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## CONTENTS

### ARTICLES

- When Wolves Wear Shepherds' Clothing: Helping Women Survive Clergy Sexual Abuse  
*Diana R. Garland* 1
- Cognitive and Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy with Religiously-Oriented Clients: Two Case Studies  
*Andrew Edwards* 36
- BSW Student Perceptions of Salient Integration of Faith and Learning Indicators  
*Michael E. Sherr, George E. Huff, and Mary A. Curran* 58
- A Systematic Review of Religious and Spiritual Research in Social Work  
*Kevin F. Modesto, Andrew J. Weaver, and Kevin J. Flannelly* 77
- The Impact of Religious Affiliation while Growing Up on Substance Use by African-American Crack Cocaine Users  
*Beth R. Crisp, Mark Williams, Michael W. Ross, and Sandra Timpson* 90

## ARTICLES

# WHEN WOLVES WEAR SHEPHERDS' CLOTHING: HELPING WOMEN SURVIVE CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE

Diana R. Garland

*This article examines the problem of clergy sexual abuse with adult women. Victims and their families often seek help from Christian professionals outside the church, rendering Christian social workers and other Christian mental health professionals likely service providers in a major crisis looming before congregations and religious organizations. This article reviews resources for helping women, their families, and congregations survive the abuse of power and the betrayal of sacred trust embodied in clergy sexual abuse.*

A SOCIAL WORKER WHO IS KNOWN AND TRUSTED IN THE COMMUNITY welcomes into her office Susan, a 35-year-old first-time client and a member of her own church. Susan is obviously distraught. No, she answers, she has never been in counseling before. "I am not quite sure where to begin," Susan says. But she plunges into her story, as though fearful that otherwise she might lose her nerve. In a quiet voice, trembling with emotion, Susan blurts out that she has had an "affair" with their pastor. Then she is quiet for a few moments. Now rocking back and forth, tears streaming down her face, the words come quickly, in between sobs. She says she went to her pastor because her husband was depressed and uncommunicative and she was worried about him. The pastor had listened compassionately and expressed his concern for her loneliness as a result of what he called her husband's "emotional abandonment." He encouraged Susan to come to see him regularly for counseling during this difficult time, and soon she was meeting him several

times a week. She was grateful to spend time with this man who was so gentle and kind to her. She began to meet him at a state park as well as in his office, where they could take long walks together and talk and pray in the beauty of God's creation. After several weeks, he began saying she was an answer to his prayers for someone who could help him in his ministry. In his office, he prayed with her, holding her hand in both of his. He confessed to her that his marriage was not satisfying and that he was deeply attracted to her. He would hold her close and then kiss her gently. When she became upset by his advances, he apologized profusely, saying she was just so beautiful, and he loved her; how could such a love be wrong? He bought her books, often books on prayers or spirituality, as a way to apologize, and for a time he would not touch her at all. But then he would embrace her again. Before she realized what was happening one afternoon, they were having sexual relations in his office. Susan felt guilty and horrible at having "tempted" the pastor into this relationship, and yet she felt incapable of ending it; she thought she loved him. She felt trapped by her own feelings and desperate because there was no one with whom she could talk except the pastor himself, and he simply said he couldn't imagine that God would want to deny them the love they had found together. He often called her at work or at other times when they could have private conversations. She felt her life was spinning out of control, haunted by her feelings of sinfulness and fears her husband would discover what she was doing. A week ago, she decided to drop by the pastor's office unannounced to seek some comfort and direction. As she pulled her car in front of the church, however, she saw another woman leaving his office. Something about the look on the other woman's face told Susan in a flash that she was not the only one. In that moment, it was as though a spell was broken. Susan left before the pastor knew she had been there. Susan realized she needed help, and that help had to come from somewhere besides the pastor or the church. She has come to this social worker because she needs to talk to someone who will understand how desperate and horrible she feels. The words stop, but the tears and rocking continue. Then Susan says, "I just can't stop crying; I just want to die."

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Susan is not a seductress; she is the victim of clergy sexual abuse. She sought her pastor out for counsel, and he used her vulnerability as an opportunity to exploit her. The fact that her pastor has allowed her to carry the blame for their sexual involvement is an additional abuse of his power as a spiritual leader. The reality of clergy sexual abuse of adults, usually women, is breaking on congregations and church denominations. It is a more difficult issue to understand than the abuse of children because there is the assumption that if both are adults and there is no physical coercion, then the relationship is consensual. In fact, however, when persons with power—social workers, counselors, pastors, seminary professors and administrators, pastoral and clinical supervisors, and religious employers—attempt to seduce into sexual relationships those over whom they have power, the relationship is not consensual. More than other professional roles, the ministry is liable to the blurring of roles because friendships do develop in a faith community, and the boundaries between professional and social time are often unclear (Fortune, 1989).

Such a relationship is not merely adultery, although it may include adultery. The religious leader disregards the damaging results of the relationship for the one over whom he has power. Because of his power, he can manipulate the victim not only psychologically but also morally, inducing spiritual confusion and guilt. The crisis becomes a crisis of faith (Fortune, 1994), exploiting the religious faith of the other and sacred trust in his ministerial leadership in order to gain sexual pleasure. Even in situations in which a congregant attempts to sexualize the relationship, it is still the minister's responsibility to maintain professional boundaries and not pursue a sexual relationship; to do otherwise is to take advantage of a congregant's vulnerability. Sometimes the terms "clergy sexual misconduct" and "clergy sexual abuse" are used interchangeably. "Misconduct" does not capture the exploitation, betrayal of trust, and destruction his behavior causes, often driving the woman, her family, and others from the church, from faith, and from one another. Divorce and suicide are common.

Just as the abuse of children by priests rocked the Catholic church, so the abuse of women by male clergy and other religious leaders is a tidal wave now swamping the Protestant church (Bromley & Cress, 2000; Fortune, 1994, 2002). Nor is it a new phenomenon. The Old Testament reports that the sons of the priest Eli misused their position to engage in sexual misconduct with women serving at the Tent

of Meeting (1 Samuel 2:12). Historians trace sexual abuses between clerics and laity, senior clerics and novitiates in orders, and priests and nuns back through the medieval church (Shupe, 1998). Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, *The Scarlet Letter*, tells the story of social ostracism suffered by a young woman who engages in "adultery" with the popular parish pastor. In 1868, Henry Ward Beecher, the renowned pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in New York, began visiting Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of a close friend and a member of his congregation. Their relationship led her husband to bring charges against the pastor. Despite overwhelming evidence of their pastor's guilt, Plymouth Church stood by Beecher and excommunicated those who testified against him, including Elizabeth Tilton, who died ostracized and alone in 1897 (Grenz & Bell, 2001).

Although clergy sexual abuse is not a new phenomenon, what is new is the ability of women to sue the church for financial damages. Legal action may gain the attention of Protestant church leaders and bring reform similar to the way court cases resulting in validation of those abused as children by Catholic priests has gained the attention of the Catholic Church.

"Sexual misconduct" includes child abuse as well as sexual harassment or exploitation of adult parishioners, the focus of this article. "Sexual harassment" involves a church leader sexualizing conversations, establishing a hostile climate for women, touching and hugging in unwelcome ways, pressuring for sexual involvement, excluding women from meetings, or sabotaging women's work. It includes sexist language and jokes, public humiliation, exaggerated or mocking "courtesy" such as kissing a woman's hand, "accidentally" brushing sexual parts of the body, pressing or rubbing up against the victim, and leaning over or invading another's space. When confronted, the harasser usually minimizes the behavior, may claim the person is oversensitive, or may even escalate the behavior (Hopkins, 1998).

"Sexual exploitation" can include all of the above, but often adds another dimension that can be confusing in that the subject of the harassment may be ambivalent about the advances. Sometimes those who have been exploited may have even initiated sexual contact (Hopkins, 1998), albeit in what was perceived as a clergy-congregant relationship where on some level she considered herself safe.

In a study in 1984 of 1100 Protestant clergy, 38.5 % admitted to inappropriate sexual contact and 12.7 % had engaged in sexual

intercourse with a church member (Cooper, 2002). A more recent random sample survey of residents in the Dallas/Fort Worth area reported that 2.8% of respondents had personally experienced mental, sexual, or physical abuse by a clergyman, and 4.6% of the sample reported knowing a friend, relative, or co-worker who had experienced such abuse. Only 23% of victims reported the abuse to religious authorities and only 11% to civil authorities (Stacey, Darnell, & Shupe, 2000). One denominational group (the United Church of Canada) reported that women are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the church than in the workplace, and that clergy are sexually exploiting parishioners at twice the rate of nonsectarian therapists (Flynn, 2003).

Although there is little research about where women go for help, it appears that victims of clergy sexual abuse who seek help want someone whom they perceive will understand their Christian world view. Like Susan, they often label their experience as an affair, which is the label given their experience by the perpetrator of their abuse. Almost certainly, they will not call their experience "clergy sexual abuse." A most likely source of help will be a social worker or other clinician known in the community to be Christian. It is critical that the social worker be able to help Susan and other victims of clergy sexual abuse understand themselves and be able explain to their close family and friends what they have experienced. Knowledge of the dynamics and frequent patterns of clergy sexual abuse is therefore essential for working with these women. It is common for victims of clergy sexual abuse to suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Often, their faith in the church and in God is shaken or destroyed. Some commit suicide to escape the pain of not being believed, of isolation, and of shame (Benyei, 1998).

This article reviews the developing literature of clergy sexual abuse and suggests resources both for professionals and for the women themselves as they seek to understand their experiences and as they make the difficult decisions that will have an impact on their survival.

### **The Patterns of Clergy Sexual Abuse**

The perpetrator of clergy sexual abuse can be any religious leader, i.e., any man or woman who holds religious authority over others—pastors or priests or other ordained clergy, seminary or

religion professors or administrators, members of religious orders, youth ministers and other congregational leaders. For purposes of this article, it will be assumed that the perpetrator is male and a pastor, priest, or seminary leader/teacher/supervisor.

Grenz and Bell (2001) have distinguished three types of perpetrators. The *predator* actively seeks opportunities to abuse women with little or no sense of appropriate moral restrictions. The *wanderer* under normal circumstances would never contemplate a sexual liaison with a congregant but is experiencing an overwhelming crisis or life transition that leads him over the boundary (e.g., Lisauckis, Sherwood, & Davis, 2002). The *lover* is motivated neither by the thrill of conquest nor the need to overcome felt personal inadequacies but simply falls in love with someone who happens to be a member of his congregation. All three kinds of misconduct can create trauma for women. Friberg and Laaser (1998) provide an exhaustive review of the categorization of sexual offenders, but conclude from their extensive experience in talking with perpetrators that none fit neatly into any one category.

Very little actual research has been done to identify the characteristics of clergy who offend sexually. Laaser (1998) studied 25 clergy who had been reported for various levels of sexual misconduct. The average number of victims was two, although the researchers suspected that the participants, who were self reporting, were not entirely honest (p. 22). The researchers classified six of the offenders as meeting the criteria for a personality disorder; three were considered narcissistic and the remaining three were classified as "unspecified." Eleven were found to have narcissistic personality problems of some degree; nine had dependent personality traits, and eight were diagnosed as obsessive-compulsive. Fifteen had a sexual compulsion or addiction. They were primarily middle-aged and had functioned in ministry for at least 25 years, achieving some success and hiding their problems all along. In other words, the most common offender is a man who does not present with extreme forms of mental problems, but is reasonably successful and has a combination of narcissism, sexual compulsion, and need for affirmation (Friberg & Laaser, 1998). Of course, from the perspective of the victim, the diagnostic categories are relatively unimportant, in that they do not predict the damage done to her. These categories do point out, however, that the clergy leaders find the church a place that gives them access to potential victims,

where women will trust them more readily than they would in other relationships in our culture.

There are patterns that characterize clergy sexual abuse. Although not every aspect of these patterns is evident in every case of clergy sexual abuse, they are common and thus provide guides for professionals and the women they seek to help to understand the dynamics of their experience.

### **The perpetrator “grooms” the victim.**

“Grooming” is a process whereby the religious leader breaks down a woman’s defenses, making her feel special, perhaps pointing out her spiritual gifts, or in another ways using his position as a religious leader to develop a close relationship and isolate her from others. He uses personal warmth to obscure what his true intention is. According to Patrick Carnes, some of the ways this warmth is expressed include: expressing admiration, caring, and concern; indicating that he looks forward to a long-term relationship with her; making affectionate gestures and touching; talking about a shared project; complimenting and sharing personally in ways that are inappropriate for a relationship between a religious leader and parishioner, student, or employee (Carnes, 1997). He co-opts religious and spiritual language into an agenda designed to meet his own needs. It is a gradual and subtle process, and one that has extraordinary power, desensitizing her to increasingly inappropriate behavior while rewarding the victim for tolerance of that behavior. He speaks for God, saying things like, “You are an answer to my prayer. I asked God for someone who can share my deepest thoughts, prayers, and needs and He sent me you;” and “God brought us together because He knew how much I needed someone like you.” (Liberty, 2001, p. 85). Later, she may find it trite and feel humiliated that she believed him, but at the time, it is a powerful way to exploit her and silence her doubts, throwing off her inner moral compass (Liberty, 2001). After all, spiritual leaders are expected to act in one’s best interests, and he is capitalizing on any vulnerabilities he has found in her to exploit. Frequently he is describing his own marriage as unfulfilling.

Grooming is essentially seduction in a relationship in which he holds spiritual power over her. He provides a story, or what Carnes calls a “sustaining fantasy or supportive script” (p. 56) that justifies the relationship. He may be doing wonderful things in ministry and needs her support for his calling. For example, the alleged story of

evangelist Jim Bakker is that he used his role as a tired minister to millions of persons while no one ministered to him as a means of gaining sexual access to women, almost as though that by giving to him sexually, they could empower him to minister to others (Friberg & Laaser, 1998).

There may be some shared mission, a cause for which they need to partner. She senses something is not quite right, but it is a relationship she has been taught to trust—he is a spiritual leader, after all—so she allows him to say and do things she would not allow a man to do in a normal friendship. At the same time, she becomes increasingly anxious. Anxiety escalates physiological sexual attraction and arousal (Carnes, 1997), therefore intensifying the bond between them. Clergy have organizationally sanctioned easy access to intimate settings under profoundly intimate circumstances. They are permitted an instant intimacy not normally granted to other people in society. “Even a woman with a firm sense of boundaries in other kinds of relationships may well stop guarding them so that her core may be seen and known by this man” (Flynn, 2003, p. 19). He has socially sanctioned and preconditioned access to her very soul (Liberty, 2001). We tend to follow a spiritual leader’s lead and trust. If a minister invites someone seeking counseling into the office and closes the door, she will most likely assume it is always done this way and see nothing wrong with it. Most of the time, we are indeed in good hands and safe. But if the minister is steering toward a sexual relationship, the congregant would have a hard time figuring that out and stopping him. She simply has less ability to say no and more reason to comply with his wishes—she is vulnerable (Horst, 2000).

With that kind of trust, he can easily minimize her concerns and doubts about the appropriateness of their relationship, slowly nudging at and then crossing her sexual boundaries (Fortune, 1999). The first boundary crossings may be covered on his part by claiming lack of intention. For example, if he hugs her or touches her in a way that is just slightly over the edge of appropriateness, she may question her own ability to discern what happened. If she does question or confront him, he may say, “I was just trying to comfort you” or “I was just communicating how dear our friendship is” (Carnes, 1997). As a consequence, she may berate herself and actually feel embarrassed at having questioned his intentions: “I should have known he was just being caring; how could I be so overly sensitive?” Because of the unusual level of trust that women

place in religious leaders, perpetrators are able to deprive their victims of their usual resources for discernment, good judgment, and action. The more subtle the coercion, the more invisible the power play and the greater the damage done to her (Horst, 2000). She blames herself rather than seeing his use of his role as spiritual leader to manipulate her to allow him intimacy she would never allow another man outside of her marriage. The first actions seem small; how could Susan tell someone about the pastor holding her hand in both of his in prayer without sounding that she was sexualizing a small act that he intended as comfort?

**She is “caught” but does not know how to extricate herself.**

As one client said, “Compared to him, who was I?” Women often justifiably believe that no one will believe them. The church deacons or the dean of the seminary may believe the woman “asked for it,” or that she tempted him. Others may well believe that she was dressed inappropriately or somehow was sending him signals. Indeed, she may even on some level have wanted him to be attracted to her. She may have been lonely and found him attractive. *But that does not excuse his behavior or condemn her feelings.* She trusted him to be the safe spiritual leader.

Eventually his behavior becomes overtly sexual, and she has to decide what to do. But she very likely has no one to turn to but the perpetrator himself to sort out her confusion. If she confronts him, he may apologize profusely, minimize what happened, back up in the grooming process, and wait until she has once again placed trust in him. Victims often question their own stories, wondering if they remember events correctly, or if they are making too much out of what may be the first forays across her sexual boundaries. What she does not realize is that she is already caught by the secrecy. If she tells anyone at this point, she might not be believed, or she might be labeled a seductress. If she does not tell anyone, he will continue to cross her boundaries and, later, others will question why she did not “do something” sooner. There is no way out at this point that does not shame her, even if she wants out. Whatever she is feeling, she is confused, sometimes on one level enjoying the attention and affection she is receiving from him, making it even more impossible to escape, even though she is alarmed and frightened. These emotions deepen the attachment—he is the only one with whom she can discuss her feelings.

**She becomes bonded to her perpetrator.**

Carnes defines “betrayal bonds,” as the strong attachment of a victim to someone who is destructive to him or her (1997). De Young and Lowry define trauma bonding as the emotional dependency between two persons of unequal power. “The nature of this bond is distinguished by feelings of intense attachment, cognitive distortions, and behavioral strategies of both individuals that paradoxically strengthen and maintain the bond” (De Young & Lowry, 1992, p. 165).

In clergy sexual abuse, like incest, the perpetrators exploit their power over those who are most vulnerable. Carnes (1997) uses the instructive example of Patti Hearst who had been kidnapped, humiliated, and repeatedly raped for 18 months. She was an educated and strong-willed descendant of the Hearst family, yet during those 18 months, she totally lost her identity and became bonded to her captives and helped them in a bank holdup. Of course, victims of clergy sexual abuse have not been kidnapped and humiliated in the same way, but the undermining of self and the bonding that takes place in an environment of secrecy, cut off from the very community that could help her, does depict the experiences of victims of clergy sexual abuse. In situations of danger or threat, attachments are strengthened—in this case, to the perpetrator. Moreover, it is generally agreed that the impact on victims of sexual abuse by spiritual leaders is greater than the impact of other forms of power abuse because the spiritual resources of a person’s coping capacity are directly compromised or denied by religious authority. “Trauma bonding is exponential under these circumstances because it blocks the critical process of trusting anything meaningful and leaves only the option of despair” (Carnes, 1997, p. 69).

**She blames herself and feels deeply ashamed.**

Women blame themselves for their sexual relationship with a religious leader. Everyone wants to believe that they have the power to make decisions and act on them. “What we must remember is that a person’s moral agency, that is, her sense of what is right for her and her ability to act on it, is severely compromised when someone she trusts is manipulating her” (Fortune, 1999, p. xii). Given her heightened vulnerability (which he has accentuated), her trust of her religious leader, his willingness to be unethical, and the mandate of secrecy, the setup for her abuse

is complete. When the potential victim is confronted with his sexual demands, she may accede or comply (not consent) because she does not want to lose what is important and valued in the relationship, which may be affirmation, support, and caring (Kennedy, 2003).

Because he is controlling the definition of reality at least to some extent, he can define the situation as mutual consent, thus leaving her feeling responsible. As Fortune writes, "This can happen to anyone" (Fortune, 1999, p. xiii). She is left feeling that she is to blame. He often tells her she is, and she is inclined to believe him. She feels safer to believe that she is to blame than to believe she was not in control of what happened, even though that blame leaves her with a deep sense of shame. A question that often helps her later to realize what was happening is, "Would this have happened if he was your neighbor and not your pastor?" Overwhelmingly the answer is "no." As she says "no," she begins to face the truth that he had power and authority that made meaningful consent impossible for her (Liberty, 2001, 2004).

Sexual abuse is inherently shaming. Any time one person treats another as an object to be used to gratify needs rather than as another worthy of respect, the user shames the one used (Horst, 1998). This shaming is accentuated when the user is a spiritual leader. She feels deeply ashamed of what has happened—of what she perceives that she has done, of what she has caused. "If the minister in question is a skillful emotional manipulator rather than an emotional thug, he is likely to try to convince the woman, and himself, that she really does want his sexual advances" (Horst, 1998, p. 25), deepening her sense of shame and her feelings of responsibility. For many victims, it takes years before they actually realize that the abuse is not their fault (Flynn, 2003). Because he has redefined what is right and holy based on his own needs, she is left with a deep mistrust of her ability to distinguish right from wrong. Her sense of shame and willingness to take the blame are consequently exaggerated. Tragically, judicatory bodies that hear complaints often reflect back to her this sense of blame. "It is here that the cracks in the bedrock of spirituality, sexuality and faith come into clearer focus" (Liberty, 2001, p. 89).

In part, she is ashamed because he has led her to violate the Christian sexual standard of sex reserved for marriage and celibacy in singleness. Horst points out that sexual misconduct is not bad

because it breaks the rules; rather, the rules are there because the sexual misconduct hurts people. "Clergy sexual misconduct hurts because it embodies a fundamental disrespect of one person by another . . . Sex between two people of unequal power will, one way or another, end up with one person using the other rather than two people connecting with each other" (Horst, 2000, p. 18). The issue of clergy sexual misconduct is leading some church leaders to examine the hierarchical and powered relationships that exist in church structures.

This self examination by the church may provide opportunity for significant changes in the theological understanding and practical structuring of laity and clergy. But that self examination and possible restructuring toward greater mutuality between clergy and laity should not be confused with what a victim may have actually experienced when an erring clergyman uses and accentuates his power to increase her vulnerability.

**Her stress is expressed in physiological and psychological symptoms.**

Clergy sexual abuse creates overwhelming stress in victims, and because of the risk and anxiety involved, that stress often becomes traumatic (Carnes, 1997). Victims often develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of the relationship itself. The PTSD may be exacerbated when the relationship ends, whether that ending comes with public disclosure or not. One client found it helpful to call what had happened to her "soul rape." Although her religious leader had not violently raped her, his emotional abuse—making her increasingly vulnerable to his advances and at the same time increasing her trust in him and identifying them as "partners in ministry"—felt like the rape of her very soul. For her, the physical relationship, as emotionally damaging as it was, created less difficulty than the spiritual violation.

The trauma rips through her defenses so that she cannot react effectively, shattering her understanding of her self, her faith in the order of the world and in the divine, injuring her ability to feel safe and to trust. PTSD symptoms fall into three groups. First are the symptoms of hyper-vigilance—an extreme startle response, sleeplessness, and agitation. Second are symptoms of re-experiencing—flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, or fixation on the trauma. Finally are symptoms of constriction—numbing, avoidance, and detachment from others in order to conserve one's survival ability

and feel safe. The hyper-vigilance is a way of protecting self from experiencing the event again. The reliving of the event may be the victim's attempt to master and gain some power over what happened, or find a way to heal from it. And constriction is a way to escape it, to split away from what is too painful to experience again (Flynn, 2003). The trauma women experience in clergy sexual abuse is even more profound than that of catastrophic events because of the betrayal involved. Betrayal is the defining hallmark of interpersonal violence. Breach of trust is especially important because of its significance as a core precipitant of psychological and spiritual alteration and damage (Flynn, 2003).

**She may or may not try to end the relationship.**

The victim may feel caught, unable and perhaps even unwilling to extricate herself from the relationship. She may pray for deliverance, but no help seems to come. She cannot reach out to anyone for help, realistically fearing condemnation and destruction of her marriage. She may also feel attached to the perpetrator, in the same way victims of domestic abuse are attached to their abusers. As one survivor wrote:

Only God knew the whole story. And God didn't seem to care. . . . No one would understand the web in which he had entrapped me. . . . I was an expert at deceiving. It was my only way to survive (Poling, 1999, pp. 66-67).

**The secret is discovered.**

Something happens to reveal the relationship. She may be caught with him in a situation that betrays their relationship. Like Susan, she may find out that she is not the only woman he is abusing. She may develop any number of physical or emotional symptoms related to the stress caused by the relationship, bringing her to the attention of a physician, to whom she may reveal the source of her stress. Victims of clergy sexual abuse may be swamped by symptoms of anxiety, depression, or PTSD when the secret is broken.

If they find out about the abuse, her husband and other family members now have to come to terms in some way with what has happened to her. Initially, there may be fury directed at her for what seems to have been a consensual affair. That anger may or may not be redirected at the perpetrator or, depending on how the church

responds, at the institution. The family must deal with the change of status in the congregation, which often withdraws its support at the very time that support is needed the most.

### **The church institution responds.**

Kennedy (2003) records one woman's experience:

I do not want to hurt the man in question, though I know I am far from being the only woman he has damaged. I know he goes on as ever—and with the Bishop's knowledge and therefore acceptance I presume. The Bishop merely shrugs his shoulders and says: "I know but what can I do if the man denies it and I have no direct proof?" (p. 228).

The Anglican priest who abused her was later "defrocked," not for professional misconduct but for adultery. Kennedy reports that the woman had to go into hiding because of threats to her life (Kennedy, 2003). Women often are frightened of what the perpetrator might do as a consequence of her reporting. Going into hiding is not an unusual response to threats or perceived threats of physical harm.

Unfortunately, congregational and denominational bodies have been slow to respond to clergy sexual abuse, often blaming the victims and being more concerned about taking self-protective stances to avoid legal or moral responsibility for the behavior of their leaders than they are about the well-being of those who have been harmed. In the late 1980s and 1990s, however, understanding of clergy sexual misconduct began to shift slowly; the influx of women into the clergy broke the "good old boy" networks that tended to protect clergy in many denominations (Hall, 2003), and threats of litigation won the attention of denominations when women found no other recourse. Investigatory committees were created to respond to allegations rather than leaving the church's response in the hands of a single figure, such as a bishop (Hall, 2003). Now in some cases, it is possible for women to register complaints with denominational judicatories without their identities being revealed in their congregation. Although this may help protect a woman from the negative consequences of being identified publicly, it also cuts her off from the support of her friends and community during a very difficult time.

When the congregation does find out, women often find themselves discredited, blamed, and shunned. Women victimized in religious organizations where they are employed may be forced to resign, losing their careers. "When one of their own is exposed, rather than open doors to healing for all concerned, church leaders often close ranks around the perpetrator and seek to silence the messenger" (Poling, 1999, p. 19). As a consequence, the crisis compounds as women lose their community, their vocation, and their connection to the church. The multiplying crises are overwhelming, hitting her and her family with shock wave upon shock wave of stress.

**She is urged to forgive.**

The community often urges survivors to forgive the abuser before there has been opportunity for her even to begin a process of healing. They urge forgiveness out of a desire to put the ugliness behind them, not out of an understanding of the damage that has been done. This often means allowing the religious leader to escape the consequences of behavior that may, in fact, create the best opportunity for him to be faced with what he has done and the need for change.

The community instead needs to attend first to whether the dignity and integrity of those who have been violated have been protected and restored. It needs to put in place effective structures for ensuring the safety and protection of other vulnerable people. It needs to be sure that legal and moral obligations have been met. Without attending to these responsibilities, victims cannot forgive without denying their own worth. Forgiveness does not preclude accountability and prevention of additional victimization. Forgiveness needs to be a response of the community, not just of the individual (Horsfield, 2002).

Clergy sexual abuse traumatizes the soul the way injury traumatizes the body. "Asking a victim to forgive the offender early in the process is like asking someone to play basketball with a broken leg" (Horst, 2000, p. 32). Forgiveness is a gift from God; it cannot be forced or willed. It will come only with healing of the wounded soul and eventually of the community itself. Because of the urging to forgive and the shunning they experience, and because the perpetrator has used and abused his role as God's representative as a way to get to her, some women leave the church and never

come back. Some turn their backs on God, unable to distinguish between those who have hurt them and the God they represent. They rightly experience the urging of others to forgive as a minimizing of the damage the perpetrator has done and is capable of doing in the lives of others. The victim recognizes the public apology he proffers as a means of maintaining his leadership role; she has heard it before. It is part of his pattern of grooming, now used with the larger community. Nothing has changed except that she is publicly disgraced.

A few victims find support. Somewhere within the denomination or institution they find those who can hear their stories with understanding and who deal justly with the perpetrator, removing him from the role of power where he can continue to offend. They provide her with support and relationships that can help her begin healing. They provide consultation and support to her family and community who are also victims of the abuse of power that has taken place. "Jesus called us to do the hard work that makes for shalom in broken lives, including persevering amidst the conflicts and tensions that forgiveness alone does not eliminate; Zaccheus had it right" (Evinger & Yoder, 2002, p. 80)

Margaret Arms provides wise counsel in putting issues of forgiveness in perspective (Arms, 2002). Her research with religious leaders and pastors revealed that they tend to use the less onerous theological term "sin" rather than "evil" to describe sexual abuse. In contrast, abuse survivors often use the term "evil" to describe their experience. "Sin" implies that abusive behavior is universal, since we are all sinners, when in fact it is not, even though the potential for such behavior may reside in all of us. Using the language of sin rather than evil reflects a perpetrator mindset, normalizing and minimizing harmful and destructive behaviors. This makes religious institutions complicit with the offender mindset that seeks to minimize the abuse by calling for forgiveness before even naming the truth of what has happened. "Religious truth telling might commit to engaging in a rigorous and public process of justice in its own house in the face of clergy abuse" (Arms, 2002, p. 120). There needs to be acknowledgment of what happened and who was responsible, with genuine remorse and repentance by those who have done harm. Encouraging the victim to be silent or to forget or to minimize what has happened to her is not encouraging forgiveness; in fact, it is

quite the opposite. Forgiveness may include speaking out about what happened, remembering the abuse and being an advocate for others who have been silenced, using anger to work against violence and abuse. It brings the private process into public view and in that way it is a powerful force for change.

**She begins to describe herself as a survivor.**

Surviving clergy sexual abuse is a life-changing experience. As one woman writes, "The damage has been done, and I continually have to fight with myself not to be defined by the damage" (Poling, 1999, p. 79). Many women have to live with the damage in secret because our culture does not have a framework for understanding their experiences. We are just now developing a framework for understanding clergy sexual abuse of children. This secrecy is itself a terrible burden.

Sometimes I want to scream, "Yes, I am a victim of clergy sexual abuse!" Yes it did happen to me. I hate the secret. I hate the burden. Why can't I talk about this the way one would talk about any other injustice? But I can't, probably because I fear there will always be someone who thinks I asked for it or wanted it. But in many ways I am no longer a victim. I don't even want to use the word "survivor," because I don't want just to survive. I want to live and thrive. And I am thriving—despite what happened, despite the pain, despite the shame I feel, despite the secret (Poling, 1999, p. 99).

The impact on survivors of sexual abuse by spiritual leaders is greater than survivors of other forms of power abuse. Since part of coping with trauma is spiritual, sexual abuse by a spiritual leader further complicates the recovery process.

Trauma bonding is exponential under these circumstances because it blocks the critical process of trusting anything meaningful and leaves only the option of despair . . . . My experience with survivors of trauma is that every journey or recovery depends on the survivor coming to a point where all that person has gone through means something (Carnes, 1997, pp. 68-69).

### Professional Responses and Intervention

#### **Women need language for understanding what happened and is happening to them.**

This review assumes that most women seek help after the exploitation by the clergyman has ended—he ended it, she was able to muster the strength to end it on her own, they were discovered, or she stumbled upon the knowledge that there were other victims and her perspective on the relationship was transformed as a consequence. Often, women's shame and overwhelming fear of the secret coming into the open will keep them from seeking help until after the relationship begins to unravel. Nevertheless, some may seek help prior to the end of the abuse. She may come for help for other matters, or she wants to find a way to end it but finds herself unable to do so. She may be so depressed or anxious that she self-refers or others refer her for help, perhaps without knowing about the cause of her anxiety and depression. You can help her realize that the very act of seeking help, even if she has not been able to end the relationship, took tremendous strength. She will continue to regain power that has been taken from her when she decides that his behavior is wrong and must be stopped. But that point may not come without hard work and strong support from you and perhaps from a trusted friend or family member (Hopkins, 1998). Your compassion and acceptance of her, even if she struggles to make this decision, are critical.

Perpetrators and their families, women's families, their congregations, and the larger community almost universally blame women for the fall of a beloved religious leader, calling his abuse an "affair" and assuming that because she is an adult and that he did not violently assault her, the relationship was consensual. Even if she learns the words "clergy sexual abuse," she may still feel overwhelmed with guilt, wondering how she could have ever "let such a thing happen," particularly when confronted over and over with the judgment of others during a time in which she is struggling with depression and anxiety. Language is critical. It makes all the difference to call her experience "abuse" instead of "an affair," and to be called "a victim" rather than "an adulteress." Otherwise seemingly innocent conversations by friends who do not know her role in the congregational crisis and who use the language of "affair" and "that woman" create shame and trauma over and over.

Talking it through with a social worker who understands the process of clergy sexual abuse can be the beginning of survival. She also needs to be connected to other survivors; she is not the only one, and others' stories that parallel hers, whether in writing or in support groups, can provide great insight and solace. Research indicates that reading, studying, and other self-education efforts can be critical tools in helping victims understand their abuse and come to terms with it. Flynn found that self-education promoted autonomy, provoked the righteous anger necessary for trauma integration and healing, and stimulated creative problem solving (Flynn, 2003).

One of the most helpful books for victims is the volume edited by Nancy Poling, *Victim to Survivor: Women Recovering from Clergy Sexual Abuse* (1999). Following powerful introductions by Marie Fortune and by the editor, women tell their actual stories of being victimized by religious leaders and how they have survived. Victims can find themselves and their experiences in these stories and not feel so alone. They can also begin to embrace emotionally as well as cognitively the frame of clergy sexual abuse to understand what has happened to them.

Another very helpful resource for victims is Horst's *Recovering the Lost Self: Shame-healing for Victims of Clergy Sexual Abuse*. This small volume published by the Order of St. Benedict in Collegeville, Minnesota, clearly defines clergy sexual abuse and operates from the premise that victims often feel lost in their relationship with God and in the human community of the church, with shame as a central feature of their victimization.

One of the first resources available is still one of the best, Marie Fortune's *Is Nothing Sacred? When Sex Invades the Pastoral Relationship* (1989). It is a moving case study of a church and its charismatic "successful" new pastor who, during a four year pastorate, involved himself sexually with a number of its women members. The circumstances included harassing phone calls in the middle of the night, rape, and seduction of those to whom he had offered care during grief and family crises. Fortune was called upon to offer counsel to and advocacy in behalf of six women who came forward in order to stop their pastor from abusing others. Evidently, there were many more victims who did not speak out. Perhaps the most frightening aspects of the story are the slow and ineffectual responses to the victims of the congregational and denominational

leaders. The book provides procedures for responding to clergy sexual abuse, guidance for protecting the clergy person unjustly accused, and approaches for congregations and denominational leaders dealing with such a crisis.

Patrick Carnes' *The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitative Relationships* (1997), although not only about clergy sexual abuse, provides another framework that helps victims become survivors. Carnes explains how exploitative relationships create "betrayal bonds" when a victim bonds with someone who is destructive to him or her. Also, one of the earliest resources available, Peter Rutter's *Sex in the Forbidden Zones* (1989), is still helpful. A psychiatrist, Rutter provides case studies of men in power—therapists, doctors, clergy, teachers, mentors—who betrayed women's trust by involving them sexually.

**Determine if she is dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).**

Goldfein (2004) suggests that the first therapeutic stage following a traumatic event includes offering compassion, hope and an understanding of what has happened to her. She needs reassurance that the range of emotions and physiological responses she is experiencing are to be expected and not pathological. Explain the neurochemistry of trauma, and assess whether she needs a medical evaluation, especially if she is not sleeping, or she is depressed or suicidal. She may also be concerned about sexually transmitted diseases, particularly if she learns that there are multiple victims. Her anxiety may not have allowed her to face the topic; she may need to be encouraged to seek a medical evaluation. Your acceptance of her fears, rage, depression, and the range of other emotions she is feeling, of her uneven progress, and of her need to tell you of her experiences in layers as trust develops are invaluable.

Rothschild points out how important it is in cases of PTSD, before delving into a discussion of the traumatic experience, to teach a client how to contain the flow of anxiety, emotions, memories, and bodily responses (Rothschild, 2004). Once she knows she is the one in the driver's seat, and that she can stop the flow of distress at any time, she can then dare to explore her experiences. "Developing 'trauma brakes' makes it possible for clients, often for the first time, to have control over their traumatic memories, rather than feeling controlled by them" (Rothschild, 2004, p. 44). Working

in a state of stress and even flashbacks only deepens the trauma. Instead, teaching her how to stop the overwhelming stress and panic she feels when recalling her experiences will help her feel safe enough to go further. Rothschild describes a process of watching the client for hyperarousal and then stopping the exploration and instead narrowing her focus to looking at her current environment, describing her current surroundings, as a way of pulling the client away from a developing flashback that will be retraumatizing if not prevented (Rothschild, 2004). Telling her story will take patience, recognizing that layers of story will be added as she experiences safety and control in the telling and regrouping, rather than the “out of control” experience that characterized the abuse itself.

According to Goldfein (2004), the second stage of recovery is learning to contain feelings and begin the process of healing. Explore her past successes and coping styles and how she can use this knowledge of herself to cope with this experience. She needs to strengthen relationships with friends and family and address problems there that may have predated the clergy sexual abuse. She may need encouragement to begin to resume life, building structure into her life that makes her feel “normal” again. Help her reclaim or learn new approaches to self soothing.

Exploring the spiritual dimension of her trauma will come as she struggles with her feelings about God, her church, and how her spiritual life may have been severely attacked. She will probably need to find her way into a different understanding of God and into a new faith community. However she finds her way, she will need help in finding the meaning in what she has experienced and, in time, the positive changes she has experienced—new skills, new understanding of herself and of God, greater confidence in herself (Goldfein, 2004). This process may take months or years, depending on the breadth and depth of devastation she has experienced, the support available to her, and her own coping resources. Some never return to formalized religion or participation in a faith community.

**If she has not already reported the abuse, she may want to consider whether or not to report his abuse to the congregation or religious organization to whom he is responsible.**

She may find that one of the ways she can find meaning in this experience for herself is to do whatever she can to ensure that he does not hurt others. She has a number of options that she may

need help in exploring. Depending on the context, they may include filing a criminal complaint, filing a civil suit for damages, reporting to church bodies, filing a complaint to an ethical standards or licensing board, filing a complaint with the local Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, asking the church for reimbursement for therapy and other costs, and, of course, doing nothing (Maris, 1995). If she does report him, she risks being revictimized. At a time when she may be struggling to stop blaming herself, the message she may hear, either subtly or blatantly, from those entrusted with the responsibility to adjudicate complaints and hold religious leaders accountable, will reinforce her sense of responsibility, shame and failure (Liberty, 2001). As she talks with an investigating committee or board of elders or trustees, her language may fall short of naming her experience in a way that reflects the deep damage done by her predator. As a consequence, they may hear her name and thus they label the relationship as a consensual "affair." She needs to be prepared before giving testimony, therefore, and legal counsel may well be advised. She will be speaking to people who most likely do not understand the issues of power, grooming, and victimization involved. An advocate can accompany and support her through this process of giving testimony and pursuing a response from the congregation.

Some congregations and denominational bodies have responded to the problem of clergy sexual abuse by developing justice-seeking policies. Many more have not. The more centralized, mainline denominations are more likely to have policies than are decentralized, congregation-based denominations and non-affiliated congregations. It is important to find the policies that are currently relevant to the congregation, denomination, and/or institution in which the abuse occurred. Some organizations and congregations will carefully protect her identity; others will not. She may need a professional's help in ferreting out the policies relevant to her situation and determining the risks and protections afforded her. Few people know the definitions of sexual harassment, the behavioral flags that signal potential abuse, or the scope of what is considered sexual misconduct, harassment, or abuse. They do not know what redress is possible in their church or institution, or whom they should contact. Moreover, the fear religious leaders have that they themselves may be prosecuted for similar offenses is inversely proportional to the speedy provision of effective inter-

ventions. Or as Benyei has said metaphorically, “the river of justice is still full of piranha” (Benyei, 1998, p. 83). Consequently, she may need the social worker to be her advocate, exploring the policies and procedures on her behalf.

If she is afraid that the perpetrator might physically harm her if she takes action, take her fears seriously. Is she receiving harassing phone calls from him or others? Have there been threats? She may need to make clear to the church investigatory body, or to the police, the basis for her fears. Even if he has not overtly threatened her, she will likely feel safer if the investigatory committee requires him to have no contact with her. If there has been an overt threat, consider a police report and whether or not a protective order should be sought.

**Depending on the details of her experience and the response of the church, women will need legal counsel.**

Depending on the laws of a given state, the abuse of power she has experienced may be considered a crime, e.g., if she was in a counseling relationship with a pastor, a student in a religious college or seminary, or an employee in a religious organization. Sexual harassment is prohibited in the workplace and in educational institutions by federal and state laws. She has to show only that she has experienced behavior which a reasonable person would have found hostile. It does not matter that the perpetrator meant no harm; the impact of the behavior on the victim will be the focus of the inquiry. Sexual malfeasance is any sexualized conduct occurring between a person in a position of trust with an adult entrusted to his or her professional care. Faith communities can be held liable for sexual malfeasance of their clergy under several legal theories (Underwood, 2003).

If she has suffered mental distress or physical illness or loss of job, there may be legal liability on the part of the congregation or institution employing the perpetrator. Legal counsel can help her sort through her rights and these options. Women and their families may need significant resources for counseling over a period of years, depending on the severity and longevity of the abusive relationship and other life factors that interact with this event in her life and the impact on the family. Although the secrecy of these arrangements makes it impossible to know with any certainty, it appears that many religious organizations are quietly settling with women out of court and providing them with financial resources

for counseling, needed medical care, and/or settlement packages if they have lost their employment or careers. One of the conditions of these agreements is often mutual guarantees of silence by all parties. "Frequently the institution, at the urging of its lawyers, has sought to settle out of court for significant sums of money if the victim(s) agrees to silence, i.e., not to discuss the particulars of her/his experience ever again. The institution is more interested in secrecy than justice and is willing to pay people off in order to preserve its public image" (Fortune, 1994, p. 115). This practice of silencing is driving victims and their families out of the church rather than supporting them in a time of great anguish.

**She has to accept the betrayal and abuse for what it is and what it has done to her.**

Carnes suggests that healing begins when the survivor accepts that her trust has been betrayed (1997). If there has been a delay in dealing with the abuse, the victim may have been dealing with her anxiety and distress with medication, alcohol, or repeating the experience in other relationships where she is exploited. She may have carried the distress in ways that caused physical illness or depression. She may experience significant weight loss or gain or other physical expressions of trauma (Flynn, 2003). As she begins to confront what has happened to her, she will begin to remember the abusive relationship and have intense reactions to those memories. She may begin to recognize the high cost the relationship has demanded of her, and she may be very fearful about what is still to come. Many victims have much to grieve, because they have lost much. She may feel betrayed by God, the ultimate betrayal (Flynn, 2003). She may also become overwhelmingly angry. Anger can be an empowering emotion; it helps her break the secrecy and evaporates the loyalties to the perpetrator that have bound her.

Some of this work can take place in an individual therapeutic relationship. It can also be most helpful for her to talk with other women who have survived clergy sexual abuse. She needs friends who understand her, and they may well not be those persons who were her friends before this crisis. Virtually every perpetrator has more than one victim (Fortune, 1999), and some victims of the same perpetrator find tremendous support from one another, particularly if they are going through a denominational or legal process of seeking justice. There are also networks of survivors springing up

that can provide needed connections for survivors. Some of these resources are listed at the end of this article. Some organizations hold weekend retreats and seminars where women can form linkages with others to walk with them through this difficult passage. Community rape crisis organizations provide compassionate, free services, and a non-church organization can legitimate her experience as a "real assault" and not just a religious matter.

**Women need help with their family relationships as they begin to move on with their lives.**

One woman spoke of desperately wanting to tell her husband but "not knowing how to do it," which she described as "hell...real hell." The entrapment caused her to have "death wishes" and it ultimately took nine months to tell her husband the entire story a little at a time (Flynn, 2003, p. 102). Some women decide not to tell their husbands at all, fearing their husbands' reactions (violence or abandonment). Consequently, they deal with the trauma and struggle on their own, creating silence and distance in their marriages.

If she does tell her husband, marital counseling is almost always needed. Nevertheless, she also needs time alone in counseling to process what happened to her without having to guard what she says in front of her husband. The victim's husband and perhaps also family will also need help in grasping what has happened and to deal with his (and their) rage; they are "secondary victims" (Hopkins & Laaser, 1995). Although at some point they will have to deal together with her guilt over the pain experienced by her family, they also need some therapeutic space and time individually. Although there are a few good resources for women to read about clergy sexual abuse, it is tragic that there is virtually nothing for the families of victims, all the more reason that a time to talk through the confusion of what they are experiencing with a professional may be helpful.

Most of the resources available for victims recognize that partners and other family members may be angry and feel rage at what has happened, cautioning that they should take care not to direct their rage at the victim. Although that may be good advice, it often comes far too late. The victim herself often does not understand in the beginning what has happened to her. If she initially understands what she has experienced using the construct of "affair," her husband's anger and sense of betrayal will be aimed directly at her. As she begins to come

to terms with her experience as abuse and nonconsensual, and if her husband has struggled to stay with her despite her having an "affair" with the pastor, it may now sound like she is making excuses for her behavior. She in turn may find him a ready target for the anger that is growing within her over what has happened to her; he does not seem to support her fragile newly constructed understanding of clergy sexual abuse and emerging understanding that she did not cause the abuse. Only the most committed marriages can survive this kind of anger and the rending of mutual trust. Both spouses are probably also dealing with the spiritual crisis of the loss of their church community and close friends and spiritual leader, as well as the swirl of multiplying crises and possible public shame they both have experienced. Every aspect of their relationship may be affected, including their ability to be intimate with one another if she is having flashbacks to the abuse (Name withheld, 1995). There is no research about the impact of clergy sexual abuse on marriages and children, and the little research available suggests that the church did nothing to help. Many relationships within families are completely severed (Flynn, 2003).

Moreover, perpetrators often choose women who are particularly vulnerable for one or more reasons. Often she has come to him for counseling because of a personal or family crisis. Many women who experience clergy sexual abuse were also victims of childhood abuse and other serious life crises for which they may or may not have received help (Kennedy, 2003). The clergy sexual abuse is one more traumatic experience compounding the life crises she was already experiencing. Those original issues have not been resolved and will need careful therapeutic attention as well, particularly now that seeking help for those troubles has led to this trauma. Or, she may have been particularly vulnerable because he is her mentor, employer, or supervisor in ministry. In many areas of church life today, even in the most liberal of denominations, women have difficulty finding their way into the ministry to which they feel called. Therefore, a man who recognizes her gifts, who makes a way for her where there seemed to be no way, and takes on the role of her champion may have created significant dependence. On top of everything else, she faces a major career crisis.

### **Beyond justice comes healing.**

A woman may have chosen to tell her story to hold her abuser accountable, and in the process, brought about justice. She may

have found validation in that process. Or she may have been further bruised and battered. But even in the best of circumstances, if the congregation or institution has responded with justice, this will not heal her shame. "The single most effective cure for shame is the experience of being seen and understood exactly as you are by someone who has no need or wish for you to be anything different" (Horst, 1998, p. 40). She needs to talk with someone who can help her learn to focus on her needs and feelings, who will walk with her as she learns to trust herself and others again and tries to put her life back together. Recovery is not just an individual process; she needs to tell her story and be heard by others who can listen and value her. This is not only a therapeutic process; it is also a regaining of her personal power in a community of others who can help her reclaim her sense of personal agency (Rose, 2002). This can come in a support group, in a group of supportive friendships, and perhaps also in a supportive family.

Ultimately, healing involves forgiveness, which is a process that happens to the person doing the forgiving and may or may not affect the offender. She needs to be clear—as do others—that forgiveness is no substitute for justice. In fact, forgiveness must include justice as the unfair hurt is recognized (O'Brien, 2005). A woman may find that before she can forgive the perpetrator, she must forgive the forces that allowed her to be hurt. If she thinks she had some responsibility for what happened to her, that she somehow allowed herself to be vulnerable, then she must forgive herself. That forgiveness involves admitting her own sense of guilt, confessing it, and accepting the forgiveness of God. She may well need a professional to sort out with her what proportion of responsibility she bore for what happened. Even though she recognizes the abuse of power that took place, she still may have had some agency, however minor it might have been. Taking a thorough inventory of what responsibility she feels for her victimization takes seriously the complexity of causation with which she may be struggling. Forgiveness of the perpetrator may only be able to come after, or at least intertwined with, forgiving herself and seeking and believing in God's forgiveness.

Even more difficult may be forgiving God. How could God have let this happen to her, perhaps in God's very name? It may be very difficult to forgive God, both for the victimization and for the lack of justice that may be her experience with those who should

be concerned about justice. The pain inflicted on her in processes of revictimization by the church, either through its minimization or ignoring what happened or through scapegoating and rejecting her, may deepen her anger at God as well as the church. Any process of forgiving the perpetrator needs to take into full account those who allowed him to do this to her—herself, God, the church, and those who perhaps could have protected her if they had acted on what they knew. Recognizing the complexity and arduous work involved in forgiveness is a first step.

### Summary

Social workers employed in settings identified as Christian need to be prepared to care for the victims of clergy sexual abuse. They may not always blurt out their stories to us like Susan did; their stories may be hidden under layers of depression and shame. As we help our congregations and denominational agencies and institutions develop policies and protective guidelines, however, we can expect that the Susans may seek us out. Moreover, we may be able to reduce the incidence of clergy sexual abuse.

The skills predators use to groom victims also elicit trust and support from the larger community, creating an aura that makes discovery of perpetration unlikely. Although some offend only once, many will continue to abuse if they are allowed to continue in positions with similar dynamics to parish ministry. In order to prevent clergy sexual abuse, therefore, congregations and institutions must develop policies that require screening, background checks, mandatory training, mandatory reporting, complaint procedures, intervention strategies and guidelines, victim support measures, discipline policies and mandatory disclosure (Evinger & Yoder, 2002). The problem of clergy sexual abuse will not be resolved until strong screening programs are instituted in seminaries and in congregations.

Secondly, we need to do the research about the prevalence and experiences of these women and their families. The resources listed below are helpful, but they are just a beginning. There is so much more we need to do.

On February 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops released two reports on the clerical sexual abuse crisis prepared by the lay National Review Board it had empowered to

establish the extent and causes of the crisis. At the heart of the report was the first summary of statistics on the crisis issued by Catholic officials based on a survey of diocesan records. Four percent of the approximately 110,000 priests in service since 1950 had allegations of sexual abuse of children filed against them; 10,667 alleged victims reported that they had been abused; and an additional 3,000 have not filed formal complaints. The total cost of settlements and treatment for priests and victims exceeded \$572 million at that point in time, with perhaps hundreds of millions more to follow (Walsh, 2004, p. 19). Although no one knows with any certainty, it appears that the abuse of women is a much more pervasive problem than the abuse of children (Bromley & Cress, 2000).

Will it take court litigation of this magnitude—or greater—to bring justice and healing for the women who are victims of clergy sexual abuse? Or will the church find ways—before being ordered to do so by the secular courts-- to act justly and bring healing to victims and their families and faith communities shattered by the betrayal of wolves in shepherds' clothing? ❖

#### KEY RESOURCES

**Internet Sites.** There are many internet sites, but these are the most useful:

Advocate Web, Helping Overcome Professional Exploitation <http://www.advocateweb.org>

AdvocateWeb offers serves as an information and network clearinghouse for victims and professionals, providing links to therapeutic and legal help as well as to networks of survivors, advocates, and print and other resources.

Faith Trust Institute (formerly known as Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence), Working Together to End Sexual and Domestic Violence

2400 N 45<sup>th</sup> Street #10

Seattle, WA 98103

Phone: (206) 634-1903

Fax: (206) 634-0115

<http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org>

Faith Trust Institute provides training and resources for both religious and lay leaders concerning faith and sexual and domestic violence. FTI provides multi-religious and multi-cultural books, videotapes, curricula, and speakers that can be incorporated into seminary curricula or used by other organizations.

Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute (ISTI)

<http://www.csbsju.edu/isti>

Saint John's Abbey and University  
Collegeville, Minnesota 56321

ISTI offers a lengthy list of organizations that can be utilized by victims of sexual abuse or exploitation. It also provides a bibliography of references, book reviews, publications, and a list of treatment programs and victims associations. ISTI conducts workshops and conferences.

The Linkup, Survivors of Clergy Abuse

P.O. Box 429

Pewee Valley, KY 40056

Phone: (502) 241-5544

Fax: (502) 290-4056

<http://www.thelinkup.org>

Linkup provides information about choosing a therapist, and provides a great variety of resources tailored to various denominational groups. The Linkup also works to educate denominations and congregations in an effort to understand and prevent clergy sexual misconduct as well as to help victims, their families, and congregations.

**Additional Print Resources.** I have already described key resources for women survivors above. Here are additional resources for families and congregations:

Hopkins, N. M. (1998). *The congregational response to clergy betrayals of trust*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.

This is an excellent overview of the issue of clergy sexual abuse from the perspective of the congregation and the process of addressing the crisis and recovery process for the congregation that has suffered clergy sexual abuse.

Hopkins, N. M., & Laaser, M. (Eds.). (1995). *Restoring the soul of a church: Healing congregations wounded by clergy sexual misconduct*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.

The volume is presented in three parts. The first section focuses on primary victims—their experiences, their healing, and their transformation into survivors. The second section addresses the experiences and healing of secondary victims. This section looks at patterns of organizational distress in congregations where clergy sexual misconduct has occurred, whether recently or in the distant past. The devastating impact on the spouses and children of offenders is also explored. The final section explores the processes of long-term healing. This volume is essential for church leaders who are faced with this crisis in their midst, including deacon boards, denominational officials, social workers and other mental

health professionals, and any who find themselves helping guide a congregation through this experience. The book provides guidance on such practical issues as planning and leading meetings that inform church leaders and congregations about what has happened in their midst, relating to the public and the press as the misconduct becomes known, caring for the families of offenders, and serving as an afterpastor.

Horst, E. A. (2000). *Questions and answers about clergy sexual misconduct*. Collegetown, MN: The Liturgical Press.

This small volume provides an introduction to the topic of clergy sexual misconduct and clergy sexual abuse for congregations. It is written for congregations and clergy seeking to be sensitive to the needs of victims/survivors and abusive leaders. It addresses some of the most common and troublesome questions, such as, "Does this mean *any* sexual relationship between cleric and congregant is off limits? What if both parties are single adults?" and "Aren't clergy human? Aren't they on the same journey as the rest of us?"

Levine, R. B. (1996). *When you are the partner of a rape or incest survivor: A workbook for you*. San Jose: Resource Publications, Inc.

This workbook is the only resource I could locate written specifically for the partner or family member of a survivor of rape or abuse. There is no resource specifically for families of women who have suffered clergy sexual abuse, but many of the dynamics are the same. Although not entirely adequate to the task of addressing the marital issues created by clergy sexual abuse, particularly the spiritual abuse, this book can be helpful in normalizing the anger, depression, and sexual difficulties survivors and their partners experience in the wake of abuse. Perhaps the stories of husbands in this book will encourage the partners of women struggling to survive clergy sexual abuse to seek the support and professional guidance they need to help and not revictimize as they try to find their way through the struggles of recovery.

Tower, G. (2005). *Fish in a barrel: A true story of sexual abuse in therapy*. Salt Lake City: Millennial Mind Publishing.

This book tells the compelling, true story of a woman who falls prey to a predatory psychotherapist who sexually abuses her and wreaks havoc in her family. Left devastated and confused, she is able to take action that ultimately leaves the reader feeling that she, too, can make a difference despite victimization. Although the story is different in the details from clergy sexual abuse, and it does not involve the spiritual and religious overtones that are so central in clergy sexual abuse, this book nevertheless will be a page turner for survivors of clergy sexual abuse who find the author to be someone they can identify with and can embolden them in their own journeys of healing.

Cambridge, C. R. (1999). *Forgive us our trespasses*. Hollis, NH: Hollis Books.

This novel tells the story of a woman who, 20 years earlier at the age of 17, was sexually abused by her pastor. When allegations arise from other women and she realizes that the pastor has continued to abuse women and girls, she decides to tell her husband about her long-buried past and testify in a church trial in order to finally stop this predator from continuing to victimize women. The novel's location of the main character's victimization during her adolescence makes this more useful reading for women victimized as children, not for those who have been abused as adult women. In fact, it may unintentionally underscore readers' sense of guilt if they were adults, and not teenagers, and yet they were unable to stop their abusers. The too-easy resolution at the end of the book is unrealistic and does not fit the experience of most survivors of clergy sexual misconduct. Moreover, the book is flawed by a need for editing for grammatical and simple typographical errors that detract from the power of the story. Not recommended.

McClintock, K. A. (2004). *Preventing sexual abuse in congregations: A resource for leaders*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute.

This book is written in a very accessible style for clergy and lay leaders of congregations, to help congregations know how to foster healthy relationships in community life, cope with addictive behaviors, create safety in counseling and pastoral relationships, and adopt guidelines that prevent sexual abuse. This is not a volume for survivors of clergy sexual abuse, but it is a volume that will be most helpful to those consulting with congregations to help them prevent clergy sexual abuse.

Miller, D. A. (1993). *How little we knew: Collusion and confusion with sexual misconduct*. Lafayette, LA: Prescott Press.

Dee Miller tells her own story of serving as an international missionary with her husband. A fellow missionary sexually assaulted her. Although she escaped physically unharmed, she was traumatized by the experience. Her initial response was to remain silent until she realized that the perpetrator was victimizing others as well. When she found the courage to tell her husband and the mission organization, she found her husband to be supportive but fellow missionaries and the organization minimized her experience, sympathized and sided with the perpetrator, and attempted to cover up and silence her. *How Little We Knew* exposes the problems of revictimization by social networks and religious organizations that abuse victims agree can be even more traumatizing than the initial abuse. It makes clear why many women intuitively seek to cover up their victimization, believing they will find their stories met with disbelief and shaming rather than understanding, help in healing and protecting others from harm.

O'Brien, R. (2005). *Set free by forgiveness: The way to peace and healing*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

This book is not written with victims of clergy sexual abuse as its target audience, but it provides a wonderful guide nevertheless to the arduous and important processes of forgiveness—forgiveness of abuser, of self, of the church and its representatives, and ultimately, of God. O'Brien distinguishes between forgiveness and forgetting, insisting that forgiveness must involve remembering, as well as forgiveness and restoration, recognizing that it may never be possible for relationships to be restored. O'Brien weaves together theological truths, biblical stories, and rich narratives of people's lives that will be a resource for individual women and their families struggling with the concept of forgiveness.

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