responses will vary.

The closeness of some congregants to the offending clergy person will mitigate the impact of the disclosure. For all practical purposes the mission and ministry of this congregation in proclaiming the gospel will for the moment cease, as the congregation struggles to absorb the new revelations.

This first step in the restoration approach will be developed further in another chapter along with four other crucial steps outlined by Nancy Myer Hopkins.

Another crucial factor that must be examined and critiqued is the influence of the cultural and institutional factors from the wider community, that have created a climate in which power can be abused. Clergy betrayal of trust is more than one man's sin. In a larger

sense, his transgression indites the church as whole, and demands that we re-examine the way we do ministry ( Exley, 1998).

I agree with Exley's conclusion that a careful re-examination of ministry practice must be undertaken by both lay leaders and denominational officials, to discover their role, if any, in creating a climate in which abuse of power, resulting in clergy sexual misconduct can occur. The problem, it seems, is church-wide and underlines the fact that ministers are human beings with the same ego needs and sexual drives as other men with one significant difference. Other men can acknowledge their humanity, their propensity for sin, and receive the counsel and support of the church. For the most part, the minister must live in denial (Exley, 1988).

To combat this situation that isolates and keeps many ministers from being able to disclose their sexual feelings in a safe and supportive environment, rather than deny, suppress or act out inappropriately, the church must act intentionally to provide a safe context for expression of these feeling and give the necessary support. For if we fail to learn from our mistakes, and failing to learn, we are doomed to repeat them (Exley, 1988).

Moral failure in ministry is very complex, and not all sexual sin results from mere lust. Because of the close working relationships that are often part of the ministry practice of many local pastors, in what often begins as legitimate authentic ministry of shared projects, attentiveness, compassionate listening and the giving of comfort and support, which leads to emotional bonding and if left unchecked can lead to an illicit

affair. Thus structures of accountability must be developed and implemented in the wider church context to forestall the onset of clergy sexual misconduct.

Just before his sexual sin was made public, Jimmy Swaggart wrote: "I have always taken pride in my spiritual strength. I have believed in my relationship with God, if He promised me something, I could have it. I can't recall, in all my life, ever going to any body and asking them for help" (Swaggart, 1988).

It was only with the wisdom of hind-sight, that Jimmy Swaggart, realized that sexual sins cannot be overcome without the support of a spiritual brother or mentor to whom one makes himself accountable (Exley, 1988). What Jimmy Swaggart experience has clearly demonstrated for us is that even as a man experiences success in the ministry, he may be losing the battle within even as he experience success in the ministry. I cannot help but wonder how many ministers might have been spared the tragedy of moral failure if only they had had someone to go to when temptation just reared its ugly head (Exley, 1988).

#### **B. Relevance to ministry in a wider context**

It must be emphasized again that the church in its wider context must provide structures of support ( i.e. peer groups, judicatory supervision and encourage and equip local lay leaders to provide parish counsels that will, with denominational support develop structures of accountability within their local church).

In addition to providing structures of support, denominational leaders must provide clear guidelines for adjudicating complaints and investigating reports of clergy misconduct, in order to provide justice for all involved. Denominational polity also

shapes how decisions are made and what outside assistance might be available to these leaders (Hudson, 1998).

According to Jill M. Hudson there are at least four goals that should be pursued when seeking to respond with compassion and empathy to a congregation in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct.

1. Restoring equilibrium to the setting
2. Reconnecting individuals to their coping skills.
3. Promoting the most positive outcome possible for all involved.
4. When possible, preventing long-term maladaptive stress reactions that can result from failure to address trauma at the outset (Hudson, 1998).

In order to affect the goals outlined above, it would be advisable that the use of existing relationships be employed from two perspectives. First of all there should be some form of therapeutic intervention with the congregation, where counselors are able to provide help to the congregation to process the emotions and assist in guiding the discussions among the members of the congregation. On another level, the congregation can and will greatly benefit from non-professional caregivers.

It must be noted that in the initial stages of responding to the needs within the traumatized congregation, where emotions will be running very high, therapy which can and will be useful later, will be impractical now. For therapy to effect the desired goal of restoring emotional equalitarian, individuals will need to feel safe to explore the



psychodynamic effects of the events that transpired following the disclosure of clergy sexual misconduct.

The exception to this rule or general principle is occasions when individuals just cannot function because of the pain that comes as a result of the trauma they have recently experienced. It is important for those ministering to congregations that have been traumatized to understand, that it is not uncommon for some individuals to tell and re-tell their stories. This enables them to talk about what has happened. They need to relate the situation to other events in their lives. They often need to explain the incident to themselves so that they can acknowledge it. Acceptance cannot precede acknowledgement. This retelling of their story has a therapeutic benefit, however it should subside within a reasonable amount of time.

In concluding this first chapter, and our examination of ministry in a wider context it is imperative that we include a critique of our present cultural patterns that create a climate that facilitates abuses of power, by clergy who are entrusted with the exercise of sacred power. It is an established fact that there is a power imbalance that exist in our present culture. Women do not share equally in the use and exercise of power, and because these imbalances have largely gone unchallenged until recently to the detriment of many women in society, we have come to acknowledge that women do not share equality with men in our culture, which has given rise to, and the maintenance of power differentials between men and women which raises ethical questions. Until such a time as patterns of child rearing in our culture is changed, it is likely that men (including clergy) will continue to generalize their deep feelings. In order to develop healthy

patterns of sexual relating in the church, the cultural patterns have to be changed (Lebacqz and Barton, 1991).

To acknowledge these cultural realities is not in any way giving tacit approval to sexually abusive behavior by clergy toward congregants. Structures are needed to ensure that pastors will relate appropriately to members of the opposite sex in their congregations.

When sexual abuse occurs within a congregation it is difficult to express empathy for the women who were abused, without appearing to condemn and blame men (Lebacqz and Baron, 1991). It is equally difficult to express sympathy for the male pastor, without running the risk of appearing to diminish the pain and trauma of abused women, yet, this is the paradoxical context in which we must work in order to build an ethical framework, for a redemptive and restorative response to congregations in the wake of clergy sexual misconducts.

In the wake of trauma, there appears always to be some period, whether intense or mild of questioning life's meaning and purpose and wondering whether the God in whom we've believed has an active role in the world (Hudson, 1998). In the wonderful book *All Our Losses All Our Grievs* pastoral counselors Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson point out that the life of faith is an ongoing task of building and rebuilding. Questioning is the start of the rebuilding phase for most people, and we need to assure each other that God is able to handle our doubts and questions (Anderson and Mitchell, 1983).

In their desperate attempt to find comfort in the midst of a traumatic and devastating situation the heightened stress and sorrow of the moment frequently lead to emotional responses that desperately seeks comfort in our earliest roots rather than our matured faith (Hudson, 1998).

In the aftermath of trauma within a congregation, the way in which that congregation responds to the pain and perplexity that resulted from the betrayal of trust by their pastor can potentially offer a great witness to the secular community in which they reside. God can use our brokenness to be a source of healing for others, and create opportunities to bring the healing grace of God to the brokenness of their lives. The healing of the individual affected by a group trauma can be hastened if the individual remains connected to the courage and healing journey of the larger group.

It has been long recognized that the close affiliation of the Jewish people is related to their ability to survive and thrive in spite of great suffering, as in the case of the Holocaust. They are fully cognizant of the power that emanates from shared pain, in that it can provide a frame work for healing. For these reasons congregational gatherings are essential following a traumatic incident like clergy sexual misconduct. We must remember that people who have been traumatized need to talk about what happened. They need a safe and supportive space where they can share their deep feelings with others who are going through a similar experience. Talking through the pain, perplexity and disillusionment is therapeutic, in that it allows for feelings to be named and validated, as they journey towards healing and renewal.

The ability of the congregation to connect with its coping skills, through its use of its spiritual resources, is also a very effective way by which they can allow scripture, hymns, stories and other positive experiences to nurture them amidst their pain.

## **CHAPTER II: Principles that guide and inform**

### **A. Religious Principles**

Among the religious principles pertinent to this project is the fact that congregations expect their clergy to be trustworthy and safe, thus allowing them to bring all of their vulnerabilities to God through them and the church. Because of the power that resides in the role of the ordained, the responsibility for maintaining the boundaries, always rest with the ordained person. The call to serve the church brought with it high expectations and hope. Since the minister is also involved intimately in major transitions in the lives of parishioners, and this involvement produces major bonds of affection, any betrayal of trust, and particularly that of a sexual nature, will inevitably result in great harm being done to the congregational system.

There are several religious principles that are pertinent to my project, included among them are trust, belief, forgiveness, repentance, restoration, reconciliation and restitution. Faith communities are places where we bring our longings for meaning, intimacy and deep connection with the Divine (Benyei, 1984). Clergy misconduct are especially damaging because we all know that pastors are called to emulate the charity, chastity and care of Christ the good shepherd (Armstrong, 1995). Because of the symbolic representation of those in pastoral ministry, to be sexually victimized by a pastoral minister in the minds of many congregants, is tantamount to being exploited and betrayed

by the church or even by God himself. I agree with Richard M. Gula that "people entrust to us very personal matters, because they perceive our professional role to be a zone of safety for them" (Gula, 1996).

Moral responsibility in ministry transcends social conventions, and the pastoral minister is more than just a professional person to his congregants. His behavior toward his parishioners must go beyond mere general rules of conduct, and must be rooted in his moral response to the call of God, who authorizes and legitimates morality. The pastoral minister must then be guided by those values which are in accord with what God values. When the minister acts out in ways that he betrays the values that he embodies for his parishioners, he produces chaos and confusion in the minds of those who look to him for moral and ethical guidance.

The fact is that pastoral ministry by its very nature means that we must be willingly self-disciplined so as to subordinate self-interest to serving the well-being of others. Through the ministry, we live a life of service that promotes the mission of the church to bring everyone into fuller communion with God. Our being symbolic representatives of God makes it urgent that we respect the requirements of being professional, since people's experience of us is so tied up with their experience of God (Gula, 1996). Because of the symbiotic way in which the pastoral minister is viewed and experienced by congregants as the "resident holy man" or God incarnate, when betrayal of trust is revealed and experienced by the congregations he serves, the most intimate closely held values are brought into question, especially because of the implicit and explicit nature of the covenantal relationship that exists between the congregation and its pastoral minister.

Thus parishioners entrust to their pastoral minister their secrets, sins, fears, hopes and needs for salvation.

The act of entrusting is indeed fraught with risks, since by trusting another with our most intimate needs, wants and desires, we are at the same time empowering them over ourselves. We trust that this power will not be abused in selfish pursuit by the pastoral minister, whom we expect to act in ways that will promote and protect the well being of his parishioners. A betrayal of sexual trust constitutes a major breach in the conventional relationship between the minister and those to whom he ministers.

#### **BELIEF:**

To a large degree what we believe about God and our place in the world is mitigated by what we see, hear and experience in our relationship to the pastor as spiritual leader. Much of what we value is framed in the context of that relationship, and when the inherent inequality in the pastoral relationship is abused, it compromises our ability to believe in God or his word expressed in scripture.

It is important for us to know that many ministers do not realize the power inherent in the pastoral role. Many clergy are not as cognizant of the power differential involved in their care-giving roles. This lack of awareness can lead to violation of boundaries, that should be kept inviolate to protect and preserve the values and belief embodied in the pastoral relationship. It is imperative that clergy learn how to perceive and respect the boundaries of others (Friberg and Laaser, 1998).

It must be noted that many clergy are unaware of the power that resides in their clerical role, and that for many people they embody all that is good and sacred in the

core beliefs of those they serve. The priest standing at the altar is an obvious example. Many Protestant clergy vest, use the title "Reverend," sit above the congregation, preach from even higher elevations, and dominate worship with little if any lay participation (Hopkins, 1998). Add to this the mystique of spiritual intimacy with God that often accompanies this role, and physical attractiveness and a caring personal style in ministers, the stage is set to draw needy people to male clergy, including women (Friberg and Laaser, 1998).

As a representative of God the pastoral minister engenders in people, even those who are not members of the religious community a strong belief that even in this corrupt, and morally corrosive world there are still some things that are good. Given that sometimes unconscious need for a "holy person" clergy must take extra care as to how they relate to other persons, so that they do not diminish or intensify the effect they have on those who believe in them, and view them as repositories of that which is both safe and sacred.

For many people what they believe about God they believe about the minister as God's visible representative thus: when the minister betrays their trust, it is not unusual for many to experience the event as a betrayal by God, resulting in loss of faith. This is so because of the symbiotic relationship between the medium and the message, that belief in one engenders and strengthens belief in the other, and anything that diminishes belief in one, similarly diminishes belief in the other. Clergy sexual misconduct unleashes a torrent of conflicting and confusing emotions in the mind of congregants, more often than not, we judge the minister's effectiveness in terms of the congruence of their beliefs, personal life, and performance with the Christian message. The moral character and

virtues of ministers are revealed in the moral responsibilities they assume and in how they act (Gula, 1996).

Drawing from Catholic moral theology, "agere sequitur esse," we act out of who we are, that is our character. Character refers to the kind of persons who acts out of the values they have internalized. It focuses on inner realities of the self: motives, intention, attitudes, dispositions. We do not see character directly. We see it in its fruits (Gula, 1996). So then clergy sexual betrayal is seen and experienced as a contradiction of what and whom he represents for those in his sphere of influence.

#### **FORGIVENESS:**

The principles embodied in the Biblical injunction to forgive (Matthew 6: 12) "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" is one that poses great difficulty for congregations wherein clergy sexual misconduct has occurred. "Forgive and forget" is a phrase that is all too often employed by those in the congregational system that cannot face the reality of the abusive behavior, on the part of their beloved pastoral minister. However, forgiveness and its corollary repentance cannot be unilateral acts at the outset of a congregations coming to terms with clergy sexual misconduct. No one person or groups of persons within the congregational system can function as a conscience for others within they system. It is a personal decision as to when and how forgiveness will be extended.

The process of recovery varies in duration and intensity from one person to another, but as people of faith, we must always hold to the eventual possibility of forgiveness and reconciliation. It must be understood that any pressure to forgive is detrimental to the



healing process (Omerod, 1995). The congregation will need to feel and experience the full range of the emotions, including their anger and pain as part of their journey toward their healing. In all but a few instances of clergy sexual misconduct, the offending clergy will seek to deny or minimize the significance of his actions. However, if he is ever to receive forgiveness from those who have been hurt by his actions, he must acknowledge fully the hurt he has caused and sincerely accept responsibility for it. To expect forgiveness on any lesser terms would be a denial of moral responsibility, and would only tend to further victimize those who have already been hurt by his actions.

The road to forgiving can be long, and filled with much anger and pain. Both emotions are part of the healing process (Omerod, 1995). The Bible is replete with stories and illustrations of forgiveness, however clergy sexual abuse, comes with many accompanying issues, that are not easily resolved. Forgiveness cannot be hurried or prematurely offered, because this will only served to delay any healing in those impacted by it. It involves a lengthy process which can be stretched out over a period of years.

#### **CONFESSION:**

Confession must be expressed before forgiveness can be accepted or offered. Confession then must be seen as a prerequisite for a restorative approach for dealing with offending clergy. As Christians we are enjoined by Scripture to "confess your faults one to another" (James 5: 16), and by confessing we are acknowledging our actions, and are willing to be responsible and accountable for them. The insidious nature of sexual sin has shown time and time again that seldom is this sin overcome without the support of a spiritual brother or mentor, and unless it is confessed to another person it keeps us in

bondage (Exley, 1988). However ministers are well aware that to confess is to risk all. They know that to do so, they may be putting at risk their marriage and ministry. So instead of confessing which is one step toward wholeness and integrity they struggle in secret with both his failure and his ever increasing guilt.

Confession serves another important function as it relates to the healing process, when the offending clergy acknowledges fully that he has hurt many individuals and the congregation as a whole, and sincerely accepts responsibility for his actions, any expectation of forgiveness only adds further injustice to these hurt by the abuse of power and the betrayal of trust.

Psalms 32:5 David extols the virtues of confessing ones sins, and taking responsibility for one's actions, and declares it as a necessary prerequisite for being forgiven.

#### **REPENTANCE:**

The abuse of power by those in ministry is antithetical to ministry as it is envisaged by Jesus (Omerod, 1995). When abuse of power and trust have been discovered and adjudicated, the offender, through intervention of judicatory officials must be made to understand the enormity of the problems he has unleashed for the congregation and himself, and that part of the healing process must involve true repentance. This repentance must be manifested on at least two levels. This first is that the offender needs to repent for his egregious abuse of his power, and sacred trust.

One of the most demonstrative passages from Scripture that reveals the true meaning of repentance is recorded in Psalms 51. In this passage David comes face to face with his sin and its baleful consequences. In this passage David expresses deep sorrow for his

sins, and longs to be forgiven by God before whom he acknowledges his wrong. David's disposition is not one of minimization. He openly confesses that he has sinned against God, and needs reconciliation with him. A careful reading of Psalms 51 demonstrates a deep level of spiritual maturity. David blames no one but himself for his actions, and takes responsibility for the consequences of his behavior. He asks God to have mercy on him, and indeed God was merciful, but mercy in no way mitigated the consequences of his actions. David's life was embittered as a result of his actions with Bathsheba, the woman with whom he had the adulterous affair.

David's act of contrition, enables him to open himself to receive the mercy of God, which he does not deserve, but stands in need of if he is to be made whole again. Repentance in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct must be expressed on a least two levels. The first should be done privately, to the offenders family if he is married, since they would no doubt have suffered greatly upon disclosure of his transgressions. He will also need to repent before church officials after the matter has been properly adjusted.

Secondarily he will need to apologize to his congregation against whom he has greatly sinned. However, his public Confession and repentance must be handled very carefully. First of all the congregation will need to be prepared to hear his public confession and repentance. If this is done prematurely, and without the needed preparation of the congregation it can add to the pain and distress that is already present in the congregational system, and can impede the healing process.

For repentance to be effectual, the emotional upheaval in the congregation must be addressed through appropriate intervention, by a trained advocate. This person would have been with the congregation for an extended period of time, and by now an appropriate level of trust would have been developed, thus allowing for the advocate to lead them, up to and through this very challenging experience.

As a body, the church has a moral responsibility both to the local congregation and fallen brother to provide redemptive and restorative care. Discipline is mandatory, without it the sinful nature will not be destroyed. The congregation in particular has a responsibility to become an instrument of God for the redemption and restoration of the one who has fallen into sin (Exley, 1988).

#### **RESTORATION AND RECONCILIATION:**

Adultery is seldom just a "sexual sin," and while it is a manifestation of a spiritual problem, it most certainly is more than just a spiritual problem. There are other pertinent factors involved, that are often overlooked by the congregation and church officials. Among these factors are the pastors relationship with his spouse, his self-image, his sexual identity, lifestyle and work habits just to name a few. However, if reconciliation and restoration are to be realized, then these and other factors relating to the practice of ministry must be carefully examined and corrections and adjustment made. The pressures of ministry are tremendous, and without corrective action on the part of all involved (i.e. the pastor, congregation and church officials) the tendency is to revert back to that which is familiar and known by the pastor.

Restoration and reconciliation are deeply imbedded in Scripture, it is at the heart of the message that we as redeemed persons are called to proclaim and demonstrate in our interactions with each other. Jesus himself said "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost," (Matt 18: 11). But even Jesus' message called for sinners to confess and repent, and to be reconciled to God, thereby being restored to position as sons of God. The apostle Paul reminds us that "God hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation . . . God was in Christ reconciling us unto himself, . . . and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation," (2 Cor. 5: 18, 19).

The Christian community is divided in its approach to the biblical concepts of reconciliation and restoration. Many see in those passages a mandate to restore and reconcile the fallen brother pastor to the fellowship of the church with all rights and privileges accorded to any member of that local church where the pastor not only served, but was also was a member. Others see reconciliation to the church as "quid pro quo" restoration to ministry functioning. My position is that every case must be examined individually. My position is informed by the way in which Jesus himself dealt with those who erred. When confronted with their moral failures, those who responded with contrition and remorse were given the opportunity to be restored if they were removed, or to continue their ministry if they were not yet removed from their positions of trust and service. In the Old Testament King David was allowed by God to continue to sit on the throne of Israel after he had committed both adultery and murder (2 Samuel 11). In the New Testament, Peter was one of the twelve chosen by Jesus to become a spokesman for Him. Peter, although his sin was not sexual by nature, was still an egregious sin wherein

he denied knowing Jesus (Luke 22: 57). Nevertheless, in John 21: 15 Jesus confronts Peter in the presence of the other disciples and three times he asks Peter, if he loved him, and three times Peter affirmed his love for Jesus publicly, then Jesus reaffirmed Peter calling to the ministry and restored him to his position, as one of the chosen disciples soon to become apostles.

Sexual immorality is indeed a grievous sin but is not an unpardonable sin, if it is repented of and forsaken. However, some argue that when it involves an ordained spiritual leader, namely a pastor, who for the power that resides in his role, and the fact that for the members of his congregation he embodies all that is holy, and right and good, that he disqualifies himself from ever serving as a pastor again. My personal theology does not accord with those who take such a position, because of my belief that forgiveness, restoration and reconciliation are at the heart of the message of scripture. And although it is true, that when a pastor acts out sexually with a congregant, and it becomes known, that grave harm is done to the congregational system, and to the wider church community. I believe that these occasions can, with proper intervention, offer congregations an opportunity to examine their faith, through deep spiritual reflection, and use the occasion as a time for spiritual renewal and growth.

The church does have a duty to hold and call erring ministers to accountability. However, we must know that accountability has two sides, discipline and responsibility. When the church holds its ministers accountable, and metes out discipline to the erring pastor, which it must do if the destructive patterns are to be changed, it is also charged by God, with the responsibility for the spiritual care of the fallen pastor. For the most part

the church has been fairly responsible in the area of discipline, however, when it comes to spiritual care for its ministers, it has been sadly lacking (Exley, 1988). The church must embrace the gospel in all its dimensions because the cross provides not only justification, but redemption and deliverance as well (Exley, 1988).

Warren Wiersbe offers some insightful thoughts when he states that when we embrace an image of God that is all powerful his transformational power can be experienced by his healing power and presence, in the midst of our pain and perplexity. Wiersbe presents a case for four gifts that come from God that can enable and empower us through the process from pain to renewal and growth. The first of these gifts given by God is courage in our faith to face life honestly. We do not have to run away from its horror or become bitter in its wake. Instead we accept the tension that the downside of happiness is sorrow and the joy of life its burden. That is the way life is. Secondly, God gives us wisdom in time to understand what needs to be done. This direction comes through and an openness to God's healing spirit. A third gift is the strength to do what must be done. All of us who have ever lived through trauma, look back in amazement at what God allowed us to do in the moment. Finally, God gives us faith to be patient. God can work even through brokenness to bring good into the world (Wiersbe, 1984). By turning the evil to God's good, God can even give meaning to our pain, as seen through the prism of the cross, whereby God was, willing to suffer in and through Christ for the good outcome of the redemption of mankind.

I believe that congregation that have experienced clergy sexual misconduct can relate their stories of tragedy in sensitive and caring ways, that will offer a great witness to the

secular community that reads or hears them knowing that God can use our brokenness for the healing of others. Paul hears God's voice in (2 Cor. 12: 9-10: "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfect in weakness. So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness, so that the power of Christ may dwell in us. Therefore I am content with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ, for whenever I am weak, then I am strong." Times of trauma and crisis, can be opportunities for us to bring together all elements of the Gospel, forgiveness, reconciliation, repentance, Confession, restoration, divine victory and atonement. Congregations can respond to the challenge of suffering brought on by clergy sexual misconduct by talking about God and by imitating God's presence through gentle, loving care. Thus turning tragedy into love, witnessing for God (Hudson, 1988).

p. 127, Margaret Ann Hoffman writes, "Praise without lament is not honest; accept our grief as evidence of our trust in you" (Hoffman 1985, p. 127). She believes that of the many resources available to congregations in the wake of clergy sexual misconduct, none is more important than worship. Worship indeed serves many purposes and does many things." It provides one with space for grieving, remembering, and after, for renewal. Through the beauty of liturgy or familiarity with the order of worship, participants are invited into a state of dependency on God where the pain of life can be released. The music triggers much hope. It is where those gathered here the Word of God for each of them. It is where others hold up the weak and place them in God's hands. Worship is one of the most precious gifts and greatest resources of the Christian faith. Never should worship be more carefully planned than in the months following a



traumatic event. Scripture, music, prayers, and the message can be selected so as to compliment each other, and contribute to the healing process for parishioners.

In our public ministries to those who grieve we must draw upon the rituals and words that help us to weld the community together and to make sense of the tragedy of life (Hudson, 1998). For many believers, they have a tendency to always want to focus on the positive and the promises of healing. However, implicit in the message of the Gospel is both the cross and the empty tomb. Through the word congregations can be reminded of the necessity to balance the message of the cross with that of the empty tomb, and allow for both dimension of faith, to provide nurture, care and healing to deal with the trauma at hand. The worship experience can also serve to assist congregants in maintaining faithful contact with reality, dealing with what the scripture tells us about loss, acknowledging the theodicy problem, and granting permission for the often conflicted feelings that arise at these times (Hudson, 1998).

#### **B. CLINICAL PRINCIPLES:**

The revelation of clergy sexual misconduct within the congregational system throws the homeostasis of that congregation out of balance, and into chaos. The church, being a religious institution, not only mirrors the ways in which families function but they also contain families. The emotional process in religious organizations mirrors the emotional process in personal families, but also, both types of systems plug into one another. That is a major reason why unresolved issues in any of the clergy's three families can produce symptoms in one of the others (Friedman, 1984, p.195 )

One of the major benefits to be derived from utilizing family systems principles and applying them to congregational life is that it tends to redistribute the guilt "Thus it causes the congregational system to look at the entire system as contributing to the problem as opposed to seeing the problem as located only in the identified patient, namely the offending clergy (Friedman, 1984). Family systems theory has also contributed to my understanding of the emotional processes in clergy – congregation relationship can be changed for the better, and will facilitate the resolution of conflicts when they arise.

One of the insights gained from studying family systems theory is that it helps us to see how the church can become a repository of the displacement of important, unresolved family issues, (Friedman, 1984). Another important lesson gleaned from family systems is that efforts to resolve congregational issues, with the aim of restoring homeostasis to the congregation cannot be achieved by dealing only with symptoms, since this approach never produces lasting change in the congregational system. As with our personal families, changes in the emotional system manifests itself, and is often mirrored by changes in the congregational system that can be a contributing factor that can predispose pastors to act out sexually.

Most clergy who act out sexually do so because they are dealing with unresolved issues from their family of origin. Given the way in which ministry practice is carried on today in most congregations, with little or no systems of accountability, and add to this the influence of the present culture of entitlement and male dominance, both of the

factors coalesce to create the climate where clergy can abuse the vulnerabilities of congregants.

One of the principles from family systems that has helped to inform my understanding of congregational dynamics, as it relates to the functioning of congregations, is the principle of homeostasis. When a given congregation experiences a major disruption, such as in the case of clergy sexual misconduct, the homeostasis in the congregational system changes. In order to address the change, some relevant questions must be addressed. "Why now?" "What has gone out of balance?" are extraordinarily pertinent answering these questions will enable us to determine the nature of the change in the congregations system, and to evaluate whether the change is systemic (Friedman, 1984 p. 203).

I agree with Friedman's assertion that "it is almost never the issue per se that is destructive but, rather, the overall homeostatic conditions that give to any issue its destructive potential." This is true because some ministers will survive an affair in some congregations, while in other congregations, a mere suspicion of an affair can result in the pastor's termination. The response of clergy to their environment is almost always the main factor that determines how harmful it will be. To the extent that we can reduce our own anxiety with such awareness, the better the outcome will be for the minister and his congregational system.

## **OVER FUNCTIONING:**

It is a common and almost universal position of many pastors that they are shouldering all the responsibility in their congregations. This act of overfunctioning on the part of many clergy is an anxious response, that left uncorrected, can predispose a minister to burn out, which in turn can lead to clergy sexual misconduct. If ministers can be taught to reduce their anxiety, this will go a long way toward mitigation of conditions that contribute to clergy sexual misconduct. Over functioning by the pastor can also be a manifestation of an imbalance in the psychodynamic world of the pastor, to the extent that his focus is primarily on others and little attention is given to the self.

## **BURNOUT:**

Another very important clinical principle relevant to this project is burnout. There are many books and programs that have been developed to assist religious leaders who have been overfunctioning to the point of physical and spiritual exhaustion. Most of these approaches, have tended toward focusing on the individual and not taken into account the system in which they function. However, I found Friedman's insights, in bringing a "family systems" perspective to bear on the issue of burnout to be most helpful. In approaching burnout from a family systems perspective, the burned out clergy is seen as the "identified burnout," and the focus will be the overloading system. A family approach to burnout also broadens the perspective.

"A family model of burnout asks what are the characteristics of a congregational family emotional system most likely to burn out its spiritual leader or promote symptoms in his

or her nuclear family. Here are five that all congregations and parishioners satisfy to some extent: (Friedman, 1985, p. 217).

1. Degree of isolation between the congregation in it's own faith community or in it's local community.
2. Degree of distance between the lay leadership and the general membership.
3. The extent to which the lay leadership allows the congregation to pre-empt it's entire emotional life (no other friends or social network).
4. The degree to which the lay leadership has intense interdependent relationships with one another beyond congregational functioning, such as being related through blood, marriage, or business.
5. The inability of the lay leadership, particularly the "president" or senior warden, to take well-defined positions, independent of the complainers.

I agree with Friedman's assertion that to the extent any congregation, parish or hierarchy can be accurately described by this set of characteristics, and to the extent its

spiritual leader tends to overfunction, to that extent will he or she be stressed. Spiritual leaders in such systems will inescapably become caught up in the emotional triangle spin off that such systems produce" (Friedman, 1984, p. 217).

### **TRIANGULATION:**

Triangulation is another clinical principle that has played a role in clergy sexual misconduct. Some female parishioners, having gone to their pastor for advice in dealing with what they believed to be an uncaring spouse, have ended up in a sexual relationship with their pastor. How could this have happened? According to Nils Friberg in his book, "Before the Fall," he states that there are three factors that must be present 1) The state of the offender, 2) the vulnerability of the victim 3) stressful environmental conditions. The offending moment will always involve a complex interaction of all these factors (Friberg, 1998).

The fact that many pastors bring into the pastoral relationships latent unresolved issues from their families of origin that can predispose them to act out sexually also makes them vulnerable to become triangulated with vulnerable female congregants presenting with marital difficulties. Add to this situation the phenomenon of projection where the pastor is seen as embodying all that is sacred and desirable in a mate, and the stage is set for clergy sexual misconduct to occur. But here again we must use caution and view the pastor's behavior as merely an individual or personality flaw, and in so doing exonerate the congregational system from any, and all complicity, and leave the pastor as the identified patient. This of course plays into a very common occurrence within congregational life, when the congregation is unwilling or unable to see

themselves as contributing to the spiritual leaders sexual betrayal. This condition will continue as long as congregations view their leaders functioning through the prism of a personality model, when the fact is that many occurrences of clergy sexual abuse are really the result of a systemic phenomenon. This will serve to eliminate the usual dichotomy between a family and its leader (Friedman, 1984).

#### **TRANSFERENCE:**

Transference and countertransference are Freudian concepts which help us understand the unconscious emotional connections we are making with another person (Guggenbuhl-Craig, 1971). In transference the congregant seeking help within the pastoral relationship, will project onto the minister unmet needs or unresolved conflicts that are located in a prior relationship with some other significant person, in the congregant's relational system. When the congregant acts toward the pastor in ways that mirror the prior relationship, where the needs were unmet, then we have an occurrence of transference. In the pastoral relationship, transference occurs more often, because of the relational dynamics inherent in the clerical role, than because of any special attractiveness of the minister. An example of this, may be seen in the person who is seeking a lot of touching and hugs, which harkens back to a childhood need for nurturance from parents. Transference can also change a hug into a sexual advance because of some prior experience with a conflict between seduction and responsible closeness (Gula, 1996, p. 110).

The fact is that because many pastors are not educated as to the dynamics of how transference and countertransference operate in the pastoral relationship "they

misperceive the real relationship and end up responding to a false one." Pastors who are not aware of transference or who may deny the existence of such a powerful therapeutic factor are in increased danger of clergy sexual misconduct, because they may feel the relationship is one of equality, and that the counselee is making free choices (Gabbard, 1989). However, there is an inherent power differential in the pastoral relationship that mitigates against the counselee, making decisions, by giving consent on the basis of equality and mutuality that does not exist in the pastoral professional relationship. Some counselees are so concerned with approval, her hopes for a "deeper connection with a powerful person, who will heal the wounds of past relationships" (Lebacqz and Barton), that they may tolerate sexual misconduct. Again we must be reminded that no incident of sexual misconduct occurs in isolation. The phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct is symptomatic of deeper social realities. These include understanding of sexuality and power, expectations of clergy, and institutional pressures present in all churches (Grenz & Bell, 1995).

In counter transference, our unmet needs, feelings or unresolved personal conflicts get superimposed onto those of the one seeking our help. When this happens and is not corrected, it renders the pastor incapable of the objectivity regarding the needs of the person we are supposed to be helping. The real tragedy is that the congregant who came to the pastor for nurturance and care is now being used to meet his own needs, which betrays one of the fundamental tenets of the pastoral relationship, which is to serve the needs of those who come to the pastor seeking help. Some of the tell-tale sign that signals to operation of countertransference include, but is not limited to, is being overly



solicitous and available at any time, cultivating a dependency, developing affectionate sexual feelings toward the other person, disclosing our fantasies and experiences to the one who is the object of them, thus creating a dual relationship (Gula, 1996).

## **PROJECTION:**

Projection is another clinical factor that has been linked to clergy sexual misconduct. Projection, also referred to as "pedestal phenomenon" is a natural, and normal process, present in all of us to a greater or lesser extent. However, it can become problematic in the pastoral relational system, if it goes unchecked and reaches unhealthy levels. When we see qualities in those we admire, and wish we had them, we are engaging in projection. When we accept responsibility for cultivating those admired qualities we see in others, we reduce the degree of projection operating in ourselves. Some congregants expect their clergy to be holy for them, thus freeing themselves from the spiritual disciplines necessary to develop their own spiritual integrity. This kind of projection is unhealthy, and does nothing good for either the congregant or the clergy who is the object of those unhealthy projections. The dilemma for many clergy is that positive projection can sometimes feel awfully good perhaps, say why it feels so good because of the praise and adoration it entails. However, clergy must constantly monitor their feelings and responses, to avoid the trap of having even positive projection running amok, thus predisposing clergy to violate boundaries.

When projection is negative, it can lead to clergy burn out which also can contribute to clergy betrayal of trust. Self-monitoring is essential if one is to avoid the traps and pit falls that can come from either positive or negative projection.

**Boundaries:**

One of the safe-guards that has clinical implications, and therefore must be attended to, is the need for maintainance of proper boundaries within the clergy's relational system. Many clergy who have been found to have violated sexual boundaries in their clerical role with a parishioner, by taking the position that the affair was the result of two consenting adults; therefore, no real harm has been done. However, all of my research to date, emphatically asserts that because of the inherent imbalance of power that exists in the clergy-congregant relationship, mutual consent is an impossibility. The responsibility for maintaining proper boundaries, always rests with the ordained. Clergy therefore must learn to monitor their own responses in order to avoid egregious violation of boundaries. Many offending clergy fall into the diagnostic category of the narcissism and will often encourage dependency. Many victims, having indulged in unhealthy levels of projection, "will continue to fiercely defend the cleric after charges are brought" (Hopkins, 1998).

It is often the case that clergy with character disorders are so self-centered that they cannot truly grasp the fact that their behavior has brought much harm to others. The damage done to the victims of those narcissistic clergy runs very deep. Their trust has been betrayed by one whom they had a right to expect to be safe, with whom they could share their vulnerabilities. This kind of betrayal hit's at the core of a person's ability to believe in God and to trust the self. Strong feelings of confusion and self-doubt emerge as a result of this kind of behavior (Hopkins, 1998).

Congregations that have been affected by the trauma of clergy sexual misconduct of necessity must rewrite their story. How will they tell this tale? How will they integrate

what has happened to them into the way in which they understand their mission in the world. The congregation's journey through the pain and sorrow permanently changes its understanding of God, itself, and the world in which it lives. The steps the congregation takes to move beyond the trauma of their experience, and into God's restorative plan for their future, will be a significant determinant in their future" (Hudson, 1998 p 124 – 125). Another challenge for the congregation will be to face the question, "How has this chapter in our story made us more sensitive to others' pain? As Fay Angus describes it, "In the Valley of our sorrows and our grief we cultivate . . . understanding, compassion, courage, sensitivity, sympathy, kindness and all those tender mercies."

#### **GRIEF:**

The final clinical issue that I believe is relevant to my project is the issue of grief. This issue is one that is very real and present in congregations who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct. Disclosures of sexual misconduct trigger many emotional responses, not the least among them grief. The losses are several, and will vary in intensity, depending on the level of involvement with the offending clergy. For some parishioners the loss may center around the loss of an ideal or dream. For others the loss may be more than an image of what ministry should be or what the church stands for; yet for other the loss may revolve around the loss of a beloved spiritual leader and pastor. With this in mind, part of the healing process, the sharing and validation of feeling that must be done, should include affirming the good that was present in that pastor's ministry, and not to minimize that good because of the conflicted feelings that the

ministry, and not to minimize that good because of the conflicted feelings that the disclosure has brought about. People need to know that they can hold on to what was good in the ministry of the fallen leader.

One of the ways that congregants can be assisted with their grief is through the use of transition ritual, whereby they are able to look back as well as, look ahead. It will be very helpful for the congregation to be educated as to the various dimensions of the grieving process, so that they may be made to understand the varying emotions as normative for persons in their situation. The process of healing and renewal requires that people be allowed to experience the various stages and dimensions of grief, premature closure will only lead to maladaptive ways of congregational functioning. Therefore it is imperative that congregants be provided safe space for the venting and sharing of feelings in small group ministry or a parish based twelve step ministry, can be very effective in facilitating healing through the process of a grief recovery ministry. Congregations that have been supported through intentional interventions have been shown to emerge as places of joy and health, by integrating into their history, all of their experiences, regardless of how painful their experiences were.

Doing the work required to move through the grieving process can enable a congregation to heal and develop healthy ways of relating to their pastors, which will enable them to clarify roles, develop sound systems of accountability, and ministry practice that promotes the health and well-being of both the congregation and the minister.

will experience following disclosure. Shock is also a time of disbelief; the mind and spirit prevent emotions from being felt, this is natural and protective, (Hopkins, 1995, p. 237).

Searching is another stage wherein people may wish their pastor can return and things could be as it was. Searching can be a time of denial. Facts are ignored and people are puzzled by the paradoxical reality that someone who has done so much good can also be capable of doing so much wrong. Part of the struggle at this stage will be the need to protect the "perfect image" of the pastor. They need for things to stay "normal." The danger here becomes finding a scapegoat to blame. This could be denominational leaders, lay leaders, other members or the victims themselves. Reminding people of the stages of grief and telling the truth repeatedly, is the best way to help them move through the process.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHOD OF CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT:**

The approach and procedure that will be taken in carrying out this project will involve a series of meetings with the congregation, and its lay leadership, and will consist of five main components, that will assist congregational healing. These steps will be taken following the process whereby the complaint, and the investigation has been adjudicated and the charges have been declared as credible, and the pastor has been relieved of his duties. The first step following the adjudicating process, will be (1) Truth telling, followed by (2) Sharing and validation of feeling (3) Education (4) Spiritual reflection (5) Answering the question, "Where do we go from here?" The journey toward wholeness requires us to examine these categories as a way of confronting the

woundedness of the congregation whose minister has violated their trust (Hopkins, 1998 p. 37).

### **STEP 1: Truth Telling**

The journey towards wholeness and healing requires truth telling as a first step in telling the congregation's story of broken vows, and violated boundaries; is not a good way to win friends. However, for the congregation to move towards health and healing there are some realities that they must confront in order to move past it. The church has been especially loathe to jeopardize the reputation of the institution, by publicizing the misconduct of some of its most trusted individuals (Hopkins, 1998). It is often the position and preoccupation of church leaders that public acknowledgment of broken vow, is bad for evangelism, and may come perilously close to revictimizing the victims of abusive clergy (Hopkins, 1998). Nevertheless, truth telling is of vital importance, both for the health of the congregational system and healing of victims (Hopkins, 1995). Among church leaders the impulse to keep things as quiet as possible is common, given our cultures penchant for secrecy. When truth telling occurs, it gives the congregation a unique opportunity to examine its common life and to deepen relationships within the community that can lead to spiritual renewal.

### **THE CRISIS MEETING:**

There are a number of factors that will need to be addressed leading up to and during this meeting. It must be kept in mind that the impact of disclosure will be experienced differently by various congregants depending on at least three factors: (1) The nature of congregant's relationship to the church (2) the offending clergy (3) and the level of

fiduciary trust placed in the clergy-person. This fact is true also for those who have experienced bereavement, whose grief depends on the kind of relationship they have had with the deceased. Those who had a close relationship with the clergy person will be hardest hit. It is also true that one's degree of moral and ethical reasoning, would have an impact on how one responds to clergy sexual misconduct. Wherever one is in relation to the abusive clergy, reactions will be strong. There will be emotional tearing, fear mixed with shame, disillusionment and anger, shock, pain and disbelief. These reactions will no doubt trigger all sorts of defenses. Depression and withdrawal are not uncommon defensive reactions.

In preparation for the crisis meeting letters should be sent to all members of the congregation, informing them of the purpose, time, (which incidentally should not be in conjunction with regularly scheduled meetings) and place of the meeting. A location other than the regular auditorium should be used. This information will allow for those members who are not ready to confront the fact that someone so loved and respected could do such a thing to opt out of the meeting. No one should be forced to confront a situation like this if they are not ready to do so.

The crisis meeting is so called, because it begins the crisis phase for the congregation, who may have known but have not acknowledged, any malfeasance on the part of the pastor. The meeting will be chaired by a denominational leader, who should be accompanied by a pastoral response team, that will help facilitate the meeting and be available to answer questions that members may have. At this meeting the congregation will here information regarding the sexual misconduct of the pastor, and the kind of

discipline that has been decided upon by the adjudicating body. Additional information including any pending legal action that relates to the pastors future can also be shared. This disclosure will certainly be excruciating for the already traumatized congregation. It is not unusual for church officials to ask if there are any other victims of the offending pastor to come forward. This is advisable for it facilitates the healing of those who may otherwise have been left to deal with their pain and trauma in isolation, but now they can be supported and nurtured. Disclosure to the congregation is crucially important, and although it is very painful for the congregation, it is certainly preferred to the "mystery move" when the minister is just spirited away suddenly and so disrespectful regarding congregations without any explanation (Hopkins, 1995). When this happens the congregation will no doubt have developed very unhealthy ways of being,, because of the secret that has been kept. This kind of secrecy is characteristic of a closed system, and often times it leads to other maladaptive responses.

The crisis meeting is very important, and is an essential part of the restorative ministry approach; members of the congregation should be notified by letter ahead of the meeting, as to the nature of the meeting, allowing for those who are not ready to deal with the matter to opt out. No one should be forced or coerced to confront such a traumatic situation until they are ready to do so. Sometimes the offending clergy may request to say goodbye, either in person or by letter. Experience has shown that it is better done by letter rather than in person, since many of the members may still be wrestling with conflicted feelings regarding the offending clergy. An appearance by the



offending clergy could hamper the process of healing for the congregation and cause further damage to many.

A word of caution is needed here. Church officials must exercise great care that the wording of the letter written to the congregation be carefully examined for its content, to ensure that no further damage be heaped upon the already traumatized congregation. The letter should be brief and specific. At this meeting it is vitally important that great care be exercised in disclosing the information to the congregation. Enough information should be shared, so as to avoid either minimization of the behavior. Following this recommendation will help to minimize polarization in the congregation, that can impede the healing process. Some information regarding the survivor's experience can be disclosed to the congregation, but the person will not be identified, and is not normally present at this crisis meeting.

It is advisable that information regarding the investigation and adjudication of the case be shared with the congregation by the legal representative of the denomination. Questions should be entertained and answers provided that helps to clarify issues raised during the disclosure.

Truth telling is hard work for both the congregation, and the church officials, but it is vital to the healing process and should not be avoided. The crisis meeting is by nature a trauma debriefing meeting with a few added components for those who opted out of the crisis meeting. They should not be written off or marginalized but have their needs attended to since it is often the case that some of these individuals will usually find someone other than the offending clergy to blame for the present situation. Sometimes

they blame local lay leadership. Other times they lash out at denominational leaders and sometimes its the victim herself who becomes the focus of their attacks thus, the victim can be revictimized by their behavior, and be damaged more than the original abuse. Some of these individuals may never come to terms with the abusive behavior of the pastor, and may likely fade away toward another congregation, or entirely out of the institutional church (Hopkins, 1995).

We must be aware that recent disclosures from with the Roman Catholic Church and other denominations represent a radical shift in the way church institutions in our present culture operates, therefore, we must expect significant resistance. The congregation will no doubt have members who will be very uncomfortable with the process of truth telling. Sometimes the manifestation of resistance from congregants to disclosure is the direct result of rigid rules of secret-keeping from their families of origin. Some of the resistance may come from awareness that possession of the secret within the congregation, represents power, and power will be lost when there is no longer a secret within the congregations relational system. The only legitimate reason for not disclosing at the present time is to protect the victim's identity from being discovered and becoming known.

## **STEP 2:     SHARING AND VALIDATION OF FEELINGS:**

The second step in the process of a restorative ministry to congregations wounded by clergy sexual misconduct, will involve sharing and validation of feelings, that revolves around the incident of clergy abuse of sexual trust. This part of the healing process, is more effective when conducted in small groups, under the direction of a trained

facilitator. This person can be an individual from within the congregation, who has been chosen and trained to function in this capacity.

The congregation at this time of disclosure will be highly conflicted. The focus of attention with the congregation shifts from worship of God and the mission that flows out of that worship and begins instead to concentrate on the behavior of the pastor and of church members (Lebacqz and Burton, 1991). This meeting takes place two to three weeks after the initial meeting when the full scope of the pastor's misconduct was revealed to the congregation. This part of the healing process is most effective when conducted in small groups, by a facilitator trained in group dynamics.

The church, in both the local and wider arena, only recently has begun to publicly recognize the serious impact that clergy sexual misconduct has on the functioning of the local congregation and wider church. The long standing conspiracy of silence, in which both clergy and laity have colluded to maintain a facade of normalcy has come to an end, and churches must now face the facts that great harm has been done to both individuals and the church at large.

Sharing and validation of feelings offers a to congregation a way of confronting the fact that a tragic wrong has been done, and it cannot be ignored if justice and renewal are to become a reality for congregations wounded by clergy sexual misconduct. Through this process of sharing and validation of feelings, congregations can be helped to become aware of, understand, talk about, and seek help for sexual abuse and violence which are so widespread in society (Lebacqz and Barton, p.253).

This process will also help those who may be angry at either the victim who reported the abuse, or the church officials who disclosed the information and can help them come to terms with their anger. Others can be assisted who are afraid of their own feelings of anger or the anger of others in the congregational system.

The people in the groups will be given specific instructions to facilitate the venting and validation of feelings. The instructions are also geared to ensure a safe way for sharing feelings. For example, people can speak until finished about their feelings, not engaging in dialogue, discussion, or argument until everyone has had a chance to speak (Hopkins, 1995, p. 219). The validation of feelings generated in the small groups are presented by a member of the intervention team. Assurance is given that all feelings are permissible. This assurance encompasses the recognition that some people will have very mixed feelings. Some may still have feelings of admiration for the pastor and at the same time hold feelings of betrayal because of the abuse of trust. Members of the groups are also instructed to give each other space to be wherever they are relative to the grief process (Hopkins, 1995).

### **STEP 3: EDUCATION**

The process of educating the congregation should begin about four to five weeks after the initial disclosure of the abuse at the crisis meeting with the congregation. The second meeting allows the members to vent and validate their feelings about the abuse and the process thus far. During this third meeting the process will involve educating the congregation about the nature of pastoral sexual abuse. The imbalance of power in pastoral relationships negates possibility for mutual consent by a congregant to be

involved sexually with the pastor, who is responsible for maintaining proper boundaries. Additionally church officials will need to develop 1) procedures and guidelines to receive complaints (2) handle investigations (3) adjudications (4) setting penalties for those found guilty (5) providing for healing forgiveness and renewal of all parties.

The issue of gender power imbalance must be explored since it's so pervasive in our culture it must be exposed and challenged. The congregation needs to have a clearer understanding of the power dynamics in pastoral relationships. They need to understand that the structural context in which ministry is practiced can contribute to occasions of abuse by clergy, who may be overfunctioning and physically and spiritually burned out, which then contributes to and may even precipitate feelings of neediness and entitlement on the part of the clergy.

Additionally, systems of accountability that state when and how counseling of congregants should be conducted as to time, place and frequency, must be shared with the congregation that provides mutual accountability for clergy and congregant alike. The congregation will be asked to explore how their expectations of the pastor may have contributed to conditions that allowed the abuse to occur, and thus violate sexual and ethical boundaries.

Congregational education will need to incorporate other issues that are present in conflicted congregations. They need to see the dangers inherent in commonly held platitudes, that encourages dishonesty, false peace, and overly simplistic thinking. Comments such as, "we just have to move on and forget the past," and "just forgive and forget," seek to cut off or suppress discussion of difference in responses will not bring

about a speedy resolution of the congregational crisis, but will have the opposite effect of hindering the healing process, and the congregation will be robbed of the opportunity to explore what is real and risk revitalizing those who have already been abused (Goodman, 2000).

Another important aspect to educating the congregation in healthy ways of dealing with conflicted feelings in the wake of clergy sexual misconduct resides in their willingness to see that "spiritual commitments and faith understandings are both central to one's psychological identity when our identities are threatened, we are prone to fight or flee." However, these are not the only options that are available to wounded congregations. Congregations can be taught how to "unpack: their feelings, and in so doing, they can reduce their anxiety and lower their defensive bar, thus opening themselves to the grace of their spiritual resources of worship, prayer, scripture and music. As in previous meetings with the congregation, opportunity for questions, clarification and validation will be afforded to anyone who needs it.

#### **STEP 4: SPIRITUAL REFLECTION**

The reality is that while some churches excel in motivating members to engage in the kind of reflective educational encounters that can nourish a maturing faith and spirituality, many congregants manifest very simplistic faith that is characteristic of a regressive stance. During this fourth meeting members will be asked and encouraged to tell each other where God is for them in the midst of all the pain and perplexity. They will be encouraged to share how their view of God has changed as a result of the recent revelations of clergy sexual abuse.

The meaning of faith will be discussed, giving members an opportunity to deepen their understanding of a God who suffers with his people and "leads them into path's of righteousness for his name sake." I believe passages like Psalm 23 can be a source of great comfort, as we allow the shepherd to lead us from the barren plains of conflicted emotions into the green pastures of renewed faith and trust in God. Bible stories that demonstrate God's intervening in our pain and perplexity bringing deliverance and healing .

I will further explore songs and hymns that speak to the present situation, but point us to a land flowing with milk and honey. The story of the children of Israel and their sojourn in Egypt, and their eventual deliverance will be explored to ascertain where congregants are spiritually. This type of intentional spiritual reflection helps to reconnect congregants to their coping skills. This kind of activity allows for the power of grace in repentance and forgiveness, which at the present moment seems lost to the very community that proclaims this power as its reason for being. Without truth, distrust will live and fester in the community.

The congregation will benefit from the formation of a small spirituality group, that will explore trust betrayals of spiritual leaders. They will discuss how their views of clergy may have changed as a result of the pastor's sexual misconduct. They will also share how they have used or failed to use their spiritual resources. They will also explore where is God for them in this, where their hope is. They will also be asked to discuss how they now feel about sacred rites of passages that the offending pastor

presided over. Do they view them as being tainted now? Are they less valued because the officiating clergy was abusing his sacred trust all the while?

Sexuality is a powerful force that exists in all human interactions, and because of this fact great harm can result from its abuse. When sexuality is misused it has the potential to destroy all that is trustworthy, sacred, and true. For many congregants the abuse of sexual trust by their clergy produces anxiety, grief and a deep and profound sense of loss, such as betrayal by the church, and even by God. One of the main tasks of this group, will be to rediscover, and reaffirm the goodness and grace of God in the midst of pain and suffering. The goal for this group will be to assist them in clarifying that the locus of their faith and the ground of their hope is not located in the role of the pastor, but in an abiding trust in the God of scripture, who according to the book of Hebrews in the New Testament, is touched with the feelings of our infirmities," including the conflicted feelings that comes as a result of clergy sexual abuse.

**STEP 5: ANSWERING THE QUESTION, "WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?"**

At the heart of this question is the inquiry, "What else does the congregation need in order to be able to heal and move from woundedness to renewal and wholeness?" Addressing this question will be the focal point of this fifth meeting with the congregation and its lay leadership. One of the objectives will be to assist the lay leaders in setting up a process that will facilitate the continuation of the healing process for the congregation.



A task force will be appointed from a cross section of those members who attended the crisis meeting and the subsequent meetings. Their task will be to survey the congregation to (1) assess the continuing needs (2) and plan ways to address those needs (Hopkins, 1998). Because the needs of the individuals will vary, a wide variety of support should be made available to the congregation. Experience has shown that this support and care must be carried out on at least two levels. First, there must be offerings for individuals, where their specific needs are addressed, then through small groups, provision can be made for other members. This kind of congregational trauma can awaken other kinds of abuses, therefore, the task force will need to make provision "for therapy groups for survivors of childhood abuse, groups to examine one's family of origin, parish based twelve step groups, to explore congregational history or to examine issue of sexuality in media" (Hopkins, 1998, p.39).

These groups will allow members to talk about their feelings, hopes, joys and sorrows and find comfort and support in the quest for renewal and healing. I will be looking to see if their views of clergy has been altered, and if so, in what ways. Through discussion we will explore how were the resources of their faith tradition used to find meaning in the midst of this painful and traumatic period? I cannot emphasize enough the need for members to be afforded the opportunity to share their feelings, whether they are positive, negative or mixed first-person only experiences of the

offending clergy's ministry. The paradox that many congregants will wrestle with is this: how could their pastor have done so many good things and at the same time was doing so many harmful things. Reflecting on this paradox will enable them to see that the situation is not as simple as it seems, and that when clergy abuse their sacred trust, it is the conversion of a series of psychological, spiritual, social and structural issues that together created the climate and circumstances for clergy to act out sexually with those who look to them for care, support, guidance and counsel.

Institutional myopia and inertia must be challenged confronted and changed in ways that will promote a safe, healthy and mutually accountable environment for the practice of ministry, wherein congregants and clergy can live out the true meaning of their faith.

At some point it will become necessary for the congregation to move on ahead without trying to bring every last person along (Hopkins, 1998, p.42). The church will have to face the fact that some member will leave the congregation and go on to another. Others will leave organized religion altogether, and seek out other options for meeting their spiritual needs. The truth of the matter is that people will do one of three things: change, grow or will leave.

Those who choose to remain will find strength and solace in Paul's experience of struggling with a "Thorn in the flesh," but, after a period of struggle he said "for this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." (2 Corinthians 12: 8-10).

### **CHANGES IN MINISTRY PRACTICE:**

I believe that one of most fundamental changes that needs to be implemented to minimize incidents of clergy sexual misconduct with parishioners must begin with appropriate self-care so that he can be free to meet the needs of others without burdening them with his own, (Gula, 1996). Even Jesus before beginning his public ministry, spent forty day in the wilderness, communing with his father, and then throughout his ministry, would often take time away from his teaching ministry for reflection and renewal.

By cultivating habits of self-care Jesus avoided the dangers of overfunctioning that is a precursor to burnout and boundary violation, which can predispose the pastor to act out sexually, by generalizing his need for nurturance and care. To avoid this, the lay leadership needs to provide time, and money for periodic vacations for the pastor and his family.

In the wake of clergy sexual misconduct: there are several areas of congregational life that will need to be examined and changed. This will forestall, or at best, minimize the occasions of clergy acting out sexually with parishioners. To facilitate this process, a task force will be chosen to examine the following areas:

**1) What are the cultural and institutional factors that have created a climate in which power can be abused?**

The culture I'm referring to here is the present North American middle class culture, where our values revolve around commercialism, individualism, rigid hierarchical structures with male dominance at its core.

Women and children have historically been less powerful. It was not until a few decades ago, that the law that stipulated women were the property of the husband were struck down. Thus facing sexual misconduct in the church is a very counter-cultural thing to do (Hopkin, 1998, p. 44). The church is indeed the body of Christ, and at the same time it is also a human institution: thus it is not insulated from the all the shortcomings of the culture in which it operates and functions.

**2) What cultural and institutional messages do we get about appropriate and healthy sexuality?**

Our culturally derived attitudes about our sexuality can be confusing. Media images of sexuality are both explicit and revealing, and laced with racism and sexism under the guise of freedom of speech. However, we must guard against apologizing for all sexual activity, not forgetting that we are sexual beings and that sexuality is a gift to be used to enhance the well being of others, even in this highly reactive atmosphere in which we now live. A healthy person will be able to make healthy choices about which kinds of intimacy are appropriate in a given relationship. They will know and accept the boundaries between different kinds of intimacy. For example, a person with deep needs for emotional intimacy may confuse those with needs for physical intimacy. I have

discovered in my research that many clergy who offend sexually are equating sex with love and nurture.

## **HOW OPEN OR CLOSED IS THE CONGREGATION?**

Organizations that become progressively closed to outside influences mirror many of the dynamics of incestuous families. People often get sexually involved with each other in these settings. It is not uncharacteristic for clergy in these setting to burn out, act out, or leave prematurely. We will explore how we can move from being a closed system to a more openly healthy one.

- 4) What is the history of the congregation relative to other incidences of clergy burnout, or other involuntary terminations not connected with betrayals of trust?**

Overwork and overfunctioning on the part of the clergy can be a sign of our enormous amounts of anxiety, either rooted in the congregation or in families of key members or in the clergy families.

- 5) What is the congregation's entire history?**

Often the histories of congregations can be a great resource for restorative ministry to wounded congregations. There will be inspiring events, strong clerical and lay leadership, which over the years have contributed to the health and well being of the congregation. These events and occasions can be held up and celebrated. The times of difficulty and the strengths marshaled by the congregation to get through those times can be reflected upon. Stories from Scripture that were helpful can be recounted and retold again, as a way of empowering the community of faith in facing its present challenges.

**6. Are the expectations that congregation and clergy have of each other realistic?**

Even in the healthiest of congregations expectations are often not realistic. In traumatized congregations, these expectations, often unspoken, can be land mines for pastors who follow clergy who betrayed the trust of congregants. These pastors will face displaced anger.

**7. What might it mean to truly embark on a mutual ministry that uses the strengths of laity in an intentional way?**

Because a trust-betrayal event is so disempowering, looking for ways to empower laity can be a significant corrective. Two approaches can be utilized. The first is educational through special ministry training for laity. Classes on reclaiming support can be very helpful. The second is symbolic, whereby laity can be more involved in the liturgy. Ingrained attitudes toward clergy can be discussed, which will allow for many unspoken beliefs to come to the surface. This could facilitate the demystifying and humanizing of the clerical role, which in the long run will make the church a safer place for everyone.

**8. What do boundaries encompass in the broadest sense? How rigid or flexible should everyone's (not just the clergy's) boundaries be in the congregation?**

In the wake of recent disclosures of sexual misconduct in the Roman Catholic Church and in some television ministries, many denominations have provided their clergy with seminars and workshops on healthy boundaries. Included in these seminars are (a) how

does the clergy household and family interface with the congregation (b) wellness issues, (c) time management, (d) over-functioning or under-functioning, and (e) self-care. The issues of maintaining healthy boundaries must be approached intentionally and take into account the needs of everyone in the congregational system.

The Chinese character for crisis's combines the two characters for "danger and opportunity." Clergy sexual misconduct present both danger and opportunity for the wounded congregation. A crisis can present the affected congregation with an opportunity to grow, to reaffirm its mission and for spiritual renewal. If people are willing to listen to each other, avoid laying blame, keep focused while working through the pain together, they can emerge a much stronger congregation. Spiritual renewal can come as people place their trust where it really belongs, in God ( Hopkins, 1998, p. 49).

**C. Methods to be used for assessing outcomes:**

In this project, we addressed the very serious issue of clergy sexual misconduct with members of his congregation. My purpose in this project can be summarized in the following four areas:

1. To name the issue, that is to enable and empower congregations to break the conspiracy of silence surrounding sexual abuse in pastoral relationships.
2. To propose guidelines for making complaints and responding to allegations of sexual misconduct on the part of the pastor. This will necessitate formulating policies and procedure for members,

**lay leaders, pastors and church officials that will provide justice for the victim and restorative ministry for the offender.**

- 3. To identify areas in which healing and reconciliation can be supported through intentional ministry, primarily through small groups and parish based twelve step programs. These groups will meet at least monthly to allow members of the congregation to deal with their conflicted feelings within the church community.**
- 4. To suggest strategies for education and prevention of clergy sexual abuse within the congregational system. This will require changes in ministry practice and a reevaluation of expectations churches have of the clergy.**

In addition to the outcomes mentioned above I will be looking for changes in ministry practice that allow for mutual ministry, that will utilize the strengths of laity in intentional ways. For example, there might be social workers in the congregation that can provide counseling services for members, relieving the pastor from having to devote excessive amounts of time to counseling members.

I will also be looking to see how the resources of scripture, prayer., worship and other sacred helped members of the congregation, in facilitating the healing process.



5. To suggest ways of developing structure of accountability that flows both ways, to allow communication in both directions, from the people to ministers and governing bodies and back again.

Those in ministry must be able to give an account of their ministry to those they serve, and be called to account by them. Until such structure exist, sexual abuse and other forms of abuse of power will remain ingrained within the church culture (Omerod, 1995, p. 90-91).

#### **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

##### **A. A Description of outcomes assessed:**

I returned to the church about six weeks after my initial meeting with members of the congregation and lay leaders, to assess what changes were made, as a result of my interaction and interventions with them. The meetings were held in the fellowship hall and about seventy five persons were present. The meeting was opened by the church elder, who introduced me and reminded the congregation of the purpose of the meetings. Prayer was offered, and I began by thanking those present for coming, and for their willingness to address what must have been a very difficult issue to face. I explained to the congregation that my purpose in having this second round of meetings was to assess what if any changes in congregational functioning have been implemented. I also restated the facts of the case, and acknowledged that the revelation of sexual misconduct by their pastor was a painful and devastating experience. I then asked if anyone would share what their knowledge and experience was regarding clergy sexual misconduct.

Several hands were raised in response to my question. I acknowledge the hand of a female member, she appeared to be in her mid-fifties. She began by thanking me for what I had done in the previous meeting with them, by sharing with them the facts regarding the pastors involvement with one of the members.

The following verbatim will shed light on some of the exchanges I had with some of those present:

**PJ = Me**

**FM= Female member**

**M= Male member**

**PJ** How do you feel about what has happened here at your church?

**FM** I was devastated by the news I loved my pastor and still do, but I'm still having difficulty accepting what happened.

**PJ** What has been the most difficult thing for you to deal with?

**FM** Just hearing that my pastor, my pastor was involved with a member of the church (pause . . . just then other members shouted out in support of her "take your time") I thought that only happened in other churches but not here, not in our church.

**PJ** Is this your first experience of a pastor acting out sexually?

**FM** Yes, this is my first experience, and I hope its my last. I can't go through this again. I had heard rumors and speculation about the pastor's behavior, but I would not allow myself to believe any of it. But when I heard the church officials report and the letter from the pastor apologizing, my heart was broken, I was devastated.

**PJ** Devastated!

**FM** Yes, I was devastated by the news. I love my pastor, I just never thought he would do something like that.

**PJ** Now that you know the truth, how are you doing?

**FM** I'm just beginning to come to terms with the fact that pastors are not immune from sexual sin, I hope he gets some help to get back on track.

**PJ** What do you mean by "getting back on track"?

**FM** He needs to get right with God and ask for forgiveness

**PJ** What about you, have you forgiven him?

**FM** I am not sure how I feel, I'm still very hurt. I feel like I've lost everything. Why did God allow this anyway?

**PJ** Its sounds like you are disappointed with God too.

**FM** I just feel like everything and everyone I believed in has let me down.

(After saying this she sat down and another member stood up. He appears to be in his mid-thirties).

**M** Pastor Jack, I'm a man, the pastor was a man before he was a pastor. What happened here is nothing new, its just new to us.

**FM** Another female member with a very heavy Caribbean accent shouted out "but he was the pastor, he was God's servant, how could he have done that to us. I'm still angry at him, he let me down."

**PJ** You had every right to expect the pastor to behave differently with his members and not engage in sexual activities with them. This was wrong, it was an abuse of a sacred trust.

**M** How can we trust our new pastor?

**PJ** I believe it will take time to trust again.

The meeting closed with prayer and I assured them that I would be available for them whenever they needed me to come. After the formal meeting was over, I stayed on for a while longer and had some informal conversations with a few of the members who did not speak out openly in the meeting. They shared with me that they never would have imagined just how much damage could result from the pastors actions. They talked about the impact on the church that some families left the congregation all together and had no plans to return.

I encouraged them to look to God and scripture for comfort and guidance. I encouraged them to read Psalms 32, and Psalm 51 again and talk about how David dealt with his sin and his eventual restoration. It was my intentions to meet with members of the board to see what kinds of support and care was put in place to assist the members in dealing with their feeling about what had recently transpired. It was suggested that the meeting be postponed until the following Wednesday after the mid-week prayer and Bible study meeting.

I returned to the church on the following Wednesday night and met with the church board. The church elder began with prayer and introduced me again to those present. My interest at this point was to see what kinds of support had been offered for the primary victim. I discovered that in addition to the counseling that was provide by the conference officials, the church leaders had appointed two female members to work

directly with the victim, they accompanied her to her counseling sessions and provided a sounding board for her whenever she need to talk.

Additionally, two small groups were initiated, one group provided a forum for those who wanted to talk about their feelings about trust betrayal and abuse of power by clergy. The other group dealt more with issues of grief and dealt with the various kinds of losses those members had experienced. I was pleased to hear that this group was being facilitated by a clinical social worker who had knowledge of group process. She had met with the group on two occasions, and felt that some progress had been made in that those members who attended the meetings were able to talk about what happened without blaming each other, the victim or even the pastor. I believe that the social workers approach mirrored the "here-and-now focus" articulated by (Yalom, 1995, p. 139).

The meeting with the board members began immediately following the close of the mid-week prayer and Bible study meeting. Nine of the twelve board members were present. I was pleased to hear that they had appointed a task force to give study to ways in which future allegations of inappropriate sexual contact between the pastors of the church and members should be handled. Some of the recommendations suggested were incorporated into an initial draft to be reviewed by the board and conference officials. I was encouraged to learn that the board had appointed a pastoral relations committee to study and review the expectations of the church as it relates to how the pastor should interact with the congregation in terms of conducting any kind of counseling ministry. I sensed more than mere vigilance on the part of board members in seeking to prevent this kind of abuse from happening again.

I realize that the lay leaders still needed to be further educated on the factors that contribute to clergy sexual misconduct. I shared with them that a review of ministry practice and not just the counseling of members by the pastor needed to be studied and changed. The board members were very open and receptive to the recommendation that was made to them. They were eager to refocus the congregation on the mission of the church and felt that this would happen eventually, but the immediate focus should be on supporting the members as they confront the conflicted and painful feelings that were brought about by recent revelations of sexual misconduct by their beloved pastor. I encouraged them to allow the small groups to continue meeting, to allow for the processing of feelings and the venting of emotions to continue. I assured them that this was needed as it would assist the healing process within the congregation. I reminded them that healing of emotions takes time, and if they sought to hurry the process along, more damage could be inflicted by seeking premature closure. I urged the board member to support the task force in its effort to find ways of supporting the groups as they worked to facilitate the healing process.

The final meeting was scheduled for one month later; however, it was about six weeks before I was able to return. The meeting was scheduled for the third Tuesday at seven o'clock. During the time between my last meeting and this final meeting an interim pastor was assigned to the church. The local leaders were feeling overwhelmed and over-burdened with all of the issues confronting the congregation. This meant that they were not able to deal with their own feelings because they had to provide care and support for the congregation in the absence of pastoral leadership. The meeting began

with prayer by the chair of the church board, who then welcomed me and expressed thanks for what had been shared with them to assist the congregation in dealing with the trauma that ensued from the removal of the pastor for sexual misconduct. I noticed that there were members present who were not at previous meetings. I inquired about this and was told some of them had started coming back to church because the interim pastor had visited them and encouraged them to attend the small group meetings. One of the returning members expressed, that at first, she was very reluctant to attend the meetings, but that once she went, she discovered it was just what she needed. The facilitator made her feel welcomed and supported. For the first time in months she felt "safe" which enabled her to talk about how she felt. Other members of the church expressed their appreciation to the church board for its support in appointing the task force, which in turn established the small groups to assist the members in processing their grief, anger and loss. Members of the pastoral relations committee also presented a preliminary report to the congregation in which they recommended that a group of members and local leaders be trained to provide for the educational needs of the church as it relates to preventing sexual abuse and misconduct.

**B. Developments not anticipated in original proposal:**

One of the things I did not expect to find was the high level of anger toward denominational officials. This was expressed when I asked if there was anything that the denomination leaders could have done to assist the church. The members expressed consternation over the fact that the organization had little or no plan in place to respond to allegations of sexual misconduct. I did not seek to defend church officials but I shared

with them that displaced anger was a very common occurrence and it was all part of the larger grieving process. I was pleased to discover that the interim pastor was also a trained counselor and he had already begun to do ministry, utilizing his training and skills to facilitate the healing process. He had visited all of the members who had stopped attending the church, and several of them were present at the meeting. He also started meeting with a few members who seemed to be most angered by the incident to explore the history of the congregation to see if there were other instances of abuse in the church's history or in their family of origin. At the time of the meeting that group had already met once and the second meeting was scheduled for the following month.

I did not anticipate the level of resistance by the congregation in seeing their role in creating the climate that allowed for the pastor to abuse his power. One of the female members of the board was very adamant that the pastor made the choice to get into the bed with the victim, no one forced him into doing that, so therefore he alone was responsible for the mess the church was in. Several heads nodded in support of her assertion. This suggested to me that there was still a lot of work to be done in educating the congregation about the factors that contribute to clergy sexual misconduct. I do believe however, that the report from the pastoral relations committee will assist in clarifying the unrealistic expectations that churches have of their pastors and that these expectations do indeed contribute to conditions of burn-out, overfunctioning, neglect of self-care and strained relations within the pastor's own family, all of which contribute to clergy acting out sexually with congregants.



One of the surprises that came out in the meeting was recommended by the church board that any and all future counseling of members by their pastor must be done in the following manner (1) The request must be in writing, and a copy of the letter must be given to the chair of the pastoral relations committee, (2) All counseling of members, must be done at the church, with a staff member close by. To facilitate this process the door on the pastors office was changed from a solid wood door, to one that had a large glass panel (3) that anyone who needed more than three sessions be referred to an outside counselor (4) the church will provide financial assistance to those needing help to secure such services. These recommendations were voted unanimously by the church board as one of the changes in ministry practice that would help in preventing a repeat of abusive behavior by future pastors.

As I listened to the various comments from those present at the meeting, what I saw was a church that was deeply wounded by one who had done many good things that benefited the members, and at the same time had done such an egregious wrong that inflicted great pain and suffering. Nevertheless, they showed by their presence and participation in the meeting that they wanted to work through their pain and make changes, that would promote healing and renewal for the congregation. Just before the meeting closed, an elderly gentleman who had attended all previous meetings asked if he could make a statement. I asked his name and how long he had been a member. He began by thanking me for coming to their church and sharing with them the information that I did. He stated that in his thirty seven years of affiliation with the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, this was the first time that this subject was openly dealt with. He

knew of other situations where it was rumored that the pastor was involved with members of the church and church officials quietly transferred the pastor with little or no information given. He stated he always had an uneasy feeling about it but you were not allowed to ask questions. He stated that he now feels a sense of empowerment, that there are things that he as a member can do to help prevent the kind of abuse of power that was recently disclosed. He asked for prayer for himself to get over his anger toward church officials, who he blamed for the situation his church was now in. I thanked him for sharing and closed the meeting with prayer.

## **CHAPTER V: Discussion**

### **A. Implications of results reported:**

The church in both the local and wider church context has only recently begun to openly acknowledge the widespread abuse of members by clergy, and see it for what it truly is, a serious betrayal of a sacred trust, that inflicts serious harm and injury to those involved. The long tradition of denial and concealment can no longer be tolerated. A new paradigm is needed that enables and empower churches, conferences and judicatories to become proactive in their organization to educate clergy and congregations as to the real issues involved in clergy sexual misconduct. In developing and executing this project there were some results I anticipated, and some that I did not. The following list some of the result of anticipated and its implications.

### **Implications of results anticipated:**

- 1) **Among the results anticipated was that once the congregation is educated and informed as to the imbalance of power inherent in the pastoral relationship that renders mutual consent impossible, they will begin to see this situation for what it truly is, an abuse of pastoral power and a betrayal of a sacred trust (Lebacqz and Barton, 1991). Now the congregation is more engaged with church officials in matters of clergy accountability (i.e. formation of a pastoral relations committee) that periodically reviews and reports on ministry practice in their congregation, and forward, copies of the report to the ministerial secretary of the conference.**

Many of the members I met with during my interactions with the congregation stated that it was during these meetings that they began to think and speak of the pastor's actions as abuse, and that awareness was very painful for them, having to accept the fact that one who had done so much good was also capable of causing so much hurt.

- 2) **The congregation realized that the passive stance which church officials took when the pastor was removed, was not in their best interest they also acknowledged that they should require more information to support the actions regarding removal of their pastor. While reflecting on recent events, they began to see themselves as contributing to the conspiracy of silence, regarding the pastor's abusive action.**

The pastoral relations committee serves, not only to monitor that ministry practice is being conducted within acceptable boundaries, but it will also work to ensure that the pastor is being supported in his ministry and that mutually agreed expectations of ministry practice are being followed.

- 2) By developing guidelines for making and responding to allegations of sexual misconduct in concert with denominational officials, members expressed that for the first time church officials were truly interested in them as members, not just their financial support of the organization. Members expressed an appreciation for having a process in place that will enable them, without fear of being labeled as "trouble makers" to report abusive behavior within the pastoral relationship. Many members of the congregation were not aware of the name or function of the conference ministerial secretary or that they could have spoken directly to him.

**Implications of results not anticipated:**

- 1) I was greatly surprised by the willingness of the congregation to discuss with me what has been a very painful chapter in their history. My involvement with them was welcomed because it afforded them a structured forum to address their conflicted feelings and be supported in doing so. I really did not know how the congregation would respond to me asking them to participate in this project. The leaders I had interviewed about doing this project were very receptive to my proposal. However, in my research I discovered that the leaders, because of their knowledge of intimate detail of

the situation, that may not have been shared with the congregation in order to protect victims, are sometimes further along in their healing process, thus are more open to someone from the outside coming in to assist them. It is not uncommon for members to have a different position than church leaders about what should be done.

- 2) **I did not anticipate the high level of denial on the part of both the leaders and members regarding their role in creating the conditions that allowed for the pastor to abuse his pastoral power. There was resistance at the first mention of their role in this unfortunate incident. However, as we explored their expectations of the pastor's ministry and responsibility to the congregation there was a softening of their position relative to their contributing to the pain they were still experiencing.**

As I discovered from my study of family systems theory and principles that congregational dynamics often "mirror" the dynamics in family life where the pastor was viewed as the "identified patient." This position freed the congregation from seeing themselves as having any part in the present predicament. My task was to break through this defensive posture by sharing with them insights I gained from my research. I began this process of educating them in the second meeting I had with them following the crisis meeting, when the facts of the case were presented.

**B. Contribution of the project in clarifying and expanding the following:**

- 1) **Religious principles discussed in ch. 2:**

A careful reading of the New Testament, and an examination of the ministry of Jesus, revealed that the "task of the pastor is to build up the Christian community (Omerod, 1995, p. 74). Furthermore, the Christian community seeks in its ministers moral and spiritual leadership. It feels that "ministers should be able to identify right from wrong which will promote spiritual growth rather than spiritual decline, both in themselves and in those they serve. They should be able to realistically identify their own faults and limitations and humbly ask God for grace to overcome them," (McMahon, 1992). While it is true that the Christian community expected a higher level of personal integrity from its clergy and sees the involvement of ministers with congregants as totally counter to the Christian message of the New Testament and a denial of the ministerial calling, they overlook the fact that ministers are formed within the context of a culture that is spiritually and morally flawed.

This factor does not in anyway negate pastoral responsibility for their abusive actions, but it does suggest that any simplistic views or response to clergy sexual misconduct will not be an adequate corrective. For such a traumatizing experience as clergy sexual misconduct. In both the Old Testament and New Testament, there is an expected standard of conduct that is both implicit and explicit as it relates to those whom God has placed in leadership. The evidence is overwhelmingly clear and conclusive that when these standards of conduct are compromised, the result is spiritual dissonance for those who look to these fallen leaders for guidance and support. Who can ever forget Psalm 51, the ultimate anguished plea of a spiritual leader fallen into sin? "If ever there was a man of God who knew the pain of spiritual dissonance or the loneliness of undeserved spiritual

leadership it was David. His agonizing prayer has been the prayer of every conscientious person of God who has ever faced his or her own unworthiness" (Smith, 1988, p. 162).

"Have mercy of me, O God according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done, what is evil in your sight . . . cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean wash, me, and I will be whiter than snow. Create in me a pure heart, O god, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore me to the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise" (Psalm 51:1-4, 10-12, 16, 17).

This passage of Scripture brings together all the religious and spiritual issues that are raised when a pastor acts out sexually with vulnerable members of his congregation. It is true that David was not a pastor of a congregation. However, the issues that flow from his relationship with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his most trusted military leaders, bares a striking parallel with the issue surrounding clergy sexual misconduct. David used the power of his position to gratify his sexual desires. His actions demonstrated that the relationship was not consensual, but manipulative and coerced. David was in a position of trust, a sacred trust, because he was God's anointed servant, charged with care and protection of God's people. The people of Israel looked to him for both moral and spiritual guidance. David's actions and the events that followed parallel mirrors in many

ways the events that follow in the wake of clergy sexual misconduct. Even the hardened military leader Joab was mystified by David actions betrayed and contradicted what he professed to believe about God.

It took almost twelve months before David was confronted with the full ramifications of his actions when Nathan the prophet called him to account (2) Samuel 12: 1-9). A sacred trust was broken David's actions betrayed everything he said he believed, and yet God forgave him. A contrite heart like David's makes possible reconciliation and restoration. His repentance was deep and profound. He acknowledged his sin and took full responsibility for his actions. Reconciliation and restoration with God was also granted to him in response to his heart felt plea. For most of us, forgiveness of our fallen spiritual leaders is always a possibility, and history has shown, given enough time forgiveness is usually and eventuality. Reconciliation of the fallen leader is the task and challenge of both the local congregation and the wider community of faith.

In Galatians 6: 1 the Apostle Paul writes

"Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one." Restoration of the fallen brother is a biblical injunction. We have a responsibility to restore the fallen repentant pastor to fellowship with the church. However, restoration to his position as spiritual leader in the congregation may not be possible at this time. With proper care and support, the fallen pastor may in time be able to function again in another context.

David's repentance and desire to be reconciled to God as seen in his prayer recorded in Psalms 51. showed that David did not seek to minimize his actions and the



profound impact that it had on those over whom he had authority. It is true that not every fallen leader displays the contrition of David and that often times make forgiveness reconciliation, trust, belief difficult. Those leaders who seek to blame the victim and minimize the consequences of their actions makes it impossible for reconciliation and restoration to be achieved and impedes the healing process.

## **2) Clinical principles discussed in Ch. 2:**

The incidents of clergy sexual misconduct appear to be on the rise. Newspaper accounts have littered the headlines and captured the attention of both religious and the non-religious. Televangelist and high profile pastors have provided fodder for what seems to be an insatiable appetite by major media outlets for salacious and tantalizing accounts of ministers who fall from grace because of sexual misconduct with their parishioners. The recent revelations about sexual misconduct within the Roman Catholic Church have once again brought this matter into the arena of public discourse due to the abuse of power by pastors within the Catholic community. This public disclosure of behavior that has gone on for centuries in secret is now the topic of dialogue in many religious organizations who are now reviewing some cases and implementing in others, structures to educate, prevent and respond to the phenomenon of clergy sexual abuse.

In my research for this project, I have been made aware of the fact that sexual misconduct is not a simple matter of sexual desire gone amuck. I have come to realize that clergy sexual misconduct is the culmination of a number of psychological factors that coalesces into an "offending moment". There are several clinical principles

involved and the following will highlight how some of these inappropriately responded to will contribute to pastors acting out sexually. For too long, religious organizations have displayed resistance and reticence in responding to instances of clergy sexual misconduct, and those who do respond, their actions and attitudes are often characterized by minimization, blaming the victim or quietly removing the offending clergy." Because pastors/ pastoral counselors often deal with individuals who are emotionally and psychologically fragile or personally vulnerable, it is imperative that: a) the pastor/counselor himself or herself be healthy psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually, and b) that he or she have adequate preparation and education for helping those individuals under their care" (Fortune, 1989, p.137).

Most pastors will be able to draw a clear distinction between being attracted to a parishioner and acting on that attraction, (Lebacqz and Barton, 1991. p. 46). However, the expectations under which most clergy operate, both from themselves and the congregation, produce tremendous amounts of anxiety within pastors. This anxiety left unchecked can contribute to very poor boundaries which predispose the pastor to overfunction. Many clergy share the common experience of being "stuck" with all the responsibility. (See Moses complaint in Numbers 11:11). They expend lots of energy trying to get others to take responsibility but others hoard it for themselves or act out the Martyr-victim role. This mirrors the experience within families where parents or spouses caught in an overfunctioning position attempt to share responsibility with others. What most overfunctioners fail to understand is that those who are under functioning may be doing so as a maladaptive response to their overfunctioning. If clergy persons

continue to overfunction, without any corrective actions or interventions, the result may be burnout, both physically, spiritually and emotionally.

A pastor functioning in a burned out condition will be doing so with ever increasing anxiety, and thus become a prime candidate for emotional triangulation, making him more prone to act out sexually as a means of reducing his anxiety. "It is vitally important that members of the clergy understand how the relationship system of the congregational family can itself be pathogenic, and learn how to avoid becoming the symptom-bearer for that system" (Friedman 1985, p. 218).

Another important clinical principle that featured prominently in this project was the role of transference. Understanding this principle is vitally important for all clergy if they are to avoid being drawn into improper relationships with vulnerable congregants, who come to them for counseling and support. Since it is impossible to avoid its occurrence, it becomes imperative that all clergy be educated as to the operational presence of transference in the pastoral relationship. In transference, the person seeking pastoral help will project onto the minister unmet needs or unresolved conflicts that are rooted in a prior relationship with some other significant person, such as parents. (Gula, 1996, p. 110). Positive projections can be very enticing because they can feel awfully good. However, pastoral ministers must be reminded that transference occurs in the pastoral relationship primarily because of the role of the pastor, and not necessarily because of the physical appearance of the pastor. There are many needy persons in congregations seeking emotional and physical closeness, but not necessarily for sexual intimacy.

The pastor then must monitor his own responses, namely his own countertransference ,to avoid misreading the need for a friendly hug as a sexual advance on the part of the parishioner, and thus avoid misperceiving the real relationship and respond to a false one (Gula, 1996). This is a very real and present danger that clergy must be aware of or else they run the risk of superimposing onto those seeking their help their own unmet needs and feelings. The results of such a thing happening within the pastoral relationship is that the objectivity that must be present to help the vulnerable parishioner seeking pastoral care and support will be destroyed, thus predisposing the pastor to abuse his pastoral power by genitalizing his own unmet need, at the expense of the congregant. "The danger in countertransference is that we (clergypersons) are beginning to use the other person as a way to meet our own needs, but at the expense of the true purpose for the pastoral relationship which is to serve the needs of the other" (Gula, 1996, p. 111).

Some tell-tale signs to look out for that can signal the presence of counter-transference being operational in the pastoral relationship: spending a lot of time thinking about how the other person is doing, being overly solicitous and available any time, cultivating dependency in the one seeking their help and thus creating a dual relationship and blurring the true pastoral role by presuming an equality and mutuality that really does not exist in a professional relationship, ignoring the imbalance of power and trying to be a "friend" while at the same time remaining in the professional role as that person's minister, (Gula, 1996).

It is imperative that clergy maintain proper boundaries in relating to congregants who seek them out for nurturance and care. Pastors must be extremely careful to guard

against allowing relationships held by trust, becoming merely opportunities to act out sexually. Any attempt to sexualize the clergy-congregant relationship only tends toward the fostering of unhealthy dual relationships, that invariably mitigates against the sanctity of the pastoral relationship, thus undermining the very trust intrinsic to the pastoral relationship.

### **SELF -KNOWLEDGE**

To avoid these pitfalls there are some preventative strategies that must be employed to guard against sexual misconduct by clergy. It is here that the wisdom articulated in the Delphic Oracle become very relevant: "know thyself." Critical self-examination and self-knowledge is essential in recognizing our own intimacy needs, arousal mechanisms and the warning signs that tell us that countertransference is happening, and we are beginning to shift from pastoral interest to self-interest in the other (Lebacqz and Barton, 1991).

### **SELF-CARE:**

Another dimension to a preventative strategy is self-care, because we will not have the energy and presence of mind to attend to the needs of others if we do not see to our own needs being met. Failure to do this means that we make ourselves vulnerable to counter-transference in acting out our professional relationships, which will impede us from achieving the goals of the relationship, which is to server the needs of others.

There are some skills that we will do well to cultivate as part of our preventative strategy. Time management is one of them. We must avoid working extremely long hours which leaves little or no time for exercise, friends, proper nutrition, sufficient sleep,

prayer, or reflective reading. We must live intentionally by choosing our life's direction. Spiritual direction and therapy will serve to help us keep life in proper perspective and provide us with safe space to process sexual feelings so that we do not contaminate the pastoral relationship by sharing them with the one who is the object of them. We should be careful as to the time and place for meeting with congregants who seek us out for care and support, in order to avoid confusion regarding the expectations of the relationship (Gula, 1996).

## **SELF-DISCLOSURE**

The final step in a strategy of prevention is the maintenance of effective structures of accountability. If these structures do not currently exist in our relational system, we must take corrective action by intentionally working with local and denominational leaders bring those structures into being. History has shown, and my research has convinced me, that the more clergy try to make it on their own, the more likely they are to act out sexually with congregants.

### **C. The contributions of this Project to ministry in a wider context.**

The incidence of clergy sexual abuse looms high in the consciousness of religious organizations today. Recent revelations from within the Roman Catholic community, with massive media attention, millions of dollars diverted to settling and litigating law suits brought by those who were victims of clergy sexual abuse, have served notice to all judicatories that the days of denial, minimization and cover-up of clergy sexual misconduct are over. Most religious organizations are now revising their policies and

procedures for preventing and responding to allegations and incidents of clergy sexual misconduct.

It is the intent of this Project to highlight one aspect of this multi-faceted phenomenon, namely the impact of clergy sexual misconduct on the congregational system and suggest some corrective steps that will provide for the congregation achieving approximate justice for secondary victims through a restorative ministry approach to the affected congregation. I believe that all religious organizations will benefit from the research and recommendations contained in this project. For too long clergy sexual misconduct was handled by church officials with denials, minimization, blaming the victims, or quietly removing the offending clergy. The motivation has been to protect the image and reputation of the church, the offending clergy and avoid public scandal and litigations. These approaches have been myopic and inadequate as a corrective for addressing the egregious acts of clergy sexual misconduct.

In writing this project I sought to bring attention to a perennial problem that has plagued the church for a long time and has not been adequately responded to. I have also attempted to show how debilitating an impact clergy sexual misconduct has on all involved, and that no simplistic response will adequately address this betrayal of trust and abuse of sexual power within the pastoral relationship. I agree with Nancy Myer Hopkins assertion that the following elements, are essential to providing restorative ministry to wounded congregations. Essential to this approach are the follow five elements: 1) truth-telling that allow congregations to name the issue for what it truly is, an abuse of pastoral power, 2) sharing and validation of feelings in a supportive

environment, 3) education about what the congregation need to know about clergy sexual abuse, 4) spiritual reflection, that allow congregants to tell where God is for them, 5) and using the spiritual resources of their faith (i.e. prayer, bible stories and hymns) to show where their hope lies (Hopkins, 1998).

I believe the clinical insights shared in this project will be helpful to the wider church in educating clergy about the pit-falls of transference and counter-transference. Additionally clergy will benefit from understanding the role of grief, anger, positive and negative projections and dual relationships that blurs objectivity that is essential to the pastoral relationship. The dangers of overfunctioning, burnout, triangulation and the dangers of poor boundaries have also been highlighted to demonstrate the needs for structural changes in the way ministry is practiced today. It is imperative that church organizations develop policies and procedures that flow in both directions, so that both clergy and laity will be educated and informed as to how allegations and charges of sexual misconduct will be handled. Finally, I believe a restorative ministry process is in keeping with themes of Scripture in both the Old and New Testament. In the Old Testament the idea of liberation and restoration is clearly demonstrated in God's salvific actions in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament the message of the Gospel is of a God, who loves us sinners so much that he was willing to give his only son to save us John 3: 16. I have no doubt that the wider church and religious community will be greatly benefited from the issues addressed in this project.



#### **D. Implications for future ministry**

The long-term effects of clergy sexual misconduct have implications for future ministry. Not all members of an affected congregation will heal at the same time. Grief reactions can be delayed for months or even years. Resistance will be manifested by the short or long term denial by members who have stored up many emotions about the situations. Therefore, there will be a need for ongoing monitoring of the congregation to assess the needs that will require ongoing care and support. In the past, denominational leaders advocated secrecy and "forgiving and forgetting," but this approach has been proven time and time again to be inadequate as a corrective response to all the issues surrounding clergy sexual misconduct. Many congregations have emerged from the "forgiving and forgetting" approach with maladaptive ways of functioning as a congregational system.

The impact of clergy sexual misconduct can be devastating on all of its victims, both primary and secondary, and even in cases where the facts are known initially, reactions may be delayed. We know that sexual trauma victims may repress memories for years. The same is true for victims of pastors. This dynamic is also true for and applies to secondary victims, those whose faith has been betrayed. Long-term healing strategies recognize that victims of the pastor who surface in the initial period may not be the only ones. The church must be ready to accept and respond to other victim, even of years after, and be prepared to deal with them by providing appropriate care and support (Hopkins, 1995).

Education should be provided to the congregation about what physical, emotional, and spiritual symptoms may be present in people who have suppressed or repressed reactions to the trauma caused by clergy who act out sexually with congregants. Currently, this is clinically described as post traumatic stress disorder, (Hopkins, 1995). The church will be wise in soliciting the assistance of a clinician familiar with this condition to provide education and support for those needing it.

## **APPENDIX**

### **The role and function of the "After-pastor:"**

"After pastors" is a term that was coined by a group of pastors in Minnesota several years ago to describe themselves in the formative years of researching the dynamics that come into play in congregations in the wake of major betrayals of trust, such as clergy sexual misconduct. The pastors had one major factor in common, they pastored congregations where the pastor they followed had engaged in sexual misconduct with members of their congregations.

The Parish Consultation Services of Minneapolis invited these pastors to meet and discuss their experiences of pastoring congregations whose trust had been betrayed by their former pastor. The goal was to gain insights and learn from these pastors how they themselves and the congregations they served were impacted by the betrayal trust. The hazards faced by "After pastors" are enormous, and require denominational leaders to be proactive and intentional in educating and preparing those pastors, who will be responsible for providing the necessary care and support, for traumatized congregations. These pastors will be walking into an emotional minefield, and unless they are especially prepared, they will either burnout or leave those affected churches prematurely. The following are some of the issues these pastors reported being confronted with:

- 1) **Mistrust:** many pastors "wondered what they had done to earn such suspicion." One pastor felt if he had stayed in that congregation "he would go crazy," and he reported being constantly misheard or

unheard. Other pastors reported being "frozen out" of the congregation system, with no one to talk to, no support, people constantly trying to triangulate him in church fights.

- 2) **Displaced Anger:** many of the pastors also reported being the recipient of constant attack and blame, (negative projections) even by those who at first heralded their arrival. "When there is public awareness of the wounds in the congregation, but no process to help congregations heal, the pressure on the after pastor to "fix" the congregation can be enormous. Even with the best processes some of this pressure is still observed (Hopkins, 1995).
- 3.) **Anger and rage:** in many congregations anger and rage is present however, the congregation may be unwilling, or unable to acknowledge its presence. The after pastor will often be the recipient of this displaced anger and will need to be supported by church officials. Developing the skills of the "non-anxious presence" will go a long way to reduce the anxiety in both the pastor and the congregation. Many pastors in these types of traumatized congregations will often become the "scape goat" or the "identified patient" in the congregational system. This kind of denial and resistance will often result in the after pastor being seen as no longer able to minister effectively in that congregation.

Pastoral skills are called into question by congregants, stuck in the grief process.

The research has shown that the life cycle of an after pastor is relatively short, usually three to five years. After pastors who last longer are probably in situations where the congregation recognized its need for healing and appropriate assistance was made available to them and the after pastor by church officials.

After pastors need the support of denominational leaders if they are going to be successful in their ministry practice to wounded congregations. The after pastor has to confront several issues all at once. These will include (1) psychological issues, especially depression and anxiety which can result from the isolation and loneliness that is often the lot of the after pastors who minister to traumatized congregations; (2) shame is another factor that affects some of these pastors after becoming the congregation scapegoat, (3) guilt is not uncommon in these pastors for what is perceived as ineffective ministry. Left to themselves, without appropriate denominational support, issues of wellness will inevitably emerge. This then will have a corresponding traumatic and devastatingly negative impact on the pastor's own family, since he will have little emotional energy to be present with and for them.

Many after pastors reported asking the question "is it possible to minister in such a congregation and remain healthy?" The answer depends on the level of support available to the after pastor. Those who had either peers, someone in mental health or denominational support, are most likely to have positive feelings about the ministry in

those traumatized congregations. Those with little or no support are more likely to report negative outcomes from their experience with those congregations.

A congregation that has been traumatized requires a sense of safety and stability. The after pastor's ability to provide what the congregation need, is dependent on his or her well-being. If the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the after pastor are not attended to, the church will not be helped or served. Openness, self-knowledge, and self-awareness are key to carrying out a healing ministry while remaining healthy. To prepare for this difficult and sometimes rewarding ministry, after pastors must be educated along several lives. These will include courses in (1) conflict resolution (2) identification and understanding dysfunctional systems (3) classes in communication and group dynamics. Creative problem solving and decision theory are all helpful in preparing those who will step into the role of the after pastor (Hopkins, 1995).

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