

JUST FOR THE BRAVE
by Dee Miller

Words of Comfort and Reality for Those Wrestling with Collusion with Sexual and
Domestic Violence by Clergy

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By Dee Ann Miller

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In attempting to find solutions for the complex problems of clergy sexual abuse, those of us in the interfaith survivors movements find it is best to maintain lots of hope, but few expectations. In 1994, I believe a strong dose of reality for those who are attempting to confront the resistance to survivor messages must be offered in the spirit of preventive mental health.

Looking back on our family's own devastating experience as survivors, I strongly believe we could have profited greatly from being fore-warned of the resistance among both professionals and laity to talking about and being pro-active in concern for the safety of the community of faith. We would have avoided having unrealistic expectations and would have been less likely to blame ourselves because others did not understand or join us in our concerns.

If you have just begun the process of justice-seeking, you may find my words discouraging. The intent, however, is not to discourage. It is to enlighten you on the problems of justice-seeking in 1994.

If you have completed the process and been disappointed, you will hopefully find the message validating and healing.

If you have somehow found yourself to be the rare exception in that you have been received by the community of faith with gratitude and appropriate swift action, please let me know. As a writer I am looking for the exceptional stories which can show that survivors' expectations are not impossible or unrealistic, even though it seems to be improbable at present that they will be fully met.

For the purpose of simplicity, I will be using "CSA" to refer to the overall problem of clergy sexual violence. I recognize that this violence comes in many forms—child abuse, harassment or outright assault of adults, sexual involvement with counselees or congregants, sending pornographic material or making inappropriate phone calls, sometimes even the abuse of one's own wife and children.

Regardless of the specific behavior, the dynamics in the system of the institutional church seem to play out in remarkably similar patterns. What survivors assume should be "cut and dry" is considered to be also "cut and dry" by many clergy, laity, and sometimes even mental health professionals. Unfortunately, the "cut and dry" responses deemed appropriate by survivors are frequently in direct conflict with what has been done through the centuries in secret.

We are all beginning to realize that individual survivors are not the only people who thought their particular case was unique. Individual members of the clergy, sometimes almost as frightened, embarrassed, and afraid as survivors, have assumed that they also were the only one unfortunate enough to know of a case. Rather than act courageously, they have continued to act as victims, often not talking about the problem with even close colleagues, and allowing their offending colleagues to get off without the public exposure that is necessary to keep the community of faith safe.

This author in no way excuses the professional incompetence which has been shown. However, we survivors must begin trying to understand some of the cause for the incompetence so that we do not individually blame ourselves when others treat us as **crazy enemies**, rather than **courageous friends** of the system.

This material comes to you from several perspectives, our personal survivorship being only one. My Ron has been an ordained minister since 1967, the year we were married. He has also been through a 2-yr. training program with the American Association of Pastoral Counselors and has had a wide variety of opportunities to apply his skills in that area.

I am a registered nurse, nationally certified as a generalist in psychiatric nursing with the American Nurses Association. I also hold a degree in Community Mental Health. My father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, as well as several other relatives, were all ministers.

At present I am active in justice-seeking ventures in several arenas. Recently I was appointed to the Board of Directors for Linkup, an exciting inter-faith movement for both survivors and pro-survivors. (Its first national meeting was held only two years ago. Jeanne Miller is the founder.) I also serve on an adjudicatory committee with American Baptists (Ron and I have only been in the ABC for four years.). This experience, along with multiple interactions with clergy who have a variety of roles and perspectives on the issues of clergy sexual abuse and misconduct, have contributed much to my understanding of the major hurdles which we are attempting to surmount in the survivor movements worldwide.

This year I have taken two editorial positions. I serve as associate editor of the Linkup newsletter plus membership is only \$35.00/year and can be ordered through: Linkup, 1412 Argyle #2, Chicago, IL 60640. The other position is that of contributing editor for In Search of Healing, published 2-4 times per year. This magazine is a cooperative effort of professionals and survivors to provide healing messages and information to survivors of sexual abuse. It sells for \$5.00/copy and can be ordered through: The Survivor Press, PO Box 30702, Albuquerque, NM 87190. Both of these publications provide opportunities for survivor voices to be heard. I would personally love to hear from you if you have contributions to be considered for either publication.

Those of you who read **How Little We Knew** are aware that we served as missionaries for ten years in a small African country (named "Novatia" for writing

purposes). We stood firmly against the return of a veteran missionary with twenty-five years experience after this man had multiple founded allegations of sexual assault or harassment of female co-workers, repeated molestation of one minor, and the assault of a national who ended up in the emergency room of the local hospital, but refused to tell personnel what had actually happened, even after being pressured to do so repeatedly. My husband Ron and I both continued to believe that, if we could somehow find the right words, we would be successful in turning the tide of opposition at every level to our stand. After all, this was an organization we had trusted all our lives!

Refusing to be silent cost us our careers, our peace of mind, our financial security, our adopted homeland and its beautiful language, and our link with the denomination of our heritage. The pain has, at times, been excruciating. We are now stronger than ever before in our lives, but the changes have not come easy. It took only five minutes for me to learn the terrible truth about the predator in our midst. It is taken years for us to learn that clergy sexual exploitation (in the forms of abuse, misconduct, assault, harassment, etc.) is probably far more widespread in every denomination than the general public dares imagine.

With lots of hope but few expectations for drastic changes in our lifetime, we continue to search for ways of “turning the tide” in the community of faith. This booklet is just one such attempt. Our primary allegiance is to healing, especially for survivors.

WHAT SURVIVORS ALREADY KNOW

Survivors know the powerful destructive forces at work in a relationship with the abuser. Survivors have moved far enough out of the victim role to identify the fact that abuse occurred and to speak about it at least to one person.

While in some situations victims must be led to the point of recognition by a therapist or advocate (often for another victim), survivors usually want to find ways to find healing, as well as to protect others in the community of faith from the destructive behaviors of the perpetrator.

Most survivors know that the process of healing requires speaking the truth and expressing the strong feelings which come during the abuse itself, as well as those that follow in the aftermath. If the survivors have not recognized the need to openly express anger, a qualified therapist can assist the client to do so and to make wise choices about how best to continue doing so. Survivors know that someone needs to receive this anger and validate it. We also recognize that anger appropriately expressed can bring about valuable changes both in self and others.

WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW CAN HURT YOU

All of us have many assumptions about others, especially persons in our community of faith. Since children, we generally have trusted clergy and leadership in

the church without stopping to do much questioning. This all comes to an abrupt halt the day one realizes he or she has been victimized by “one of the cloth.”

A year or so after we resigned from missionary service under duress, I was cashing a check in a super market. I did not have of all of the identification normally required by that particular store and was about to concede, leaving my purchases on the counter. Suddenly the cashier looked at the check again and exclaimed: “Oh, I can make an exception here. I just noticed you are married to a ‘Rev,’ and if you can’t trust a ‘Rev,’ who can you trust? I chuckled inwardly and thought: “Lady, if you knew what I know, you’d never say that again!” In this situation, the woman’s faulty assumption seemed harmless enough to allow it to work to my advantage; but I made a mental note of how free some of us within clergy families have been because of the “happy myth” which survivors have learned is unfortunately only a myth.

Yes, survivors have already learned not to trust; but far too many of us believed the perpetrator was the only one who could not be trusted. We have gone to others in the community of faith, expecting them to be extremely grateful that we have found “the one bad apple” in the bunch.

If you are anticipating make a report of CSA at this time, I hope you will be received with the warm welcome that a messenger should feel. It is important, however, they you know from the start that many people in the community of faith may be so threatened by your message that they will try to silence, hush, or shame you.

While believing may be the issue, there is a good chance the unspoken issues—ones which are not politically correct to speak—will be the powerful, controlling ones influencing people to behave in ways that will make you think you are not being believed. People may even tell you they don’t believe you, and some honestly may not, especially if the clergy offender has a lot of seniority, charisma, or respect in status. In reality, they may believe you; but be afraid to acknowledge this.

The common beliefs which get in the way of justice have been highlighted widely in recent years so much so that I hesitate to even mention them. (For example, “Women just ask to be raped or harassed.”) Certainly, these may be expressed about you, but may seldom if ever be said to your face. Not knowing what others are saying or thinking is one of the oppressive, but valid concerns with which survivors must learn to live.

This was well illustrated in a personal experience I had only a few days after **How Little We Knew** was released. My publicist got a call from a flustered DJ who had suddenly had one of his guests cancel on him only hours before the broadcast. When he heard that I might be available, he asked that the publicist do all she could to get me on the air that day. Happy to have the opportunity, I readily accepted. It was my second radio talk show, so I was still a little nervous and unsure if that nervousness was the cause for my feeling intuitively that this man was questioning everything I said (without directly doing so).

The next morning I telephoned the publicist and requested a complimentary copy of the tape so I could judge my own performance and learn from it. The cassette arrived six weeks later. Fortunately, by that time I had time to establish a feeling of having a receptive audience with about a dozen other interviewers. As I listened to the program, I made mental notes of things I would have said a little differently. However, I basically felt proud of my presentation and was amazed that I sounded far more confident than I had felt. As soon as the interviewer dismissed me after the 45-minute program, his tone changed dramatically. “Well, folks, you’ll have to use some discernment with this one,” he commented. “I don’t know what happened here—I mean, I’m sure something did, but I don’t know.” He went on to talk about how exposing the problem had its own problems and to give advantages for churches maintaining secrecy!

Immediately I sat down and wrote the interviewer a letter, telling him that he was more of a coward than most perpetrators I knew. I assured him I would have had some fine answers for his resistance if he had been brave enough to make his remarks in my hearing. I further promised that I would inform the publisher of his behavior so they would not likely be so accommodating the next time, and I did just that!

In recent months I have learned to consider everything we do in this business (I’m not referring to the secular meaning of the word “business,” of course) as either providing education or encouragement. If I have encountered an “educational opportunity,” I try to use it to the fullest to educate others. That is what I have just done by writing this.

One of the most significant conclusions I have drawn from multiple conversations with clergy and laity is that survivors who continue to insist that the institutional church take action are viewed as “weak.” In reality, only survivors who have been able to break out of a certain degree of denial can even bring a case to the attention of those in charge. The tragedy is that the survivor after 30 days of therapy is usually far healthier than most of the people to whom a report is being given!

Forgive me if I sound grandiose at this point, but I contend that those of us who have refused to accept the stone-walling and apathetic, lame responses of people we once respected are incredibly strong. We are the exceptions. We deserve immense respect and gratitude. We are not “sick.” In fact we may never have been “sick.” We are among the healthiest in the institutional church, and our realization of this fact is all that keeps us going!

Author M. Jordan in Taking on the Gods (Abingdon Press, 1986) refers to “secular scriptures,” his term for the destructive lies or distortion of the truth which are respectable God would have us reject in order to maintain an emotionally and spiritually healthy, safe world. There are many “secular scriptures” which victimize survivors of CSA. I will name just a few which I have identified over the years:

1. The hierarchy of the institutional church always knows what is best.
2. The people of the community of faith always value the individual over the institution.

3. All problems are simply spiritual and can be solved without outside information or help from professionals outside the clergy.
4. Restoration means putting together two people who have a problem with one another. This is the goal of CSA.
5. When there is an offense within the community of faith, it only affects the primary person(s) offended and the offender.
6. Problems in the community of faith must always be kept very quiet.
7. The burden for restoration and healing lies in the hands of the offended. They are not doing their duty to the community of faith when they fail to forgive and forget.
8. The institutional church is in no way to blame for the on-going problems of CSA in its midst, so it has no obligation to victims.

All of the above are steeped in faulty theology. If you have problems understanding how this is true, you may want to talk with your therapist or a victim advocate, preferably one outside your own denomination. It is vitally important for you to know that these are widespread beliefs within the community of faith, and they may strongly influence the decisions and remarks which are made about you and the conflict.

In the name of “not making you uncomfortable,” people do use the “secular scriptures” against you, often behind your back. (Sometimes they are unaware that their thinking is “secular,” however.) If you keep in mind that the best we can hope for is what Marie Fortune refers to as “approximate justice,” you will see your primary function, if you choose to report your abuse to church authorities, as helping to provide some alteration into the deeply entrenched “secular scriptures” which are so slow to change. In the process, you will hopefully be able to get some monetary help for your personal expenses and make the community of faith safer for all concerned.

Since the 1960’s American clergy have been suffering from an intense, often unspoken, sense of low self-esteem and powerlessness. This was preceded by an exceptional “high” in the 1950’s when citizens attempting to recover from World War II and to keep their enormous, often unspoken, fears at bay, turned to the institutional church as their mainstay. The clergy profession had a sense of unprecedented powerfulness. Their work became exciting, invigorating, and at times almost effortless. They cannot help but “succeed” at that point in history.

Today the majority of people have gained education. Learning always expands our horizons and makes us see things that once looked simple as far more complex. The enlightened population has become a great challenge for the profession which has often been viewed throughout history as having “all the answers.” We know that life is far too complex for one profession to be able to claim this prestige. Unfortunately, many of the profession are still resistant to that idea. Rather than draw from the wealth of input which a multi-disciplinary approach provides, the institutional church still remains largely closed to outside information.

There are exceptions, and these are the people who will most likely be able to join you as survivors and pro-survivors in seeking truth and justice. But they are still the exceptions. These people have a “teach me, teach me” approach. They are willing to challenge the very system which continues to often give them power without real merit. They are among the brave.

Having lived within clergy households all of my life, I can assure you that the stress the profession places on itself and the demands which the public makes on the profession are immense. Protestant congregations seem to be especially ambivalent about how much power they want their minister to have. It is very easy to scape-goat the minister for either using too much power or not enough whenever the congregation does not want to face its own personal and collective dysfunctions.

However, not even in the “pagan” societies is overstepping sexual boundaries considered acceptable. This problem should be a non-issue! I personally do not believe it has much, if anything to do with stress. I am married to a man who is constantly stressed and sometimes depressed, but he does not choose to act them out by sexually exploiting others. Indeed, the majority of depressed clergy do not participate in sexually inappropriate behaviors, even though normal sexuality sometimes involves thinking about such. Some of the profession seem unduly worried about CSA because they are normal human beings who have frequently had fantasies about inappropriate behaviors. “This could easily be me!” we frequently here. “How can we be so hard on this guy?” Their difficulty in differentiating between thinking and acting seems to complicate decision-making when they are faced with an erring colleague. I suspect the confusion may even be justified by some scripturally, though I have not heard this verbally clarified. Matthew 5:28 tells us: ...“whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.” Taken literally, some fools might reason: “Well, if I’m already guilty, I might as well act on my fantasies! It’s no different.” Unfortunately, the scriptures have almost been taught to this extreme, especially in more fundamentalist denominations.

The willingness to lean toward rationalization and minimization of a perpetrator’s behavior is scary, but we must remember that to take action which is totally contrary to the mode of operation for thousands of years is often far more scary for this profession. This does not excuse the collusion, but it does help us see why survivors willing to call for accountability are such an incredible threat! It also helps us to individually think: “This conflict is not about me so much as it is about them.” (even though many of us have been greatly injured in the battles for justice)

Thomas P. Doyle, a Catholic attorney and chaplain in the USAF, refers to those of us in the survivor movement as being the “new elite” because, by speaking out, we hold a power which is not supposed to be ours! When I heard that I had to stop and chuckle a while.

WHAT THE PROFESSIONALS DON’T KNOW CAN HURT YOU

The clergy, like all professions, have been trained to do certain jobs very well. Their training, however, has been quite narrowly focused until recently. Most of the focus seems to have been on soft-hearted, merciful care-giving to victims of visible injury. Also generously sprinkled into seminary training have been methods for confronting “sinners outside the fold,” depending on how the particular denomination has defined that population, nurturing and accepting those who “go astray” when they simply ask for readmission has been a high priority. In fact, not to do so has been a sign of being negligent in one’s duties as a shepherd.

Unfortunately, the “secular scriptures” have greatly influenced how professional ministers do ministry. Just as the general population, clergy often view invisible injuries as minor, only spiritual, and somehow the fault of the person suffering. While this tendency is usually unconscious, I believe it is nonetheless prevalent. This keeps persons who are suffering from mental or emotional injury (unless we can find a biological cause) to be kept at bay, depriving those individuals of the spiritual nurturing which the profession needs to incorporate more extensively into its thinking and training.

As a result of this deficiency in the training of the professional spiritual care giver, many “persons of the flock” turn (and rightfully so) to professional counselors. Unfortunately, most people in the mental health field are not particularly adept at providing spiritual care and few understand that the injuries to victims of CSA are far more complex, requiring more specialized care (especially for those victimized as children), than other victims of sexual abuse. Therefore, the poor person suffering from this particular emotional trauma may find a huge void in the healing process. Many persons then turn to a pastoral counselor.

The tragedy which many of us victimized by the clergy and subsequently the institutional church have encountered is that pastoral counselors seem to often unconsciously feel threatened by what the victim has to say about their primary professional loyalty, which is to the clergy. While this is not always true, it has happened often enough that it must be confronted.

The following are statements which I know of having been made by pastoral counselors to victims. They were well-intended, but served only to re-injure:

To a clergywoman who has been victimized by a senior pastor: “It was just your need to feel special that kept you in the relationship.” (The clergywoman was being sexually harassed, feared for her job which she had worked hard to obtain, and knew she would not likely find another. She did not want her life totally disrupted by reporting, so she stayed until life indeed became unbearable.)

To a male minister who felt victimized by his colluding colleagues: “Oh, you ministers know what to do. You have the scriptures to guide you. Just go on what you know. I don’t really think you need my help in this.”

To a concerned friend of a teenage victim: “Reporting is really a punitive act. Redemption is what we are aiming for.”

To a daughter of a victim who had lost her job as a result of reporting: “You really have problems with grief, don’t you? I bet you never even had the experience of losing anything as small as a little kitten. We’ve got to work on this.” (The vicarious victim had lost several kittens growing up, and each experience had been difficult for her!)

While I realize I will not be making a lot of friends among professionals by writing about these problems, they do exist. Survivors need to know they exist so that there will be less self-blame when one receives a re-injury. The sad fact is that, in order to find healing, CSA survivors usually must search diligently for persons who can assist in this. There are almost always several re-injuries from professionals and laity alike, but risk-taking is what brings healing and ultimately what brings change in our world.

THE TRUTH IS: THERE ARE VERY FEW EXPERTS. CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVORS ARE AN EXTREMELY UNDER-SERVED POPULATION. Believing that one is equipped to deal with this problem when, in fact, one is not usually creates some degree of re-injury. We survivors are seen as resistant to “help” when, in reality, there is little knowledgeable help available at this point. Clergy need to realize this and admit their own incompetencies—not necessarily due to their unwillingness, but more to their inadequate training, society’s inability to confront its own faulty thinking, and the intense knowledge deficit in this field.

Yes, what professionals don’t know can hurt you. This is a fore-warning and also a validation for those who have been re-injured.

Persons in the ministry who are really seeking to understand CSA have to look at their everyday spiritual vocabulary with new eyes. They need to find new perspectives on such challenging concepts as “forgiveness,” “mercy,” “restoration,” and “qualifications for leadership.” Some are honestly seeking and questioning themselves and others. At this point, tragically, many are in too much shock and grief to do so objectively. Survivors are confronting the age-old “recycling” which few of us knew had been going on for centuries. Innocent clergy (and there are many who have neither colluded or been perpetrators) are in a very humiliating position. It is embarrassing for those who have colluded and those who have just discovered the collusive behaviors of their colleagues.

Those of us in the survivor movement had no intention, however, of softening the blow for the profession. There must be confessions, both personal and collective, to survivors. There must be apologies to the community of faith, for millions over the centuries have gone to their graves as silent martyrs. Their suffering cannot go unrecognized. If the institutional church is ever going to be restored to the place of honor which it should have in this world, there must be open, painful, honest truth-telling and both individual and collective pledges to facilitate dramatic, drastic changes.

The difference between “secrecy” and “confidentiality” is not just a problem with semantics. Just as good policies and procedures are frequently used **against** victims so that they are repeatedly re-victimized, the word “confidentiality” is often used to support the very power structure which continues to provide covert encouragement for CSA to continue.

In practicalities, how does this play out? When allegations are made, all too often the clergy person is allowed to stay in the present position for weeks or months as the adjudicatory process continues. This practice is based on the fear that the alleged offender may have been falsely accused. In reality, according to Gail Peterson, Ph.D., of Moorhead, Minnesota only 2% of allegations eventually turn out to be unfounded. While we want to be fair, we must be careful to take precautions for prevention of re-victimization. Even if allegations do turn out to be false, the congregation will need to deal with the concerns openly so the innocent minister (in this situation) can be restored expediently.

Let us look at the police departments of most major cities. Policemen are commonly suspended pending an investigation of wrong-doing, even if the community is 99% sure that the officer is innocent. I seriously doubt that most falsely-accused ministers would have the presence of mind to continue doing the stressful work which is demanded of them on a day-to-day basis. By contrast, true offenders have often been known to go around building a case for their innocence and simultaneously sexually abusing new victims, even while allegations are being reviewed! (see Marie Fortune’s **Is Nothing Sacred** for one such case.)

For the emotional health of all involved—alleged perpetrators, the congregation, and victims—there must be a hard-fast rule that those with allegations against them be temporarily relieved of their duties with pay. What an institution or local church has to pay someone not to work, you can be assured we will see the adjudicatory process speeded up for the benefit of all concerned.

Victims need to be able to tell their stories. It is not a requirement that a victim tell his or her story far and wide, but neither should it be prohibited. This is a part of the healing process for all concerned. (Yes, even for the perpetrator, whether or not he is in denial.) The “confidentiality” must be lifted, except in the service of the best interest of the victims, once allegations are founded. Exposing the evildoing of public figures is the only way the general public can be informed and protected. **IT IS SCRIPTURAL!** “Evildoers shall be cut off.” (Psalms 37:9) is just one verse that admonishes us to use “hard love” when it is appropriate.

I continue to hear a lot of confusion about “judging.” Isn’t that something we must leave to God, people wonder. Well, yes and no. While some of my Catholic friends will disagree, I personally believe that none of us has the power “even if we wanted to) to pronounce eternal damnation on anyone. We do have the power and the responsibility, however, to protect the innocent, to seek justice, and to impose natural consequences of persons who would oppress others.

Sadly, the “natural consequences” for perpetrators through the years has been the ability to continue on unabated. Survivors have been responsible for seeing that consideration be given to changing the “natural consequences” because the earlier ones were based on the assumption that survivors would usually keep silent. If one did speak out, it was easy to silence that individual under the “secular scripture” that victims ask to be abused; therefore, they are not victims!

Secrets make us sick. Confidentiality helps provide protection for the innocent as long as is necessary. It is a right only of the innocent. Secrecy is not the privilege of public figures who misbehave.

Frequently we hear ministers (and others, as well) attempting to polarize the problem of CSA by defining it as a problem with a single cause and a single, simple solution. The cause and the solution is, to these people, considered to be only spiritual.

In reality, we are dealing with a problem requiring the disciplines or professional expertise of at least two professions—clergy and mental health. Unfortunately, these two professions, by history, have often considered themselves to be mutually exclusive of one another. Here they must cooperate and communicate to a degree seldom demonstrated in the past. However, the beauty of this dilemma is that if they learn to do so with this problem, perhaps they will continue to collaborate on numerous other complex problems in our society.

Survivors see the problem as multiple in causes. Thanks to the guidance of informed mental health professionals, many of us recognize that public exposure of the perpetrator’s behavior should be the natural consequences built into our society for dealing with a public problem of this magnitude. Unfortunately, the secrecy battles are being fought throughout the community of faith and probably will be for some time.

Protection of the institutional church is generally equated with the protection of the perpetrators from exposure. Although court cases are beginning to force the church to see otherwise, enlightenment is slow. In almost every situation, protection of the victim will automatically facilitate protections for the institutional church.

Survivors and pro-survivors are handicapped because we usually have very little information about the skeletons rattling around in the closets of the clergy. Not only may we be dealing with actual perpetrators who have not yet been exposed; the resistant often are men who have covered up the behavior of one or more colleagues over the years. (A family therapist told me recently that one of her clients have come asking her to help him find a way to explain the sexual misbehavior of several of his colleagues as normal! Fortunately, she was an enlightened therapist who sent her client away very troubled.) Learning that what they have done is no longer acceptable and is considered to be sinful by those who have discovered some of the cover-ups, it is only normal to find these individuals frightened and defensive. Whenever I deal with strong resistance, I try to ask

the same question that my wonderful Christian psychiatrist asked me years ago: “Who are these men really trying to protect?”

WHAT THE LAITY DON'T KNOW CAN ALSO HURT YOU (and others)

Loyal laity, like clergy, often believe survivors are just attempting “to destroy” perpetrators or the church itself. No matter how hard we try to communicate, our intentions are always questioned. Most of us still have a strong love for the institutional church and seeing it being threatened by the immoral and criminal behavior of “wolves in sheeps’ clothing” is excruciatingly painful. We are attempting to restore the integrity of an institution we once treasured and still long to once again be able to believe in.

Our anger is not nearly so much at what the perpetrator did as it is toward the vigorous attempts that have been made to try to silence us individually and collectively. Through these attempts, the church is committing emotional suicide and homicide simultaneously.

The “tough love” stance needed in this issue is foreign to so many of the laity who are deeply committed to the institutional church. The extent of abusive and addictive behaviors (both of which require “tough love” approaches) are just as great in families of the community of faith as in the general population.

Personally, when dealing with either incest or substance abuse, I have found it generally is much easier to work with a family outside or on the periphery of the church than with one entrenched in the pervasive all-forgiving theologies so abounding within those who are faithful to it. Generally, I have been much more successful in teaching the former group to hold good, firm, healthy boundaries than I have with the latter. Whenever we look at the way individuals are responding to the issues of CSA, it is always helpful if we have the advantage of knowing something of the family of origin or the present family situation.

The laity desperately want to believe that a single survivor’s story is just a rare breach of professional ethics among their modern-day spiritual heroes. Unfortunately, those of us who are extremely active in the movement know far more about individual cases that we can tell. We are bound ethically to maintain confidentiality for individuals who have decided it is in their own best interest to speak their stories in very select circles. Telling someone that no denomination is exempt makes only a small impact on those who continue to idealize their own faith as being the one closest to the truth.

One of the best tools we have is the self-report survey. While by history these usually do not fully identify the extent of a problem (since only about 25% of those contacted chose to participate, the reports all conclude that the problem is far more serious than most laity would likely imagine. The range is from 14% to 37% of ministers who admit to having had inappropriate sexual behaviors for minister. It is important to note that as many as 25% of perpetrators with founded allegations deny that what they

did was inappropriate! Regardless of whose statistics one cares to use, the extent of the problem is critical.

What would happen if the laity really let the impact of the widespread problem of CSA enter its consciousness on a day-to-day basis as survivors are often forced to do? Wouldn't there be a concerted effort among those who have never been victimized directly to take action? At the same time, we must ask ourselves what other dramatic actions would the laity have to undertake. When we all have to admit that some of the destructive problems we face in our families and other institutions really have solutions if we dare confront them? Would we have to develop a tougher stand on insisting on healthier behaviors for all?

When the survivor movement begins to show—and it will—that change is possible when enough people band together to facilitate it, we might all find ourselves shaken up beyond the comfort level. Perhaps the apathetic attitudes, the sense of helplessness, hopelessness, and powerlessness that keep the institutional church from really taking action to support oppressed individuals would no longer be acceptable. Perhaps, for Christians, the sense of impossibility and even guilt about confronting evil in our world would be challenged with a renewed sense of the gospel as Christ meant for it to be preached! As long as we are able to collectively stand by and refuse to confront the Goliaths in our midst, we will be able to stay in the distorted sense of reality which young David's brothers embraced! Without the risk-taking faith of David, we will remain "prisoners of the Philistines."

Laity tend to underestimate their own power, just as survivors often too. They have the power to speak out, to support survivors, to deal with their own feelings, and to control the institutional church with the pocketbooks even in the strongest of our pyramidal structures. Laity empowerment could turn the world upside down. Ministers know this and preach this. Ironically, that same power could be turned inward on the institutional church, just as it can be toward each of us individually, when we decide that we want to see real change. This is the healthiest brand of psychology I know! It is the healthiest brand of spirituality I know!

THE UNIQUE DILEMMAS OF SURVIVORS OF CLERGY SEXUAL ABUSE AND MISCONDUCT

The double-binds of "whistle-blowers" are always a threat both to the "owner of the secret" (or the innocent one who knows the truth) and those who will be affected by its exposure. Without a doubt, many persons have gone to their graves with family and institutional secrets which were too threatening for the one locked in the prison of secrecy to reveal.

When one is considering whether or not to "blow the whistle" on a clergy perpetrator and/or the institutional church, the enormous internal and external pressure to keep silent naturally cause extreme anxiety. While many of us have felt great inward

relief when we have chosen to take the risk of speaking out, almost always we have suffered many losses because of availing ourselves of the freedom to do so. For some of us who have chosen to blow the whistle louder, longer, and harder each time we blow it, we have discovered that the consequences of doing so have been the loss of scores of friends, sometimes the loss of jobs, and almost always the loss of a sense of community with the institution which previously had been our primary source of spiritual comfort.

Since survivors often have already been humiliated, reduced to the level of a child regardless of the age of the abuse, and frequently suffer from low spiritual self-esteem, speaking out is even more difficult than most non-survivors can even imagine. It is a little scary no matter how many times you do it! No survivor should ever feel bound to invade his or her own boundaries by letting someone else dictate what course of action should be taken in any situation.

Survivors and pro-survivors alike, while recognizing that there are no easy solutions, must carefully select the course of action which is best for that particular time and situation. We must all realize that what is best or preferred today may change in the future (and that is fine). Regardless of what choice you make, I encourage you to strongly consider becoming a part of a survivor support system and a movement such as Linkup. Together we can make a difference, whether or not individual stories are made public.

THE FREEDOM OF HAVING REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

When one finely realizes (and often it takes years) that an easy peace is no longer available for us as survivors, calculated risk-taking of immense proportion may become a way of life. There is something very freeing about feeling you have nothing to lose. This is not to say that all of us must take the same degree of risk in the same manner as others.

Ironically freedom comes much more easily when we feel we have nothing else of value to lose. To achieve this, it may be necessary for us to change our own sense of values so that our decisions are made on a new order or rank. In doing so, we may place higher value on truth-telling than we do on harmony. This seems to be a shift which more liberal thinkers in our society have been making during the last thirty or forty years. By contrast, the institutional church still seems to be largely steeped in the reverse order. It is probably unrealistic at this point in time to expect otherwise. Knowing this can of itself be extremely freeing to survivors.

I am especially intrigued by the theological shifts which persons of Roman Catholic persuasion have often made in the course of their recovery. Amazingly, many seem to have done so without a lot of therapeutic guidance. The independent spirit of these people inspires me. No longer do they speak of individuals of the top of the pyramidal structure as having sole access to the truth or a private line to God. They often have begun to see themselves as able to feel spiritually free without the help of a clergy person.

Because we have had to put our faith in a crucible and test its every precept, all of us have learned that it is acceptable to reject any and everything we were taught as children. We are willing to constantly examine every new idea we encounter and decide for ourselves what looks right and holy. In doing so, we have moved beyond the stage where most believers usually stay stuck for a lifetime—what psychologist James Fowler says is an adolescent stage of spiritual development. (see Fowler, J. **Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian** San Francisco: Harper and Row.)

AN ANALOGY

In my work with chaotic, violent families, I have developed what I believe to be a helpful parallel for persons dealing with CSA. I offer it here for your consideration.

It is not uncommon for incest victims to also be living in a home where domestic violence or spousal abuse is an everyday occurrence. Of course, many women who live with perpetrators have themselves unresolved issues as victims of childhood sexual abuse. Sadly, but understandably, these women often have more difficulty exposing their present abusers than do their own children. They have come to believe that they deserve to be treated unfairly, that they are being unfair to their abusers when they stand up to them, that they are worthless and helpless.

When a small child comes to such a mother, daring to speak the truth about sexual abuse in the home, either denial or minimization is the norm. After all, if a little child can be brave enough to confront reality, this means the mother would be forced to do the same! Who wants to be shown up by “just a kid?” The mother feels compelled to silence the child either because she wants to believe the child is lying or needs to believe that what happened was not really serious. When a therapeutic team starts to join the innocent child, it becomes far more difficult for the mother to deny and minimize. However, she often will continue trying.

At this point, I try to imagine what this woman is fearing. While many are truly tied to what they consider to be a “love” relationship with their abuser, many are emotionally and financially too dependent to confront the truth and the consequences of doing so. It is far easier and more profitable for the mother to maintain her own security, leaving the child at risk, than to take her dear child and face the emotional work and financial disaster which facing the truth may entail for the entire family.

In standing by her child, this mother will have to face her own issues, the same issues which she has been trying to run from all her life. She must face the “happy myth” that families are “sacred” and must be preserved at all cost. She may also have to face the harsh reality that the powerful perpetrator may once again try to harm her when she chooses to stand against him.

The institutional church is in exactly the same set of dynamics as the woman I have just described. The profession is being abused by its own members to whom it has made a lifelong commitment to support. Those vows in some situations must be broken permanently in order to stop the abuse of both the vulnerable survivors of sexual abuse and potential victims, as well as the abuse to the credibility of the profession itself by both perpetrators and colluders. Survivors must make it harder for “business as usual” to continue than for change to occur. We must never underestimate the power of denial and minimization in the “collective mother,” which is what I prefer to call the religious leadership because of its responsibilities to protect “the sheep” from harm.

Yes, both the profession and individual members of the community of faith are in a double bind. Like survivors, there is no way to find healing without risk-taking. Just like the gospel, the solutions are quite simple, but daring to risk implementing them are far from easy.

If this analogy fits, use it. If not, take it for what it is worth to you.

RECONNECTIONS WITH GOD

Songs, prayers, and religious symbols have been as poisoned for most of us survivors as the image of the profession which we once trusted unquestionably. As one who, for a time, chose to quietly, but purposely let go of my faith entirely, I know the pain of that loss. I also have experienced to some degree reconnections where it seems healthy for me to do so. What I have to offer you here is not a model, it is simply a few coping skills which have worked for me. I recognize that each of us individually must develop our own plans for coping, and I would love to hear from survivors who would like to offer their own creative suggestions. Please keep this in mind as you read further.

Learning new songs—Many of the age-old songs create so many flashbacks of abuse and misuse for survivors. For three or four years after our resignation, I found it difficult to sing hymns at all. They seemed to be a mockery to what I had come to know as the hidden truth about the institutional church. While some of the traditional ones have once again become powerful or have taken on new meaning for me, I find it helpful to think of some of secular songs as incredibly spiritual for me, as well.

During our struggle to survive financially, I spent fourteen months working on the inpatient unit of a community mental health center. There a young woman unknowingly inspired me by her responses to my therapeutic use of music on the unit. “Phyllis” was a junior at the nearby state university. She was struggling against all odds to finish school, for she was a victim of long-term childhood sexual abuse, as well as a lesbian who suffered from chronic paranoid schizophrenia. This young girl was highly intelligent, but often found herself reduced to the status of a small child when she hallucinated. Medications had not been effective in eliminating her symptoms.

When I first met “Phyllis” she had just been admitted to our unit a few moments before and had chosen to join our voluntary therapeutic music group. On this particular evening, I chose to play “The Impossible Dream” on the piano.

A few days later this patient was able to return to her apartment where she remained relatively symptom-free for several weeks. Then, during finals week, she had to re-enter the hospital. Soon after the admission procedures were completed, “Phyllis” walked up to the desk and asked: “Do you have time to play ‘The Impossible Dream?’—I really need it tonight.” She and I went together to the piano room where she sat quietly and wept as I played it not once, but three times at her request. She then got up, said “thank you so much“, and quietly walked out of the room.

Several times over the course of those fourteen months she returned. Each time she dared request the same song, which she admitted had become her inspiration to continue fighting for her own sanity. Today every time I hear “The Impossible Dream,” I weep. Phyllis unknowingly gave me a great gift which I will always treasure. It captures the spirit of the survivor movement better than any song I know. I hope you will try to find the music in its entirety. Meanwhile I include a few choice words here for you to use in your own journey:

The Impossible Dream
by Joe Darion

To dream the Impossible Dream,
To beat the unbeatable foe,
To bear with unbearable sorrow,
To run where the brave dare not go.

To right the unrightable wrong,

No matter how hopeless, no matter how far;
To fight for the right without question or pause
To be willing to march into hell for a heavenly cause!

And the world will be better for this:

That one man (woman) scorned and covered with scars
Still strove with his (her) last ounce of courage
To reach the unreachable stars.

I have found another song very inspirational. We generally associate it with the civil rights movement. Yet, when I am particularly discouraged or need an extra ounce of courage, I often blast the air with its words and its tune on the piano. It also is a great survivor’s song with a highly spiritual message for all oppressed people:

We shall overcome,
We’ll walk hand in hand,

We are not afraid.
We shall stand together,
The truth will make us free,

The Lord will see us through,
We shall be like him.
We shall live in peace
The whole wide world around.

As I came to treasure the freedom of not feeling that I had to stay connected to old beliefs which no longer made sense to me, I came to also treasure the song “Born Free.” Space does not permit me to include those words here, but you may want to look that one up.

At the risk of sounding sacrilegious to some, I must tell you that I have often found it helpful to re-write some of the old traditional mainstay hymns of Protestantism into my new language which I call “survivorease”. As time goes on, I would like to do more of this. For example, I still believe we need to be “telling the old, old story of Jesus and His Love.” I am more convinced than ever that survivors are compelled to also tell our own stories for the benefit of the institutional church. How’s this for an alternative to “I Love to Tell the Story?”

I love to tell my story
Of unseen things below,
Of the power of God’s glory
In spite of all my woe.

I love to tell my story.
For some have never heard
The message of such evil
Which can be overcome.

I love to tell my story
In spirit and in song.
It shows the Power within me
To overcome all wrong.

I love to tell my story,
Though some are scared to hear.
By telling it I banish
The plague of constant fear.

I love to tell my story,

For those who suffer, too
Gain courage, strength, and healing,
And God's redeeming Love.

I love to tell my story,
In spirit and in song.
It shows the Power within me
To overcome all wrong.

How can one ever reconnect with God through prayer, especially if those who were supposed to be the Champion Pray-ers have used you for their own "good." There have been many times in the past few years when all I could do was scream at God. Apparently I was fortunate enough to have been either absent or asleep on the Sundays when lessons were taught against anger, because I do not remember ever incorporating that into my theology very well. Therefore, I didn't feel guilty when I shouted out my anger at a God who already knew all about it anyway. I personally do not believe God condemns us for our anger and sometimes God is the only one who can handle its depth.

Reconnecting with god in a positive way did not come until I began, through study, to recognize that patriarchy and divinity do not have to be considered mutually inclusive—even if the institutional church still prefers it that way! This gave me the freedom to look at those authentic characteristics of God which have been traditionally thought of as feminine. They are woven through the scriptures with bright threads, yet are too often ignored simply because to be "feminine," even though we may not admit it, has often been a synonym in our Christian thinking for "weak."

For male survivors or pro-survivors, the above may not seem pertinent. However, little children also have a lesser value on the power continuum. This is true in spite of the fact Christ told us we must all "become as little children" to enter the Kingdom of God.

Theologically, I do not think of the Kingdom of God as something for the afterlife. It is the life intended for all of us here and now on earth. By thinking of the Kingdom, as so many do, as the something for the "sweet by and by," we find ourselves embracing the feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, and powerlessness, which survivors know all too well. Ironically, this is the same sense one gets when talking to many status quo Christians who depend on some magical God to come "zap" the world into rightness some day, rather than seeing the powerfulness within each of us which can be harnessed to change the world on an on-going basis.

As a survivor, I have for the first time really identified myself with the oppressed of this world. The gospel is no longer a we-them gospel in terms of those who have said certain magic words or had some common magical experience defined by a structured religious denomination. The gospel for me is the good news about the power which is available to all of us, a power to bring about the downfall of elitism without merit. This

elitism was nowhere so evident as in the New Testament lessons about the Pharisees and Saducees.

By becoming aware of the abusive systems which Christ came to destroy, I can begin to reframe some of the beloved Bible stories through a survivor's eyes. Searching the scriptures, I continue to find old characters who have been reborn to me. They now have a life far more powerful than ever before, and the message of their stories is far more divine!

For example, look at little David—the kid who walked up to find his people being threatened by an enormous giant. His older brothers sat around colluding with the faulty assessment that this guy was too big and dangerous for anyone to think of confronting. Not little David! He got in touch with his own internal powerfulness, probably because he had been practicing powerfulness thinking for a long time. He had a great strategy. He took a weapon so non-threatening that the perpetrator laughed hysterically. David defied the faithlessness of those who should have been able to find courage. He did something very simple with complete confidence; and, in so doing, he saved himself and the host of chicken-hearted “soldiers” around him!

Finding humor in my re-writes is very empowering, which brings me to the strangest of all thoughts about survivorship:

THE GREATEST PARADOX—FINDING THE JOY, FUN, AND HUMOR OF SURVIVORSHIP

Having just read the above heading, some of you are probably slightly offended that I dare suggest that there could be any joy, fun, or humor in this whole sorry mess. After all you are probably sick of trying to tell people something they don't want to hear. You even wonder if it's worth it.

Well, in time, many survivors come to see the energy which humor, even fun in being a survivor, provides. It is not something to push yourself to do; but if it happens, you do not have to think of yourself as “weird.”

Just today I came home with a new joke from my common interactions of my job as a community mental health nurse! My husband, who still sometimes struggles with my humor, was also able to laugh:

I was visiting with a prospective patient. As we explored her present services, she told me that “some counselors from one of the local churches are coming by soon.” Further conversation led her to explain: “I don't know which DOMINATION they are—I really don't know much about the Church anyway.” I chuckled silently as I replaced the receiver a few minutes later. Perhaps this lady's choice of words reflected more wisdom than “the more enlightened!” Before my “happy myth” was destroyed, I probably could not have appreciated her error!

A few weeks ago I was shopping for produce at our large supermarket. Seeing that the stock man was especially busy, I decided to ease my way behind him without disturbing his work. My cart, like most, was a little wider near the handle than in the front. Unfortunately, my eye was not sufficiently critical to make this allowance. Just as I passed the plastic bag rack, my basket gently collided with the holder, sending a large roll of bags going one way and the metal roller-dispenser flying straight at my sandal-clad foot. “Ouch!” I exclaimed, wondering how I had been so lucky as to have been just in the line of fire! The produce man turned around quickly, apparently unaware until that moment that another person was nearby. “I about lost a foot with that thing,” I declared in a matter-of-fact, but painful tone.

“Oh, it’s o.k., ma’am. Don’t worry about it. No harm done,” the man replied as he scurried to retrieve his dismounted paraphernalia and quickly put it back to reflect a “business as usual” appearance.

A few years ago this might have been a lot more disconcerting. But on this particular day I limped off, laughing at the funny parallel he had provided me for a problem far more serious than a throbbing foot! When I got home I called a survivor immediately, and we had a hearty, healthy rip-roaring laugh which only survivors could fully appreciate!

Sometimes the humor comes even in Bible study. What a joke to think of little David (the fearless guy in touch with the God within him) marching up to the biggest perpetrator imaginable and permanently incapacitating him while people supposedly much stronger than David stood by trembling. When the powerless become powerful, it can be hilarious—especially when all we have to do sometimes is tell our stories!

I even get amused at the resurrection. Can’t you just hear those Pharisees saying: “Hey, Claudias, how in heaven’s name did that happen? I thought we got rid of that guy once and for all! You never know what a dumb trouble-making nut like him is going to do—got to watch these rebels all the time! Can’t be too careful, y’know.”

It’s kind of fun to imagine Jesus just then repeating to himself his words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Rejoice and be exceeding glad!”

Part of the joy is not in laughter, but in the security of knowing that you have outgrown some of the people who have claimed power from their positions. Genuine survivorship produces enormous growth in time. As you seek to measure your growth, compare yourself not to the size of your present burdens, but to the person you once were.

The fun often comes with other people who have survived very oppressive systems and risen to greater heights. The unique connections which spring out of survivor relationships can be some of the most joyous anywhere.

So, while you can't rush the joy, you can look for it in unusual places. You can choose to welcome it, rather than reject it. And you can also welcome it in others.

THE POISONED WORD: FORGIVENESS

Words, like religious symbols, may be so tainted for you that you will find it necessary to avoid some completely for a long while. Well-trained advocates know this.

One of the most abusive words to survivors is "forgiveness." This is partly because it has been so misused with most of us that we fear how it will be used. I have known survivors who had to get up and run out of the sanctuary when a forgiveness sermon was preached. The attempts to re-define forgiveness have done nothing for most survivors of CSA.

In an attempt to clarify a problem which is far more than one of semantics, I was recently asked to provide a workshop at our local community college. The following is a summary of my thoughts on this issue:

Myths about Forgiveness which are Confusing to Many

1. Forgiveness is necessary for healing.
2. Forgiveness is simply letting go.
3. Forgiveness is an act of mercy to which all offenders are entitled.
4. Forgiveness is for the offended.
5. We must always forgive in order to have our "sins" forgiven.

Definitions

To forgive according to Webster is: "1. to excuse for a fault or offense; pardon. 2. To renounce anger or resentment against; cease to blame. 3. To absolve from payment of."

Well-intended persons have attempted to re-define forgiveness by telling us that it is not pardoning, condoning, or absolving. They further tell us we can forgive someone and still hold them accountable. This often leads to confusion. Are we now throwing out Webster?

I dare to join a growing number of Christians who believe it is wrong to equate the forgiveness with letting go. Most of my clients seem to have also found it very beneficial to differentiate the two.

For a more thorough study of this, you might want to order the April-June, 1994 issue of **The Living Pulpit**. The entire issue is devoted to forgiveness issues. (Phone 914-758-5219) Mary E. Hunt's "To Forgive or Not Forgive" (p. 14-15) was especially helpful to me.

“Letting go” is an ongoing internal process which frees us to go on with our lives, no longer feeling personally responsible for making the offender pay for what was done. We admit that it is counterproductive for us if we continue attempting to hold another individual accountable. Although we have been let down, we acknowledge there are many things in life we cannot control or change. Letting go does not mean that we will not choose to actively encourage change in our society in systems which allow evil-doing and injustice.

It is important to note that restoration of a relationship is not necessary for either process. Granting restoration to a person who is non-repentant or minimizing often sets a survivor up for further physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. I strongly believe there are times when forgiveness is not in order (scripturally or otherwise), but “letting go” is. Unless a perpetrator has genuinely shown evidence of repentance (and few do), I believe this is the case with CSA.

Having separate definitions for “forgiveness” and “letting go” is not just a matter of semantics. It clarifies the cloudy thinking which prevails in the healing process. You **can** have on without the other.

“Letting go” is always in order at some pointing the healing journey. “Forgiveness” may be counterproductive for all concerned.

Thoughts which Block “Letting Go”

1. If only....
2. I should have....
3. I must.....
4. I am responsible.....
5. It shouldn't have happened.
6. Nothing much really happened.
7. I should be over this by now.
8. Before I can let go, somebody has to.....
9. I can't face the fact or feeling that.....
10. It's not fair. I can't stand living in an unfair world.
11. I have to get even or find justice.
12. Things have to change.
13. I can't go on with life or accomplish anything worthwhile until.....

Thoughts which Facilitate “Letting Go”

1. It happened.
2. I did the best I could during....and afterwards.
3. I can't control anyone but myself.
4. People have choices. We don't always make good ones.
5. It really hurt then and it still hurts now at times.

6. Hurt, anxiety, and anger are normal. I don't have to try to annihilate them. In fact, I can't.
7. There is no feeling or fact I cannot handle.
8. Our world is often unfair and unjust. It doesn't have to be "heaven" for me to be happy.
9. One person, acting alone, can do little to bring about change or justice. Perhaps I can find others who will join me in working for this in our society.
10. In spite of the past, today is filled with hope and promise. It is up to me to find it.
11. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference."

(Another helpful booklet is free from Radio Bible Class of Grand Rapids, MI 49555-0001: "When Forgiveness Seems Impossible" by Tim Jackson)

What Can People Do for Survivors of Clergy Sexual Misconduct?

Do "anticipatory coping," individually and collectively. Every autonomous congregation, as well as every ecclesiastical system, needs policies and procedures to avoid the anxiety and panic reactions which often result in travesties of justice. (For help with policy making, contact The Center for Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, 1914 North 34th, Suite 105, Seattle, Washington 98103-9058)

Listen—initially and on a long-term basis

Insure immediate protection for the victim and others. Report allegations to designated persons in the congregation or denomination.

Get the facts about sexual violence:

1. False allegations are extremely rare (less than 2%). It takes a lot of courage to come forward. Most victims do it only because of a desire for protection of self and others.
2. Victims don't ask to be violated.
3. All people, all families are vulnerable to sexual violence.
4. This is not a women's issue. More and more male victims are coming forward.
5. Clergy sexual misconduct is an abuse of power. It is not about sex.
6. The professional is always responsible for holding boundaries in relationships.
7. Perpetrators often have great charisma. They are highly-skilled at deceiving everyone.
8. Sexual violence is always community problem, not a victim-perpetrator one.
9. Silencing victims is "false compassion" for perpetrators. It prevents healing for all.
10. The congregation has a right to know of allegations and to have a knowledgeable outside counselor available to them, individually and collectively. They are also victims.

11. It takes a long time for healing. Do not over-simplify.
12. Perpetrators are often repeat offenders even after treatment. Be very cautious about restoring an offender to leadership of any kind in the church.

Act as an advocate, insisting that perpetrators be held accountable and that victims have support and restitution.

See that therapy is available without cost to the victim. This can be a part of the accountability placed on the perpetrator, but if necessary the church or denomination must bear the expense.

If the victim is a minor, be certain that the allegations are reported immediately to the Department of Human Services in your area. Whether or not you or anyone else is considered a mandatory reporter, there is an ethical responsibility involved.

Be aware of your own anger and anxiety. Communicating these to the victim in moderation can be validating and supportive.

Avoid offering pat answers. Faith is often shattered and what we traditionally think of as spiritual counsel in crises is counter-productive unless the victim is asking for insights.

Relieve the victim of the burden of having to constantly initiate conversations about the problem or case. If frequent contact is not made throughout the period of healing, the victim will assume you are not interested or concerned. This is not paranoia: persons who are hurting deserve this kind of care, regardless of the crisis.

Be certain the victim is informed promptly of all proceedings. Do not leave this to assumption.

Keep complete written records of all proceedings.

I BELIEVE

(the author's personal thoughts about justice in a faith setting)

I BELIEVE that the community of faith should be the safest place on the face of this earth.

I BELIEVE that it can be.

I BELIEVE that the community of faith has a right to demand more than approximate justice.

I BELIEVE obtaining more than approximate justice can be a given for the majority of victims, but it will likely come only after generations of struggle.

I BELIEVE that it is very difficult for a profession strongly educated and accomplished in extending grace and mercy to feel comfortable with “tough love.”

I BELIEVE a seminary education sprinkled with generous portions of “tough love” thinking can do much to curtail the abuse of power which is all too prevalent among religious leaders at this time.

AN OPEN LETTER TO GLORIA

Note: In a few weeks I will be attending a very special healing service for a survivor named Gloria. During that service I will be reading a letter which I sent to her several weeks ago. This lady has been publicly speaking in churches, telling of her victimization and survivorship for years. Because of her courage, she has been criticized by some. Gloria has asked me to use her actual first name in this document. My gift to her is really a gift to all sojourning survivors and vicarious survivors:

Dear Gloria,

Be faithful to your story. Don't let anyone discount it or discount you for telling it. The truth is so beautiful, even when it is painful. Your story is your witness. It is powerful. When enough stories are told, we will see real change. “Blessed are you, Gloria, when men (and women) shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely..., rejoice and be exceeding glad, for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”

Telling your story first brings healing to you. Later it brings healing to the world. Yours is a prophetic voice. Prophets profit, but seldom do they profit monetarily.

How can you “rejoice and be exceeding glad?” Only by recognizing that you are a part of something bigger than yourself. When you are dealing with denial, you must think of it as a huge iceberg. You must see yourself as just one little ice crystal on the whole frozen mass! That thought is both humbling and liberating.

Remember that the vast majority of survivors have never yet “come above the water” to speak out. They have not found a voice because they have not found the resources necessary to do the job. It is not their fault.

When you tell your story, it is important that you be realistic in your expectations. You don't have to see great things happen to you or even see personal justice to have healing. (Grant it, it certainly helps.) You can rejoice that you are a part of something much bigger than yourself. I have often taken comfort in the words to a song Tennessee Ernie Ford used to sing: “Be not dismayed when men do not believe you. He'll understand and say ‘Well done.’”

You can choose to stay involved at the level that is best for you and the God within you. That is a personal decision. You may need to take the energy this whole mess has created and put it to use on another issue for a while. You may need to sit quietly and simply pray for others. You may need to write letters of support or listen to other survivors. Even if you choose to take a less visibly active part in the survivor movement, remember: “They also serve who only stand and wait.”

Telling your story is not a **requirement**, but the freedom to tell it is a **right**. You may choose to continue, as you already have, to consider telling it as a **privilege**. Regardless of your choices, you have a voice in the survivor's movement. You have a right to tell and a right to protection if you do tell.

You will hear people saying: "What about the perpetrator's rights? Well, the perpetrator threw away his rights when he abused you. He has a right to be healed, but not at your expense or the discounting or silencing of your voice. The truth needs to be told. If he is really as healed as he claims to be, he should be telling **his** story as **his** witness.

Telling your story is a matter of pushing against oppressive boundaries. You are one voice among the masses attempting to establish new standards for justice, new acceptable social relations.

When the anti-slavery movement became threatening to the status quo in the last century, the white community had a feeling of universal terror because they imagined the freed slaves to be far more powerful than it was possible for a people so oppressed to ever become. (There's a little humor in that when you look at it closely.) **THE OPPRESSORS BECAME DESPERATE TO CONCEAL THE TRUTH.** Desperate people do desperate things. Life became so scary for many former slaves that they took to the woods for safety!

As you have already learned, telling your story creates backlashes. That's o.k. That means you are accomplishing something, **not** that you are being totally ignored! But how do we survivors cope with our own fears, some of which may even be truly life-threatening or financially devastating?

Perhaps we can take lessons in creativity from the freed slaves. History tells us that when the frightened people knew the KKK was coming, they worked together to place ropes made of grapevines across the road to trip the approaching enemy. (Notice they did not try to kill the enemy—just disempower them.) They built their own churches and schools to use as fortresses. They found ways to disregard their limitations and kept looking for opportunities to make life better for the next generation. And they clung to one of their most valuable resources—their lively, spirited music. Nobody could take that away!

By telling your story, you pass on what others need to hear—the destruction of the "happy myth" that Jesus Christ came to destroy. It is the "happy myth" that the powerful are capable of becoming God. You are calling into accountability those who would continue in positions of power when they have permanently disqualified themselves by their own behavior.

As a survivor, you cannot be welcome anywhere that your story is not also welcome. You cannot be embraced and rejected at the same time. Your story will sometimes create division where there **should** be no division. It will continue to create hardships for you, whether or not you choose to tell it. But as survivors, we demonstrate beautiful scars.

Thank you for confronting reality. Boldly tell your story as often as you like. It is your witness to the power of God in your life to overcome evil.

Go In God's Power and Peace!