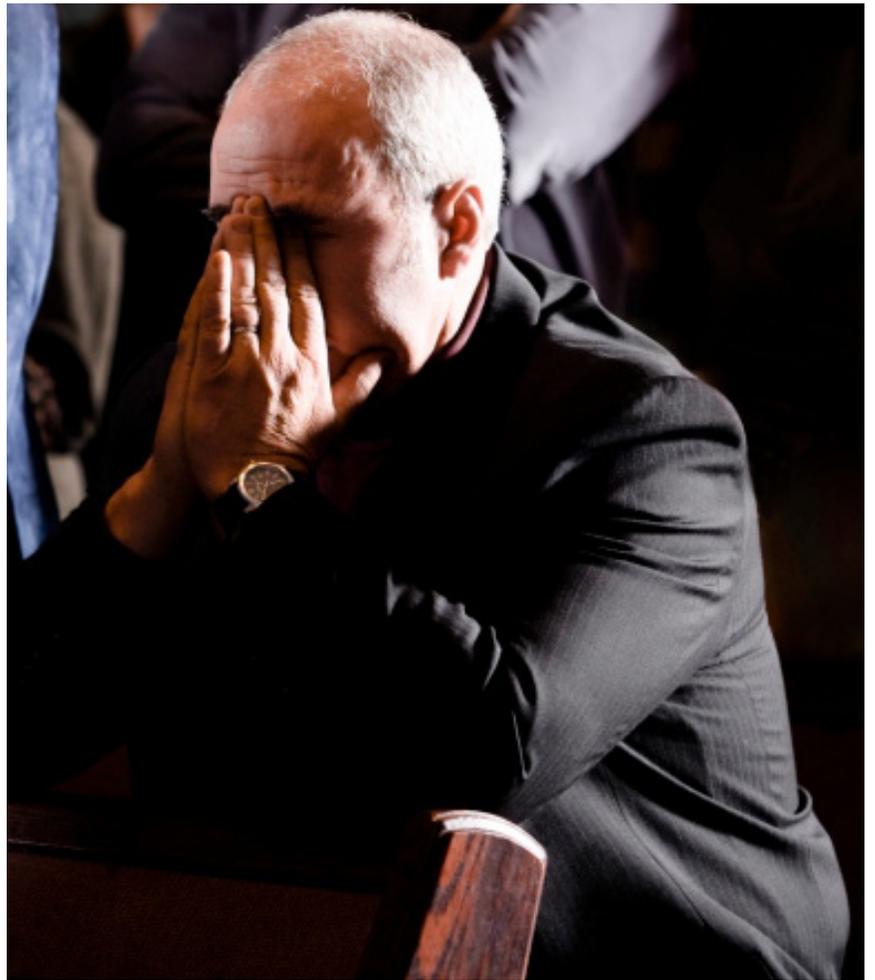


VOLUME 10 NUMBER 2 Spring 2013

*Violating Boundaries:  
Improprieties in Ministry*



# CARING CONNECTIONS

*An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling*

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# THE PURPOSE OF *CARING CONNECTIONS*

*Caring Connections: An Inter-Lutheran Journal for Practitioners and Teachers of Pastoral Care and Counseling* is written by and for Lutheran practitioners and educators in the fields of pastoral care, counseling, and education. Seeking to promote both breadth and depth of reflection on the theology and practice of ministry in the Lutheran tradition, *Caring Connections* intends to be academically informed, yet readable; solidly grounded in the practice of ministry; and theologically probing.

Caring Connections seeks to reach a broad readership, including chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty and other teachers in academic settings, clinical educators, synod and district leaders, others in specialized ministries and — not least — concerned congregational pastors and laity. *Caring Connections* also provides news and information about activities, events and opportunities of interest to diverse constituencies in specialized ministries.

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# Editorial

When I invited Bishop Roy Riley of the New Jersey Synod/ELCA to write an article for this issue of *Caring Connections*, he responded, “Unfortunately, as a Bishop of this church (twenty-three years, including extensive service as Chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops), this is something with which I am all too familiar and experienced.” The very same week in which Bishop Riley and I shared that exchange of emails, I had the numbing experience of reading that, according to the U.S. Dept. of Education, 9.6 % of high school students have experienced some form of sexual misconduct by the beginning of their senior year. Now considered at “epidemic level,” the Pentagon estimated in a recent report that as many as 26,000 members of the military may have been sexually assaulted last year, up from an estimated 19,000 assaults in 2011.

In John 10:10, Jesus is recorded as having said, “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and other faith bodies very publicly declare their commitments to making the faith community “a safe place,” where the people of God can freely worship, learn, grow, serve, and care for one another. Indeed, the church’s very mission is centered on making all of God’s creation “a safe place,” where the dignity of all people is respected and safeguarded.

Boundary violation—the intentional and manipulative use of one’s designated position for personal gratification (sexual or other)—is a flagrant misuse of the ministerial office and a betrayal of the trust so vital to “life abundant” and to building up the Kingdom of God. The damaging consequences of such violations are at times impossible to fathom. Just ask

any victim; just ask any one of those high school students or members of the military.

Rev. Jan Erickson-Pearson, a treasured co-worker from the former Division for Ministry of the ELCA, produced an invaluable resource appropriately titled, “Safe Connections.” A more valuable resource for ministry can hardly be found. Quoting from that document: “Boundaries are a way of talking about honor and respect, about not invading or crashing into another person—emotionally, physically, spiritually. Boundaries are like lanes of traffic, designed to keep us moving safely together, alongside one another, without colliding or running each other off the road...boundaries are ‘limits that allow for a safe connection, based on need’...they make it possible for us to safely venture into relationships of trust and vulnerability.”

When those of us in professional and public ministry do not set—or choose to disregard—such sacred boundary limits, we literally “go out of bounds.” The consequences can be devastating and cause irreparable damage to victims, their families, and entire communities.

While these boundary violations are often sexual, it is very important to note that they can also be fiscal, or include such ethical/behavioral improprieties as breaching confidentiality, psychological manipulation, etc. When such serious violations and offenses are committed, the church has the responsibility of intervening on behalf of victims and communities, often removing offenders from their position or place in ministry.

Since ELCA synods and LCMS district offices are designated points of first contact in the vital process of notification, intervention, disclosure, and discipline, we are indeed grate-

## Call for Articles

*Caring Connections* seeks to provide Lutheran Pastoral Care Providers the opportunity to share expertise and insight with the wider community. We want to invite anyone interested in writing an article to please contact the editors, Rev. Chuck Weinrich (cweinrich@cfl.rr.com) or Rev. Don Stiger (dstiger@lmcsmc.com). This is a regular item in each issue of *Caring Connections*, but we are particularly intentional as we invite articles for upcoming issues on the following themes.

Summer, 2013 “Torn Apart: Pastoral Care Responses to Community Violence”

Fall, 2013 “Pastoral Interventions with Family and Domestic Violence”

Winter, 2014 “Chaplaincy Involvement in Working with Advance Directives for Health Care”

Have you dealt with any of these issues? Please consider writing an article for us. Or, do you know someone else who could write for us? Talk to them yourself or let us know and we will contact them. We sincerely want to hear from you!

ful to both **District President Raymond Mirly** and **Bishop Riley** for sharing guidelines, insights and their personal/pastoral experience regarding ministerial impropriety and boundary violation. As DP Mirly cites, those who serve in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling and clinical education can be of significant assistance throughout the entire healing process.

We are deeply grateful to all who have contributed articles addressing and exploring this serious issue—one with which, to quote Bishop Riley again, far too many are becoming “all too familiar and experienced.”

As an Intentional Interim Pastor who has worked extensively with congregations recovering from traumatic occurrences of boundary violation, **Rev. Martin Homan** addresses the pastoral arts of “restoring trust” and dealing with “secrets that kill.”

**Rev. John Martinson**, Director for Ministerial Health and Leadership Resources/Clergy Coaches at Fairview Health Services, lifts up the vital dimensions of prevention, wellness, and lifelong nurture of leaders—leaders who are intentional about maintaining a balance of mental, emotional, physical and spiritual health.

**Victor Vieth**, who developed the National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, challenges what he sees as the disturbing extent of “pastoral ignorance of the dynamics inherent in child abuse,” reflects on the spiritual damage suffered by abused children, and shares some fascinating observations regarding the personal lives and theological insights of Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther.

**Amy Hartman**, Diaconal Minister and National Director of “Cherish Our Children,” offers a vision and issues a prophetic call for a church equipped to prevent child sexual exploitation. She reminds us that the growing, national prevention community sees faith communities as providing some of the very few multigenerational opportunities for equipping people in effective prevention.

Finally, **Rev. Dale Kuhn**, Diplomate and Past President of The American Association of Pastoral Counselors, identifies ten key “assertions” about religious professionals and boundary violations, and elucidates ways in which stress, need for recognition, perfectionism, isolation, depression, and anxiety “drive many boundary violations.”

Our book review for this issue is actually the preface to a significant new resource for ministry, published by the Alban Institute. Edited by **Rev. Beth Gaede**, it is titled, *When a Congregation Is Betrayed*. We are indeed grateful for permission to share the entire first section of this new publication.

to people suffering the consequences of modern warfare. To access “Reflective Practice”: <http://journals.sfu.ca/rpfs>.

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Once again, be sure to check the extensive information on Zion XV contained in the Events segment on page 36 of this issue. In the next few weeks you will likely be receiving in your regular mail a brochure describing in full detail what this Zion XV conference will be about. About that same time you will also be able to go online to register! The address to register for Zion XV online will be [register.novusway.org/zionxv2013](http://register.novusway.org/zionxv2013). Soon—hopefully by July 1—you will also be able to visit our Zion XV Information website: [www.ZionXVConference2013.Wordpress.com](http://www.ZionXVConference2013.Wordpress.com). In addition, you can already order an Asheville Area Visitors Information Booklet by going to: [www.exploreasheville.com](http://www.exploreasheville.com).

These Zion Conferences have been wonderful opportunities to reaffirm your commitment to specialized ministries, expand your knowledge in these ministries, and meet colleagues, both new and old, in a restful setting. Zion XV will continue these rich traditions, and we hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to be a part of this pan-Lutheran gathering!

Finally, when the ILCC disbanded, the money from the “Give Something Back” Scholarship Fund was divided between the ELCA and the LCMS. If you recall, this endowment makes a limited number of financial awards available to individuals seeking ecclesiastical endorsement and certification/credentialing in ministries of chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, and clinical education. Applicants must:

- Have completed one (1) unit of CPE.
- Be rostered or eligible for active roster status in the ELCA or the LCMS.
- Not already be receiving funds from the ELCA or LCMS national offices.
- Submit an application, along with a financial data form, for committee review.

Applicants must complete the Scholarship Application and Financial Data forms that are available from Judy Simonson (ELCA) or John Fale (LCMS). Consideration is given to scholarship requests after each application deadline, August 15 and February 15.

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#### More on Moral Injury...

Following the publication of our recent issue on Moral Injury, we were delighted to hear from Herbert Anderson, Editor of “Reflective Practice” (formerly “The Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry”). Herbert alerted us that Vol. 33 will have a mini-symposium on moral injury, particularly with regard to preparation of future religious leaders who minister

# The Not-So-Secret Life of Bishops - Tending the Professional Boundaries

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It was twenty-two years ago, but I remember it as if it were yesterday. I was just beginning my ministry as a bishop in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

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I had scheduled a series of Expectations Days, meeting with clergy in parish and specialized ministries, and lay rostered leaders as well.

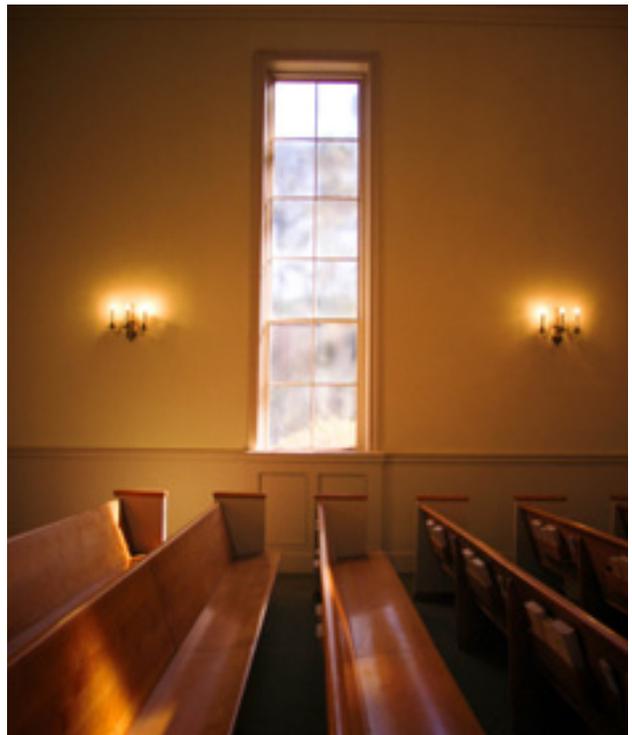
The agenda for those gatherings was simply to outline what this new bishop expected of the leaders on this territory, and to listen to the leaders share their expectations and concerns for the bishop. For my part, the list of expectations ran the gamut from the most basic of pastor responsibilities to the importance of collegiality to the ground-rules surrounding misconduct. Most of all, these conversations gave opportunity for reassurance and a pledge of my support for their various ministries in the context of our shared commitment to God's mission.

During the lunch break of the second such gathering, I received a call from my new secretary. She told me that one of the parish pastors had telephoned and needed to see me as soon as possible. So, on my way home that afternoon I detoured over to the small town where the pastor was serving. After a brief greeting, the pastor warned me that I might be contacted by the husband of a woman in his parish, a man who believed that his wife and the pastor were involved in an inappropriate relationship.

The irony of this scenario was not lost on me. Even before I could provide clarity about the rules and responses surrounding misconduct, misbehavior was apparently already happening. This was a rude but important awakening for the new Pastor of this Synod.

Seeing the devastating consequences of mishandling misconduct in other churches and recognizing the risks in its own systems, the ELCA had already begun to provide coaching for bishops in caring for people and congregations involved in such circumstances. Over the last two decades this coaching has evolved into part of the process of formation for new bishops and the development of policies and procedures designed to care for victims and to insure due process when allegations come to light.

This is not to suggest that the ELCA has solved all of the thorny issues related to boundary violations by rostered leaders, nor has this church been exempt from serious



*It should be understood that in every pastoral relationship, whether parish ministry or specialized ministries, the clergyperson holds the greater power because of his/her office*

cases of misconduct. But I am deeply grateful that this church has taken with utter seriousness the terrible negative impact professional misconduct has upon victims and upon the church's participation in God's mission. So, we seek to respond to victims with compassionate pastoral care and to perpetrators by seeking to prevent victimiza-

tion of others. And, we continue to learn.

The story begun earlier in this article resulted in the removal of the pastor from the clergy roster. In the course of my learning the details of the admitted misconduct, I discovered that this was not the only incident of inappropriate behavior – an all too frequent occurrence in such cases. The identities of the victims were not made public and the woman who was the most recent victim was able to remain in the congregation. I wish that the outcome and the journey toward closure were as clean and simple as this paragraph might suggest. That is almost never the case, as the issues and dynamics described in what follows should make clear.

**The Power Imbalance.** It should be understood that in every pastoral relationship, whether parish ministry or specialized ministries (chaplancy, clinical pastoral education, counseling, etc.), the clergy person holds the greater power because of his/her office. This means that the responsibility for misconduct in ministry relationships will always fall first and foremost to the pastor. As far as this church is concerned, the consenting adults description is not relevant. This is why clergy in particular have to take responsibility for prevention – everything from self-care to safe ministry practices to transparent systems for feedback and accountability.

**Faith at Risk.** Of all of the consequences, all of the damages resulting from misconduct, there is none greater than the loss of faith. This is usually articulated by the victim as an inability to find or relate to God. The source of greatest sadness for me in these cases of misconduct has been to hear the cry of someone who feels so abandoned by God. With adult victims, some of this is rooted in their own feeling of guilt for what has happened. They believe they have played a part in bringing down a servant of God, the pastor. How could God ever forgive them for that? A major part of the bishop's ministry at that point is relieving the burden of ultimate responsibility for what has happened without discounting the truth of their remorse and repentance and their need to hear a word of forgiveness. The imbalance of power in the pastor-parishioner relationship is the ground for beginning to address the loss of faith and sense of abandonment.

The loss of relationship with God and the sense that faith is gone is especially acute with child victims. The pastor (and a rostered lay leader as well) can be known and trusted by a child as the mediator of the relationship with God. To have that person act in such a harmful way toward a child can cause faith damage that is virtually irreparable this side of heaven. I have listened to the stories of such children now grown into middle-aged adults. Their lives and relationships are often a trail of brokenness. But the most devastating part of the story is to hear of their loss of relationship with the God who loves them. In such moments, it is hard not to remember the chilling words of Jesus: "If any one of you put a stumbling block

before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6)

**Necessity for Disclosure.** The natural tendency in matters of misconduct is always to hide. (See original hiding story in Genesis 3:8ff). It's not just the perpetrator and the victim hiding, it's the community's preferred response as well. Leaders of a congregation council, confronted

*The source of greatest sadness for me  
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with an incident of pastoral misconduct, will almost always jump to their default position: hide any unpleasantness from the congregation. Experience in the church has proved this to be exactly the wrong approach. The congregation and others directly affected need to know the truth about what has occurred. As painful as disclosure is, it becomes essential for the ultimate healing of the community. Disclosure, while critically necessary, is one of the most difficult tasks for any bishop.

**Forgiveness Versus the Privilege of Public Ministry.** When there is disclosure of misconduct, there are predictable responses. At first a congregation will be upset and angry at the pastor and/or the unidentified victim. Then, after a little time, the congregation will likely begin to defend the pastor and focus its anger on the bishop/discloser and whatever action the bishop has announced. The theme of this sea change is "Aren't we supposed to forgive?" The bishop's work moves from disclosure to defining the difference between forgiveness, which is an always available gift of faith; and public ministry, which is a privilege granted by the church for the sake of the Gospel.

Because denial is also a dynamic operating in the system, the difference between willingness to forgive and willingness to retain someone in public ministry often becomes a difficult concept for congregation members to understand or apprehend. The simplest illustration would be in the office of preaching and worship leadership. If you knew that the person preaching or leading worship had been involved in professional misconduct, how distracting would that awareness be to your ability to hear the proclamation of Law and Gospel or to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper from those hands? Be honest with yourself.

The Lutheran Confessions affirm that even when the minister is unfit, the sacrament is still valid. That is true. But the matter of ministry necessarily extends through and beyond confessional integrity to the humanity of the ears and hearts being called by God through the servant leader. This is a very important reason for establishing boundaries in ministry relationships. The effective proclamation of the Gospel itself is at stake.

**The Role of the Bishop Vis-à-vis the Accused.** There is a terrible bind in all of this. The time comes when the Pastor of the Synod can no longer be the pastor to one who faces allegations of misconduct or to the victim. The bishop must make this clear when facts indicate that there is a legitimate need for investigation, encouraging the accused minister to identify someone who can be their pastor in and through the process. Similarly, victims must be helped to find a place to turn for their own pastoral care. The bishop's sense of being a pastor for the whole church – congregations and rostered leaders together – with a primary focus on the mission to which we are all called, helps to differentiate responsibilities. This doesn't often soothe the ache in the bishop's pastoral heart, however.

**No Second Chances?** If there is repentance... If this was only a one-time indiscretion... If the emotional safety and economic security of the innocent spouse and children are at stake... If there is a prescribed and completed plan of therapy... If...

How does the bishop balance accountability for the mission of the church with responsibility for the care of rostered leaders? Never mind that the person involved in professional misconduct is often among the brightest and the best of leaders. Never mind that the one involved in misconduct so often seems to be a good friend and valued colleague in ministry. Never mind that the consequences of someone being removed from the roster ripple far and wide into unimagined places and circumstances. Lutherans have a knack for dealing with ambiguity. No one is suggesting that we like living there.

The realities are these: We live in a litigious society. Communications are instant and too often unmanageable. Trust in institutions, even faith communities and leaders, has fallen dramatically. The church itself as the vessel for bearing the Good News is vulnerable in ways unthinkable a hundred years ago. So we come to this awareness: if leaders who have been engaged in professional misconduct are pardoned and restored, and then fall for whatever reason into one more incident of misconduct; the church, knowing the previous failure, may become virtually indefensible. This is why there must be Expectations Days. What is at stake needs to be publicly named by those who are called to oversight for the sake of the Gospel. And even then, it may not be enough. Nevertheless we try. It is that important. *Kyrie eleison.*

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*Roy Riley has served as Bishop of the New Jersey Synod, ELCA since his election in 1991. He also served as Chair of the ELCA Conference of Bishops from 2003-2007. A native of South Carolina, Bishop Riley was called to New Jersey from parish ministry in Winston-Salem, NC in 1980 to serve as Assistant to then Bishop Herluf Jensen. He plans to retire on August 31, 2013, as the NJ Synod elects a new bishop. Roy is married to Betsy, and they have a blended family of four children.*

# Secrets Can Kill

Q&A with the Reverend Martin Homan, Intentional Interim Pastor

## 1. In what way(s) are congregations wounded by the misconduct of a trusted minister?

A congregation that has had clergy sexual misconduct has significant trust issues. When I am focusing on sexual misconduct issues, I am working with situations where there are shame issues and a loss of intimacy. With sexual misconduct cases, I have discovered that the image of God has been changed, because people see God in their pastor. When that trust and intimacy is lost, people take a long time to regain trust. The congregation's boundaries become porous. Congregations and members are wounded and lose trust in themselves and in God. They are more susceptible and more vulnerable to other church workers and other people with boundaries violations. The congregation can close in on itself and continue to repeat the pattern they established with these violations. If the secrets are not dealt with, the congregation and future workers can repeat what has been happening in the system because this has become the norm. They lack trust in clergy and can play out their issues in the next pastor or church worker. If the church does not deal with the misconduct, they will continue to be affected by this lack of trust. The next church worker can act out either externally or internally. The church can continue to shrink and perhaps die.

These misconduct cases cause the image of God to be changed, because people come to see God in pastors. If the sexual misconduct is perpetrated by the first pastor, much of ministry after that is damaged. Long term affairs damage congregations even worse. When a church worker has an affair with a member of the church, it is often an issue of power and control. The church can lose its identity.

Other church workers can become symptom bearers of the anxiety of the church system. The health of the pastor is co-causal with the health of the church. If the church has high anxiety, this anxiety can be and is often played out in the church workers. In many cases, when one church worker has had sexual misconduct, following church workers may have sexual misconduct. In other churches, I have seen church workers and their families become ill because of the stress in the congregation caused by the sexual misconduct case.



*If the secrets are not dealt with, the congregation and future workers can repeat what has been happening.*

## 2. As I understand it, you have worked with congregations where the outgoing minister (pastor or DCE) has engaged in sexual misconduct as well as congregation(s) who have had workers involved in boundary violations other than inappropriate sexual behavior. Is there a difference in the resulting pain/brokenness within the congregation?

Whenever a church worker has sexual misconduct, the congregation will have issues to deal with because the image of God has been destroyed. You are dealing with a

loss of intimacy, and trust between God and the church has been broken. When children are involved, the pain is even greater. When the affair is with someone outside the church, it can be more sexual rather than power issues. Other church workers can be symptom bearers of what is going on in the church family of origin. The worse cases are those that directly involve pastors and members of the church. These are quite often issues of power and control.

### **3. How do you address the pain? What resources do you use? Is there one particular process or theory that informs your intervention?**

I have discovered that secrets kill. If the situation is not dealt with, the church will continue to experience conflict. The congregational leadership has to be open to talking about the secrets and working through ritual to let go of the past and the pain of the misconduct. Early on I try to work out the disclosure process as well as to bring in others to help with the pain and the grief. The congregation needs to plan for the future without the offending church worker and to trust God and one another once more. The Alban resource by Beth Ann Gaede (*When a Congregation Is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct*) has many excellent resources for every area of the misconduct case from dealing with the initial intervention to creating healthier church systems. You will find other resources below that can be of help to the church. I personally am inclined to follow a natural family systems theory (Bowen/Friedman) approach. I apply these same principals to myself. I as the leader need to work on my own issues first as I work on theirs.

### **4. What has frustrated you in your work with the congregations?**

What has frustrated me most is congregational and denominational family of origin issues. As with people, churches can choose not to deal with their congregation of origin issues as well as clergy of origin issues. Unless we are intentional about learning from our congregation of origin, we will bring what we have learned and experienced into our next congregation. What we have learned in our families of origin we pass on from one to the other. I would encourage the reader to read Candace Benyei and Conrad Weiser to better understand these issues.

We are not sufficiently screening church work candidates, nor assisting them with their families of origin, nor understanding the congregation of origin. We also attempt to reconcile church workers and churches when interventions would be best. Some people believe that you might be able to heal people and reconcile these church workers back to the congregations is possible. I agree with the zero tolerance policy that the Council of

Presidents has adopted. Reconciliation can and should happen between the broken parts of the congregation.

My other frustration is with both the LCMS and the ELCA, and how we are no longer funding congregational and church worker health. Both synods have relegated such health issues to their health plans and actuarial tables. We are no longer proactive. We need to focus also on congregational health. If not, we will pass on these symptom from one congregation to the next.

*... people take a long time  
to regain trust*

When such cases do occur, by the time the district presidents work through such cases, both the congregation and the church worker are very much damaged by our present processes. We are no longer sending in triage teams that assist with the debriefing of the congregation, church worker, and victim(s), nor are we as a denomination assisting congregations and church workers in trouble. Instead, we are concentrating on new missions rather than coming to terms with congregational issues or focusing on the good old days of The LCMS. All we have left to assist churches are district presidents, some district staff, and unevenly trained consultants and intentional interim pastors.

### **5. What can/should congregations do to prevent or discourage inappropriate behavior by their called workers? What are the marks of a healthy congregation?**

We can establish congregations with healthy boundaries and policies that help us come to grips with boundaries issues. I would recommend everyone read and utilize books helping churches establish healthy boundaries. Two such books are *Preventing Sexual Abuse in Congregations* and *Clergy Sexual Misconduct: A Systems Approach to Prevention, Intervention, and Oversight*.

I would encourage all congregations to adopt the wellness wheel developed by The LCMS and the ELCA. James Wind of the Alban Institute has assisted in this process in the booklet, *Healthy Congregations/Healthy Leaders* (Alban Institute, 2010). We need to encourage clergy and church worker wellness in all seven quadrants, remembering that in baptism we are new creations: Social/Interpersonal Wellbeing, Intellectual Wellbeing, Emotional Wellbeing, Intellectual Wellbeing, Vocational Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, and Financial Wellbeing.

I would encourage churches to focus on the marks of a healthy congregation such as the ones developed by Dr.

Peter Steinke in the Healthy Congregations workshops and now part of Healthy Congregations, Inc., at Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Ohio. Dr Emlyn Ott is the present director of this organization. These principles are:

- Healthy congregations accept differences (rather than deny)
- Healthy congregations focus on their strengths (rather than their weaknesses)
- Healthy congregations focus on mission (rather than “getting along,” the past, survival, “the minister,” or some other thing or issue)
- Healthy congregations respond to anxiety and change (instead of reacting)
- Healthy congregations manage conflict (instead of deny it)
- Healthy congregations act flexibly and creatively (instead of rigidly)
- In healthy congregations, leaders promote health through their presence and functioning (instead of techniques or skills)
- In healthy congregations, leaders challenge people (instead of comforting)
- In healthy congregations, leaders provide immune capacities (instead of enabling disease processes)
- In healthy congregations, people respond graciously and truthfully (rather than judgmentally or secretly)
- In healthy congregations, people develop caring relationships (rather than willful transactions)
- In healthy congregations, people empower others (rather than dominate them or cure them)
- Healthy congregations recognize the Creator’s interdependent design of life (rather than isolated, unrelated parts)
- Healthy congregations practice stewardship gratefully and willingly (rather than begrudgingly)
- Healthy congregations combine money and the Christian Life (rather than separate the one from the other)
- In healthy congregations, people share their lives (instead of each living for oneself)
- In healthy congregations, hospitality is offered to all (instead of each living for oneself)
- In healthy congregations, beginning again is a way of life (instead of staying stuck)

## 6. If you had the power to affect change in our church body with regards to this issue, what would it be?

If we really care about the vitality and health of our church workers and congregations, I would reinstate the executive director for ministerial health on the national level. This time, the executive director would be respon-

sible for church work and congregational health. Such a person would work closely as a resource with the seminaries and colleges as they prepare church workers; develop policy for wellness; assist the Council of Presidents as they work with clergy and churches; and, serve as a resource to churches and clergy as we are in mission and ministry together. We also need to further develop people better equipped to assist churches and church workers in wellness, as well as the distress of misconduct.

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*Martin Homan currently serves as Interim Senior Pastor of Christ’s Greenfield Lutheran Church and School (LCMS), Gilbert, AZ. He has served as interim pastor at a total of thirteen parishes/schools since 1995. Prior to that, Martin served as a parish pastor and assistant professor in Old Testament and Hebrew at Concordia College, River Forest, IL. He is accredited as a Professional Transition Specialist by the Interim Ministry Network and credentialed as an Intentional Interim Pastor and Interim Ministry Specialist by the LCMS Interim Ministry Conference. Martin is married to Sandra Margaret Olsen.*

*Congregations and members  
are wounded and lose trust  
in themselves and in God.*

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Healthy Congregations, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 21 East Main St, Columbus, Ohio, Dr. Emyln Ott, Director. [www.healthycongregations.com](http://www.healthycongregations.com)

International Institute for Trauma and Addiction Professionals – Dr. Stefanie Carnes, President. [www.iitap.com](http://www.iitap.com)

Faith Trust Institute – Dr. Marie Fortune, Director. Originally put out popular video, “Not In My Church.” [www.faithtrustinstitute.org](http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org)

Interfaith Sexual Trauma Institute, Saint John’s Abbey and University, Collegeville, MN 56321. [www.religiousinstitute.org/link/interfaith-sexual-trauma-institute](http://www.religiousinstitute.org/link/interfaith-sexual-trauma-institute)

# Holding Ourselves Accountable in Ministry

An interview by Joel Hempel with the Third-Term President of The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod’s Missouri District.

**Thank you, President Mirly, for taking the time to meet with me and respond to a number of questions and concerns for our issue on “Boundary Violations.”**

President Mirly: I’m pleased to do it! This is a very important subject and one that causes a great deal of suffering for many people.

**In general, what can you share – appropriate to what can be disclosed – about the common practice within the Council of Presidents (COP) in handling sexual misconduct and other improprieties?**

The Synodical Handbook dictates much of what we have to do. There is zero tolerance for the most egregious behavior – sexual intercourse and genital touch. In such cases, we ask for the pastor or other rostered worker to resign his or her called position. If the person refuses, the bylaws are enforced. Here I’m talking about bylaws 2.13 – 2.17, as well as the guidelines in the Council of Presidents’ Manual. There is little wiggle room! We also see to it that the victims are ministered to appropriately, with respect and anonymity, unless otherwise directed by the law of the state. When it is needed or requested, we get the victim(s) treatment.

**Who pays for the treatment?**

We do.

**Not the perpetrator?**

That would be appropriate as part of their repentance, punishment, and restitution; but I assure you, they generally are not forthcoming in offering to pay the expenses for treatment. Neither the handbook nor the COP Manual addresses this. Perhaps we need to be more directive when it comes to this kind of restitution.

**When an accusation is made against a church worker, what happens? Can you walk me through the beginning of the procedure? I know the Synodical Handbook details the step-by-step**



*It is an “allegation” until it is proven and/or acknowledged by the perpetrator.*

**process, but I’m wondering about what occurs before you get to the formal implementation.**

First, the District President (DP) has to substantiate the allegation – if it is not self-disclosed. The DP then has to investigate the allegations – and it is an “allegation” until it is proven and/or acknowledged by the perpetrator.

He may conduct the investigation himself, assign it to a trusted individual, or assign it to a panel. If the allegation proves to be true, the DP asks for the resignation of the worker – assuming again the behavior by the minister was determined to be egregious and/or scandalous. If the misconduct is not the kind of behavior that requires removal from the roster, then the District President has more latitude to work with the offending party, seeking the healing that is needed.

### **Can you say more about what is included in the definition of “scandalous”?**

I mean anything that discredits our Lord, the church, the office of the ministry and ministers in general. Here I’m thinking about what is in I Timothy. In addition, if the sinful behavior or misconduct has occurred over a long period of time, has resulted in great harm, and there has been no repentance, the minister is going to be removed from office. This would not only include egregious sexual sin, but also such behavior as bankruptcy without the intent of making restitution. That is seen as the same as stealing. Of course, criminal behavior would ultimately result in removal from the roster. In such cases, I suppose the DP functions like a prosecutor.

### **That’s a lot of responsibility!**

It is! Now let me add that the District President also has to be the defense attorney in order to protect the rights of the accused until guilt is proven. And, he has to document everything! If you want more details, you can look in the Synodical Handbook. There are a series of hearings that have to be followed in certain circumstances.

### **I have to say, President Mirly, this is a very law oriented process.**

Unfortunately, a long history of dealing with such matters has made the law orientation necessary and normative. But I should also emphasize that whenever possible – depending on the behavior and the attitude of the offending party – we work toward restoration of the worker. Even if the person is removed from the office of ministry, we seek confession of sins, repentance, and absolution. For example, if a worker is caught up in pornography, research and experience in working with such cases has proven the behavior will become increasingly serious, destructive and potentially criminal. But once the worker self-discloses or the behavior is discovered, and the person cooperates, we can get him help. Depending on the behavior, he may have to be placed on restricted status until treatment is completed. Most DPs have professional resources they work with in getting behavior diagnosed and treated. Here I should give a plug for our Concordia Plan Services. They will pay for the diagnosis after the deduct-

ible. Of course, mental health treatment is also available through Concordia Plans.

### **I can imagine you would get considerable resistance from workers who don’t want you looking over their shoulder into the counseling process.**

True. But I try to clarify with the worker that my interest is his well being – spiritual and otherwise – as well

*What should be and what is, as you know, are often two very different things.*

as the well being of the church. The worker is required to sign off on the DP receiving the test results. As far as counseling goes, we only require a report from the counselor that the worker is attending the sessions and participating in them for the sake of his or her healing.

### **To be honest, I think that is very considerate on the part of the District Presidents. Quite frankly, though, I think it is foolish, disingenuous, and self-destructive – as well as destructive to the church – if the minister is anything other than forthcoming and open, so that God’s will is served!**

What should be and what is, as you know, are often two very different things.

### **One final question along this vein: What if the worker is removed from office? Do you have any responsibility to the person following his or her removal?**

If possible and the DP has the means at his disposal, he may offer direction and assistance in finding the disciplined worker secular employment. But we really don’t have the budget to help the person become retooled. Also, I would be remiss if I did not say that, although the DP is not the pastor to district workers, we were all pastors before becoming District Presidents, have a heart for ministry, and thus continue to pastorally care about the workers who get themselves in trouble... along with caring for and attending to those who are victimized by church workers.

**On a slightly different subject: as the District President, can you share some of the sorrows and disappointments you experience dealing with these matters, as well as any successes?**

I'm sorry to say we don't see many successes when it comes to misconduct and improprieties. Too often, ministers hide their behavior, become entrenched in it or addicted to it, and they are so filled with shame and guilt that they do not claim the courage of Christ to come to me and confess their sins and seek help. I understand they are often afraid of my authority as their ecclesiastical supervisor. At the same time, I care deeply for each of our workers and congregations.

**I hear your passion as you talk.**

I am passionate about this! Pastors, Deaconesses, Teachers, DCEs all could experience the healing of the Holy Spirit if they could confess their sin early on and seek counsel. And, I must admit, I generally only see the offending, misbehaving workers after their behavior becomes more or less public. I don't know how many are getting or have gotten help, and by God's grace have been able to repent. So, I guess the point I am making here is that all of us, as broken sinners, need the courage of Christ to find and make regular use of a confessor or counselor or mentor or spiritual companion or someone who can be trusted, and with whom we can develop a "working" relationship so that when we start walking away from God's word and His way, we already have someone we trust, someone who can help us before the sin becomes so embedded.

**What about successes? Are there any?**

Yes, and we don't see all of them because, as I mentioned, the successes often happen before the misdeed comes to my attention. Also, many problems get dealt with at the congregational level through the relatively new CARE Process, which, as you know, we adapted from the program that originated in the Texas District under John Hirsch ([www.jhirsch@txdistlcms.org](mailto:www.jhirsch@txdistlcms.org)). It has been very helpful to me and to our district in managing and resolving the conflict that sometimes surfaces between staff, and between a staff person and the congregation.

**You also mentioned counseling and spiritual direction or companionship; are there other resources you would recommend?**

As for counseling, I don't know what is available in other church bodies, but our Concordia Plan Services does offer an excellent counseling service that begins with a confidential 800 telephone call. No reports are made to me or anyone else!

Also, you know I strongly encourage all ministers to be involved with the Circuit Pastors' Conference or its

equivalent for other workers. This is equally true for those of you in specialized pastoral ministry. There are too many lone rangers out there in the parish and in institutions who are not holding themselves accountable through their circuit brothers and sisters. And if for some reason they have a problem with their circuit, it should not be an excuse for isolating themselves. It is to their advantage, and the well being of the church, for all workers to seek out a support and accountability group! But make sure it is a group that is (a) deeply Christian, (b) trustworthy and confidential, and (c) will hold you accountable.

Other resources would be conferences, seminars and workshops, and reading material that is directed at both professional and ministerial growth, and—when needed—addresses whatever one is struggling with in his or her life.

Another resource is that a DP may also network within a pastor's congregation or neighboring congregation – or possibly within an RSO – to see if laypeople can be identified who have the skill set that would benefit a pastor, chaplain, or other church worker. If a need is brought to my attention, I can help the worker think through how to identify the resource that is needed to provide the kind of support that would make his life and ministry easier and more satisfying. It may also be that I would refer the worker to a trusted counselor who can help with the process of identifying the need and locating the appropriate resource.

*I'm sorry to say we don't see many successes when it comes to misconduct and improprieties. Too often, ministers hide their behavior, become entrenched in it or addicted to it.*

**Those are helpful resources for avoiding problems as well as addressing them when they surface! Now I have a personal question: What do you do with the pain that must get stirred up in you due to the kind of suffering we are addressing? I once had a District President tell me he would not run for a third term because the pain he experienced from workers and congregations getting themselves into unnecessary trouble was just too costly to him personally.**

I feel for the brother! But I must say I have been spared that kind of pain. By God's grace, I have been protected from personalizing the suffering of others. I spend a lot of time in prayer; and I surround myself with competent people who are faithful servants of our Lord and who

care for and support me. Then of course, there is the love of Debbie – second only to the love of God (Debbie is President Mirly’s second wife of six years. His first wife of 37 years died in 2006)! I am truly blessed! In addition, the Council of Presidents is a unique and most helpful network. It is not unusual for me to call or email a fellow DP or vice versa with a concern and a request for counsel.

**As you know, Caring Connections is primarily published for ministers serving as institutional or crisis response chaplains, pastoral counselors and clinical pastoral educators. Do you have any counsel for specialized pastoral ministers as to the ways they/we can be helpful to District Presidents and Bishops as it relates to clergy misconduct?**

I admit I don’t have much contact with chaplains and others. Most DPs work with congregations and parish pastors. But I have sought out the counsel and experience of some who serve in specialized pastoral ministry. I also think it is to the church’s benefit for specialized pastoral ministers to make themselves available to DPs (and Bishops) informing them of their training and availability should a need arise – and the need does arise! I encourage them to offer themselves and their training to program committees for Circuit and District conferences and workshops. Also, invite the District President to come to their place of ministry in order for the District President to learn about the “special” nature of this ministry. We just don’t know enough about what you do! The specialized pastoral minister can feel slighted and hurt by our lack of knowledge – and perhaps rightly so. Or, he/she can take the initiative and open the door of communication and work to improve the relationship with the DP.

**Excellent advice! What about specialized pastoral ministers and the unique risk to which they are exposed? Any comment?**

It is my experience that most in specialized pastoral ministry are fairly invisible. I suppose some want it that way. But this is dangerous! It seems that they can too easily dissociate from peers and even from a congregational community. Because of the nature of their work, they may have to be more intentional in their church involvement – for the sake of their spiritual well being.

In addition, chaplains and counselors may be exposed to greater temptation to become more acculturated by the institution. Due to the nature of their ministry, rather than being surrounded by “church,” they are surrounded by competing cultural influences. Culture is not bad in and of itself; but there is enough evil out there that can be tempting to someone who is insufficiently careful.

There is also the temptation of thinking too highly of

*There are too many lone rangers out there in the parish and in institutions who are not holding themselves accountable through their circuit brothers and sisters.*

oneself. On the one hand, our church body is very congregationally oriented, so a specialized pastoral minister can feel unnoticed and under-appreciated – which can lead to feeling sorry for oneself and perhaps acting out in some sinful way. On the other hand, because of their “specialized” training they may be tempted to become arrogant and thus vulnerable to the feeling they are beyond Satan’s reach.

Bottom line, specialized pastoral ministers have a great deal to offer the church and the world. They also need to stay alert and be wise in the Lord!

**President Mirly, thank you very much for your time and insight! Your many years in the ministry and as District President will greatly serve those who read this interview. God bless you!**

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*Ray Mirly has served as President of The Missouri District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod since 2006. He has been an ordained pastor in the LCMS for 35 years, having served pastorates at Trinity, Orchard Farm, MO and Immanuel, Olivette, MO. Ray also worked as a teacher at both St. John, Young America, MN and Holy Cross, Detroit, MI. Ray is married to Debra and the father of two children and four step-children. He is a grandfather of four, with eight step-grandchildren.*

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*Following his first call to an inner city parish [Prince of Peace, Cincinnati] and starting the Inner City Parish CPE Center, Joel became a chaplain and created the Lutheran Senior Service CPE Center in St. Louis. After 19 years in each ministry, Hempel retired and is now working part time as the Specialized Pastoral Ministry Coordinator for LCMS; he is also a Circuit Counselor.*

# Healthier Leaders Serving Healthier Communities

It is critically important for the church to protect its members from the abusive behavior of rostered leaders who willfully use their positions of power and authority to take advantage of others.

It is important that such leaders be removed so they cannot harm others. It is also important for the church to protect its members from the abusive behavior of rostered leaders who do not intend harm but harm none-the-less. These are rostered leaders who enter ministry emotionally vulnerable and are then confronted with a professional environment that leaves them overwhelmed by stress, isolated from colleagues, and lacking professional support. For these rostered leaders we must provide the best possible support. We must, in fact, provide the best possible support for all rostered leaders throughout their ministries so that all leaders are able not only to avoid crossing professional boundaries but also are able to provide effective leadership and compassionate ministry. This article will look briefly at sources of stress and vulnerability, followed by a longer discussion of examples of emerging resources.

The last fourteen years of my ministry have been dedicated to working with rostered leaders who have encountered struggles in their ministries. Fairview's "Ministerial Health and Leadership Resources" provides Ministerial Health Assessments—primarily for ELCA and LCMS rostered leaders—with the goal of increasing self-understanding, as well as understanding the challenges of ministry. The ultimate goal is always to create a plan for restoring personal health and most often a plan for enabling a return to ministry as trustworthy, effective leaders. For a few, the goal becomes planning a transition to new vocational opportunities that better match their deepest interests and greatest gifts.

I will begin by touching on three factors that, in my experience, contribute to vulnerability in ministry. Certainly there are others, but perhaps these are adequate to make the point that good leaders get into trouble for reasons that we can understand and address.

One factor is the extent of emotional vulnerability that some rostered leaders bring to their ministry. Many people are drawn to rostered ministry by the opportunity such a vocation provides to care for others. This opportunity matches well with their natural sensitivity and genuine concern for people. The desire to support and



*Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) is perhaps the only supervised program in which those preparing for ministry intently focus on growth in self-awareness and self-understanding.*

affirm others is often, however, closely linked to the need for support and affirmation. While the gift of compassion serves well the ministry of pastoral care, the personal sensitivity lying beneath this compassion creates great vulnerability in rostered leaders when faced with the competing demands, inevitable conflicts, and complex politics of the ministry setting. The pressure of meeting the multiple needs of those served, coupled with criticism (if even from only a few), can have a devastating effect and become a heavy burden to bear.

In my experience, the roots of emotional vulnerability were often evident in the leader's family-of-origin. Many rostered leaders reported a troubled childhood with little genuine support from parents. Often it was their pastors and youth leaders who provided support and valued them as people. This support both drew them to the church and sparked an interest in church service, an interest in caring for others as the church had cared for them. It did not, however, overcome the lack of primary support in their families. It is perhaps not surprising that Dr. Edwin Friedman saw the value of Family Systems work for clergy, and why his writing and workshops struck such a responsive chord among pastors.

A second theme is the complex leadership challenges of rostered ministry. I am convinced that there are few organizations more complex and less clearly structured than congregations. In addition, congregations are volunteer organizations. The rostered leader is highly dependent on the commitment and good will of members to create community, as well as develop and carry out ministry. The willingness to respond ranges from the nominally invested, who contribute little, to the overly controlling, who exert authority and insist on their own way. Even among healthily invested members there can be challenges, as these members have a high level of ownership, widely divergent priorities and a broad range of expectations from their leaders. For rostered leaders with a strong need to please and be liked, the stress of such an environment can be overwhelming and lead to various forms of "acting out."

A third theme is the historical lack of focus on leadership education and training in preparation for ministry. Seminary education has traditionally focused on such areas as Bible, Church History, Systematic Theology, Homiletics and Pastoral Care. Internship/Vicarage, the one period of dedicated practicum training, varies greatly in quality from congregation to congregation and from supervising pastor to supervising pastor in terms of providing the opportunity to develop leadership skills. One could make the argument that a pastor can only learn to provide effective leadership when in a leadership position. The opportunities to engage in high-quality, on-site learning experiences, however, have been limited. Clinical Pastoral Education is perhaps the only supervised program in which those preparing for ministry intently focus on growth in self-awareness and self-understanding.

A final theme is the historic lack of support for rostered leaders throughout the course of their ministries. There are many reasons for this lack of support, including the church's seeming reluctance to "require" too much of rostered leaders once they have graduated from seminary, the conviction among rostered leaders that they should be capable of managing on their own once they have graduated, and the assumption of congregations that rostered

leaders come to them with all they need to provide effective leadership. In this environment, it is no wonder that support has been slow to develop and even slower to be used. With the exception of certified ministries in pastoral care, counseling, and clinical education, ordained ministry is one of the only high-level professional services that functions in this way. The fields of medicine and mental health function far differently, for example, in that for both a lengthy supervised practice is core to preparing for service, and lifetime continuing education is required.

*The goal of every rostered leader is to be both a trusted leader and the healthiest leader possible.*

It is important to note that the church has made efforts to establish guidelines and support pastors for at least 40 years. I remember as a young pastor in the early 70s participating in an ALC program for pastors in team ministries. I also remember pastors from seven Lutheran congregations in Las Vegas – congregations from the Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod, Lutheran Church in America, and American Lutheran Church – meeting regularly for mutual support. In addition, a number of pastors and spouses met with a facilitator for a period of time to talk about the impact of ministry on our families. Certainly, similar efforts to gain mutual support were happening across the church.

The 1995 ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed two recommendations regarding support for rostered leaders. The first, from the Task Force on Theological Education, was to encourage each Synod to develop by 1997 First Call Theological Education programs for all newly rostered leaders and lay leaders under call during their first three years of ministry. This represented a significant recognition on the part of the ELCA of the need to support church leaders as they transition from seminary to parish ministry and a significant effort to develop meaningful support.

The second, from the "Beyond First Call Theological Education Task Force," described the current state of lifelong learning and set standards for the future in an ELCA document entitled "LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT FOR FAITHFUL LEADERS, Continuing Education in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: A Vision and Strategy Statement." This document sets a yearly goal of 50 hours of intentional continuing education, an extended study and renewal program (sabbatical) of one-to-three months every three to five years, peer review, and participation in "Healthy Leaders/Healthy Church" (developed as a joint project

of the ELCA and LCMS). Responsibility for maintaining these standards was placed on the rostered leaders, the congregations or other calling organizations, and the synods. The document concludes with a summary of a 1995 survey of rostered leaders' use of continuing education. Quoting from the document: "On the one hand, there seems to be growth in rostered leaders' use of time and money for continuing education. On the other hand, there are needs of this church and rostered leaders that are not being adequately addressed. The 'state and current practices of continuing education' is neither clear nor uniform across the church." This document, as well as documents on First Call Theological Education, can be found on the ELCA website under lifelong learning. <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Education/Life-Long-Learning.aspx>

The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod has similar programs in addition to the joint LCMS – ELCA project "Healthy Leaders/Healthy Church" mentioned above. The LCMS offers a Post Seminary Applied Learning and Support (PALS) program that regularly brings together groups of five to 12 recent seminary graduates during their first three years of parish ministry. In these meetings, the new pastors worship, study and discuss together new ministry experiences in the company of an experienced pastor. In addition, they offer a variety of continuing theological education opportunities through their seminaries as well as advanced degrees. I refer you to the LCMS website for further information: <http://www.lcms.org/page.aspx?pid=1167>

In more recent years, the ELCA has begun using coaching as an effective means of supporting rostered leaders and congregations in ministry. The Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit of the ELCA utilizes coaching to support congregations through Natural Church Development, mission developers and redevelopers, stewardship teams, evangelism teams, and others.

In 1999 Fairview Health Services and Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota began working with Mark Anderson, former Director of Fairview's Ministerial Health, and Alan Nohre (then President of Corporate Coach U) to develop a coaching resource for pastors much like the executive coaching available to corporate executives. We called this resource Clergy Coaches. The goal of Clergy Coaches is to provide leadership support for rostered leaders in the form of one-on-one coaching with an experienced pastor knowledgeable in the art of coaching. Clergy Coaches began providing coaching in 2000, making it available to all rostered leaders who would value such support. While this offer of coaching for all rostered leaders continues, three new efforts to support rostered leaders have begun. Each support resource is either centered on or incorporates coaching.

The first is a pilot begun several years ago in the Min-

neapolis Area Synod to engage pastors in coaching as they accept new calls within the synod. The Minneapolis Area Synod is significantly strengthening its support of pastors in 2013 by making it the practice of the synod that all rostered leaders accepting a new call will have available the support of a personal coach as they transition into their new leadership responsibilities. For this practice to take root, congregations are being asked to offer coaching as one of the benefits in the letter of call. The Synod is partnering with the congregations by committing to share the cost of coaching for their rostered leaders. Clergy Coaches is offering to provide coaching at one-half its established coaching fees to help diminish financial barriers.

The second is a pilot with ELCA synods in Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, with our primary focus in the Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, to create a multi-faceted First Call Theological Education (FCTE) experience that includes personal leadership-focused coaching along with opportunities for self-learning and growth, spiritual direction, financial coaching and leadership from Vibrant Faith Ministries on congregational ministry. Partners engaged in creating this model include Portico Benefit Services, Augsburg College, Vibrant Faith Ministries, and Fairview Health Services.

While this FCTE pilot is developing, Gretchen Anderson, Pastor at Concordia College—Moorhead, MN, has been conducting surveys of FCTE programs around the country to learn what others have been doing and what is proving to be most helpful to pastors as they move into their first call. It is important to know that work is occurring on multiple fronts to strengthen First Call Theological Education across the ELCA.

The third is a very new pilot, still in development, which extends support resources to rostered leaders after their first three years of ministry and further extends these resources to key lay leaders who serve alongside the rostered leaders. We have termed this pilot "Healthier Leaders Serving Healthier Communities." The goal is to equip leaders to live well, supported by a number of resources, including various tools contained in what we have called a "wellness kit," seminars and retreats to learn from one another and grow as leaders, assistance from Vibrant Faith Ministries to develop congregational ministry, and the opportunity for the rostered and lay leaders of each congregation to work with a coach. Our hope is that leaders will be advocates for a new emerging paradigm of congregations becoming wellness centers (health, healing and wholeness). This pilot will begin with a retreat for rostered and lay leaders of participating congregations, followed by support from Vibrant Faith Ministries and a coach dedicated to work with the leaders of each congregation over the course of the following year.

These are examples of efforts that are being made throughout both the ELCA and LCMS to create more

consistent cultures of life-long learning and support for the rostered leaders of our church. I know of these because of my personal involvement. I also know many others could write a similar article highlighting work with which they are involved. As we move forward, it is important to learn from one another, so that together we can provide the best possible resources. We all share a common goal of further building a culture of life-long learning and support, a culture in which rostered leaders are not only expected to learn and grow throughout the course of their ministry, but welcome the opportunities where using the best support available is not only expected but welcomed, and where the goal of every rostered leader is to be both a trusted leader and the healthiest leader possible.

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# A Lutheran Approach to Ministering to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Abuse: What does this mean?

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“It is to the little children we must preach, it is for them that the entire ministry exists.”  
- Martin Luther<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Theologians often struggle with ministering to the needs of both victims and perpetrators of child abuse. Pastoral ignorance of the dynamics inherent in these cases often results in applying the law to victims and the gospel to perpetrators.<sup>2</sup>

This takes place when pastors fail to understand that childhood trauma often results in significant medical and mental health conditions including drug and alcohol abuse, violent tendencies, anger, promiscuity or early pregnancy.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, pastors are tempted to apply the law without realizing they are only treating the smoke and not the fire itself. In contrast, most sex offenders are religious<sup>4</sup> and highly skilled at mouthing the words of repentance and in otherwise convincing clergy not to take strong actions against them.<sup>5</sup> As a result, many pastors pronounce the gospel to offenders fully intent on continuing in their sin.



*Pastoral ignorance of the dynamics inherent in these cases often results in applying the law to victims and the gospel to perpetrators.*

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Daudert, Ed., *Off the Record with Martin Luther: An Original Translation of the Table Talks* 233 (2009).

<sup>2</sup>See generally, Victor I. Vieth, “What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse,” 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257 (2012).

<sup>3</sup>Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, The Relationship of adverse childhood experiences to adult medical disease, psychiatric disorders and sexual behavior: implications for healthcare, in Lanius, et al, *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic* 77-87 (Cambridge University Press 2010).

<sup>4</sup>According to one study, 93% of sex offenders describe themselves as religious. Gene Abel & Nora Harlow, *The Stop Child Abuse Book* (2001)

<sup>5</sup>Victor I. Vieth, “What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse,” 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257, 261-264 (2012)

When this happens, abused children suffer profound spiritual damage<sup>6</sup> and often flee the church while their

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<sup>6</sup>Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincelle, & Penk, “The Long Term Impact of Child Abuse on Religious Behavior and Spirituality in Men,” 22(5) *Child Abuse & Neglect* 369, 376-377 (1998); Barbara R. McLaughlin, “Devastated Spirituality: The Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on the Survivor’s Relationship with God,” 1(2) *Sexual Addiction & Compulsivity* (1994); Donald F. Walker, et al, “Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents,” 41 *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice* 174 (2010).

offenders are empowered to remain snug in the pews emboldened to strike again.<sup>7</sup> In unwittingly harming the child's faith, pastors are also harming the primary coping mechanism of many abused children.<sup>8</sup> Research consistently shows that child abuse victims "who maintained some connection to their personal faith (even if it was damaged as a result of abuse) experienced better mental health outcomes compared to adult survivors of abuse who did not."<sup>9</sup>

Although clergy need better training in responding to all aspects of child abuse,<sup>10</sup> Lutheran theologians should also utilize their rich religious traditions in properly responding to these cases. In the lives and writings of Martin Luther and C.F.W. Walther, we find sound theological principles for godly responses to child abuse.

To this end, this article includes a discussion of child abuse in the lives of Luther and Walther, some insight as to how abuse may have influenced each man, and an analysis of how each of these pillars of our Lutheran faith viewed children and responded to instances of maltreatment and sexual exploitation.

### Abuse in Luther and Walther's Childhoods

Although little is known about C.F.W. Walther's mother, there is evidence his father was physically abusive. As one example, the young boy Walther was whipped for the seemingly mild infraction of accidentally sitting on a family sofa reserved for guests.<sup>11</sup> In reference to his father, Walther said "A young man must endure much pain, ere he becomes a gentleman."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>See generally, Victor I. Vieth, "What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse," 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257 (2012).

<sup>8</sup>Terry Lynn Gall, "Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse," 30 *Child Abuse & Neglect* 829 (2006).

<sup>9</sup>Victor I. Vieth, Basyle Tchividjian, Donald F. Walker, & Katlin R. Knodel, "Child Abuse and the Church: A Call for Prevention, Treatment and Training," 40 *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 323, 330 (2012); see also, Shondrah Tarrezz Nash & Latonya Hesterberg, "Biblical Framings of and Responses to Spousal Violence in the Narratives of Abused Christian Women," 15(3) *Violence Against Women* 340 (2009); Donald F. Walker, et al, "Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents," 41 *Professional Psychology: Research & Practice* 174 (2010).

<sup>10</sup>Martin Luther College (New Ulm, Minnesota), Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Mequon, Wisconsin), and Bethany Lutheran Theological Seminary (Mankato, Minnesota) are three Lutheran institutions specifically providing instruction to called workers on recognizing and responding appropriately to cases of child maltreatment.

<sup>11</sup>August R. Suelflow, *Servant of the Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* 15 (2000).

<sup>12</sup>C.F.W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* 100 (2010).

Child abuse in Martin Luther's life is even clearer. The reformer himself spoke of physical abuse at the hands of his mother, father and school masters. Luther claimed his mother "caned me for stealing a nut until the blood came."<sup>13</sup> He said his father "once whipped me so that I ran away and felt ugly toward him until he was at pains to win me back."<sup>14</sup> As for his schooling, Luther recalls "I was caned in a single morning fifteen times for nothing at all."<sup>15</sup> Emotional abuse, in the form of public humiliation, was practiced daily in Luther's schooling when the poorest student was required to wear a donkey mask until

*Most sex offenders are religious and highly skilled at mouthing the words of repentance and in otherwise convincing clergy not to take strong actions against them.*

the child could catch someone speaking German—and then the mask and its accompanying humiliation was passed on.<sup>16</sup>

### The influence of child abuse in the lives of Luther and Walther

Luther and Walther bore some of the traits often resulting from child abuse—including bouts with depression and other forms of mental illness.<sup>17</sup> Apart from feelings of intense sorrow,<sup>18</sup> abusive childhoods may have influenced these men in other ways. Luther claimed the abuse he endured as a child is what "drove me to the monastery."<sup>19</sup> Whether or not that is true, both men demonstrated a remarkable sensitivity to the needs of children and displayed in their writings and conduct extraordinary compassion for victims of abuse.

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<sup>13</sup>Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* 17 (1950).

<sup>14</sup>*Id.*

<sup>15</sup>*Id.*

<sup>16</sup>*Id.* at 18.

<sup>17</sup>See e.g., Matthew C. Harrison, "Walther's Breakdowns," *The Lutheran Witness* 23 (October 2011); Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God And The Devil* 320-324 (1992) (discussing Luther's mental illness).

<sup>18</sup>For example, Walther described himself as a "miserable boy." Christopher Barnback, C.F.W. Walther and Affliction, in *C.F.W. Walther: Churchman and Theologian* 3, 6 (2011).

<sup>19</sup>Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* 17 (1950).

## Our obligations to children: the writings of Luther and Walther

Perhaps cognizant of the blows he received, Luther expressed reservations about the effectiveness of hitting children as a means of discipline. Specifically, Luther said “children that can be forced only with rods and blows will not develop into a good sort; they will at best remain godly no longer than the rod lies on their back. But under Christian training godliness is rooted in their hearts so that they fear God more than they do rods and clubs.”<sup>20</sup>

Luther said there was “no purpose for a father and mother” other than to care for children and rear them in the “fear and knowledge of God above all things.”<sup>21</sup> When confronted with the unseemliness of changing a diaper, Luther tenderly said a father should respond:

O God...I confess to Thee that I am not worthy to rock the little babe or wash its diapers, or to be entrusted with the care of the child and its mother... Neither frost nor heat, neither drudgery nor labor will distress or dissuade me, for I am certain that it is pleasing in Thy sight.<sup>22</sup>

Walther called children “far more precious than gold or silver, than house and home” and prayed:

O Lord God, we tremble when we recall that You have placed us over our children as Your representatives to lead and guide them on earth, and that You will someday say to us: ‘Where are the children whom I have given you? Have any of them been lost?’ For again and again we have been guilty of neglecting them, due either to a lack of love or to misguided love, to a lack of earnestness or to sinful zeal, to a lack of wisdom or to the deceptive wisdom of this world.<sup>23</sup>

## Our obligations to children: Luther’s catechism

Luther’s childhood was violent and influenced him in early writings to use the word “Father” primarily as a judge.<sup>24</sup> However, Luther’s catechisms contain much gentler prose as he writes of “dear children coming to their dear father.”<sup>25</sup> According to one scholar, the reason for the change in Luther’s writing is simple:

Luther had discovered what it meant to be a Father! ‘Father-like’ was not a simile for Luther’s father but the experience of Luther himself as a father, especially

with the death of his second child, Elizabeth, as an infant.<sup>26</sup>

As one biographer notes, Luther “played and prayed with his children. He listened to them laugh—and cry. Sometimes when they cried he would take them in his arms until the last sob had come and gone.”<sup>27</sup> Although not a perfect parent, Luther’s tender interaction with his children is reflected in his view of God’s relationship to us. In his explanation to the second article of the Creed, Luther said simply “(Y)ou may believe in Jesus, that he has become your Lord...and set you on his lap.”<sup>28</sup>

In his explanation to the fourth commandment, Luther saw not simply an obligation of the children toward their parents but also a responsibility of the parents toward their children. In Luther’s Large Catechism he admonishes parents this way:

Everyone acts as if God gave us children for our pleasure and amusement, gave us servants merely to put them to work like cows or donkeys, gave us subjects to treat as we please... We really must spare no effort, time, and expense in teaching and educating our children to serve God and the world.<sup>29</sup>

## Luther and Walther’s response to sexual exploitation

One scholar finds that “one of the most surprising things about Luther’s explanation of the sixth commandment is the equality that Luther implied throughout.”<sup>30</sup> This same scholar notes that “whatever sexual relations were to” Luther “they were not an invitation to exploitation.” On a visit to Rome, Luther had seen priests sexually exploit women and may have had this in mind when he directed his pen against “the whole swarm of clerics in our time who stand by day after day in the church, singing and ringing bells, but without keeping a single day holy, because they neither preach nor practice God’s Word, but rather live contrary to it.”<sup>31</sup>

As a young minister, Walther guided the emerging Missouri Synod through a scandal in which at least four women were sexually exploited by Lutheran Bishop Martin Stephan. The conduct of Stephan would be deemed a felony crime under modern criminal codes. In response to this conduct, Walther and his colleagues applied the

<sup>20</sup>Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says* 142 (1959).

<sup>21</sup>*Luther’s Large Catechism* 47 (Concordia Publishing House 2010)..

<sup>22</sup>John F. Thornton & Susan B. Varenne (Eds), *Faith and Freedom: An Invitation to the Writings of Martin Luther* 249 (2002).

<sup>23</sup>C.F.W. Walther, *For the Life of the Church* 136 (2011).

<sup>24</sup>Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* 51 (2009).

<sup>25</sup>Id.

<sup>26</sup>Id.

<sup>27</sup>Frederich Noll, *Luther: Biography of a Reformer* 170 (2003).

<sup>28</sup>Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther’s Catechisms: Forming the Faith* 56 (2009).

<sup>29</sup>Id. at 35.

<sup>30</sup>Id. at 38.

<sup>31</sup>Id. at 37.

law to the unrepentant Stephan by exiling him from the colony while they poured out the gospel to his victims.<sup>32</sup>

### **Luther and Walther's response to domestic violence**

Luther and Walther both faced instances of a parishioner enduring beatings from a spouse and both men chose to protect the victim over the objections of the authorities. Luther "fought for a woman's right to divorce an abusive husband, despite the Wittenberg City Council's fear that if that became grounds for divorce, no one would be left married in Wittenberg."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Walther supported a woman beaten to the point of being unconscious by defending her right for separation. When admonished by the church, Walther defended his theology and may have gone so far as to lie to the authorities as a means of protecting both the woman and her child.<sup>34</sup>

### **Applying law and gospel to victims of child abuse: lessons from Luther and Walther**

Victims of abuse have often turned to drugs, alcohol, sex or other behaviors in search of relief from abuse.<sup>35</sup> In one case, a victim of physical and sexual abuse developed an addiction to meth and while high on the drug drove a car and accidentally killed a man. When released from prison, the man was deeply remorseful but unsure if God would still accept him.<sup>36</sup> In such a scenario, the obligation of a pastor is to offer the release of the gospel.

According to Walther, the only contrition necessary to receive the gospel is the realization you "can no longer find consolation in yourself; if everything is dark and depressing" and you cry out "Where can I find consolation?"<sup>37</sup> For many survivors, the world is indeed "dark and depressing" and their cry for consolation is a plea rooted in enormous pain.

The gospel has much to which victims can relate. Christ was the descendant of a sexually exploited woman<sup>38</sup> and was often seen in the company of other sexually exploited women.<sup>39</sup> Victims often see understanding in a God who was himself beaten, neglected, and nailed naked to a cross. Indeed, many survivors have told me their favorite Bible verse is: "He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3 ESV).

*Indeed, molesters often purposely seek out congregations in which to operate, because they are confident in the gullibility of clergy.*

This is not to say a pastor should ignore a victim's abuse of drugs or other harmful behavior but rather that the theologian must first recognize the hole in the victim's heart. When properly applied, the gospel will assist in moving a victim away from sinful conduct.<sup>40</sup> The victim may then be more amenable as a pastor assists in helping him or her access medical and mental health care, chemical dependency treatment, or other services.

Pastors must also be cautious in urging a victim to forgive their offenders. Forgiveness is a difficult concept for many victims and requiring this act is to place the victim under the law. In commenting on the obligation in the Lord's Prayer to forgive others, Luther noted that man cannot forgive in the way God can and that forgiveness is never a work we must complete in order to be saved but is instead a work of the Spirit.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, Luther said the devil lies to us when he says "You must forgive or you will not be forgiven; you have not forgiven; therefore despair." Luther simply retorted that through faith we will want to forgive but may not forgive fully this side of heaven.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Victor I. Vieth, "What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse," 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257, 265-267 (2012)

<sup>33</sup>Id. at 39.

<sup>34</sup>August R. Suelflow, *Servant Of The Word: The Life and Ministry of C.F.W. Walther* 34-35 (2000).

<sup>35</sup>Vincent J. Felitti and Robert F. Anda, The Relationship of adverse childhood experiences to adult medical disease, psychiatric disorders and sexual behavior: implications for healthcare, in Lanius, et al, *The Impact of Early Life Trauma on Health and Disease: The Hidden Epidemic* 77-87 (Cambridge University Press 2010).

<sup>36</sup>This is a case the author is personally familiar with.

<sup>37</sup>C.F.W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* 280 (2010)

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<sup>38</sup>Joshua 2, 6:22-25; Heb 11:31; Mat. 1:5.

<sup>39</sup>Mt. 21:31.

<sup>40</sup>Victor I. Vieth, "What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse," 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257, 267-270 (2012)

<sup>41</sup>Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* 95 (2009).

<sup>42</sup>Id. at 94.

## Applying the law and gospel to perpetrators of abuse: lessons from Luther and Walther

Child abusers, particularly those who sexually molest children, are extremely skilled at mouthing words of repentance.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, molesters often purposely seek out congregations in which to operate because they are confident in the gullibility of clergy.

In the words of one convicted child molester:

I consider church people easy to fool...they have a trust that comes from being Christians...They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people...I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.<sup>44</sup>

In recognition of this deception and the cognitive distortions to which many offenders cling, a pastor may wish to explore the sincerity of the parishioner's repentance. To this end, the pastor may want to explore three subjects with the offender.

First, ask about the offender's willingness to address the needs of his family. This may include moving out of the house if his spouse or children desire, obtaining medical and mental health care for the children or spouse he has violated, and giving the pastor enough information about the use of religion in the abuse so that he or she can assist the victim in responding to any spiritual damage.

Second, determine the extent of the offender's cognitive distortions. This can be done by asking the offender if he holds himself fully accountable for his crimes or whether he believes his wife or children are in any way to blame. In one case, a Lutheran pastor convicted of molesting children in his congregation blamed his offenses on his wife because she withheld herself sexually.<sup>45</sup>

Third, remind the offender of our obligation to abide by the laws of the land (Romans 13:1-2) and inquire whether or not he will be turning himself into the police and accepting earthly consequences. You may wish to remind the offender of the thief on the cross who accepted governmental punishments for his crimes but simply implored the mercy of God for his soul. In response, Christ offered the kingdom of God.<sup>46</sup>

A child abuser unwilling to address the needs of his victims or to accept full responsibility for his conduct is likely a poor candidate for the gospel. Indeed, C.F.W.

Walther said that a "child molester" unwilling to turn away from his sin does not have "genuine faith" because a person who "has obtained a living confidence in Christ cannot live in sin. His faith changes and purifies the heart."<sup>47</sup>

Even if a Lutheran pastor pronounces God's forgiveness, he must work with the offender to address the needs of his victims and otherwise repair the damage he has inflicted. Indeed, many Lutheran hymnals contain Luther's questions in preparation for Holy Communion. In response to the question how we will respond to Christ's forgiveness of our sins, Luther writes:

I will daily thank and praise him for his love to me. With his help I will fight temptation, do my best to correct whatever wrongs I have done, and serve him and those around me with love and good works (emphasis added).<sup>48</sup>

In the case of child abuse, an offender seeking to correct the wrongs inflicted will seek sex offender or other treatment, will turn him or herself into the police and accept governmental punishments, and will work to address the victim's medical and mental health needs.

If a child abuser is unwilling to act, the pastor is nonetheless compelled to protect the victims. In a report on the pastor-penitent privilege, the Missouri Synod notes that if a parishioner is not truly penitent but is simply using the pastoral office to his own advantage, the pastor has no obligation to keep the parishioner's confidence.<sup>49</sup> If, for example, the parishioner is not genuinely remorseful for sexually abusing a child but is hoping the pastor will keep the offender's wife from calling the police, there is no penitent privilege. Even if the penitent is sincerely confessing his sins, a Lutheran pastor must "exercise his judgment in protecting the interests of those in danger."<sup>50</sup> In acting to protect existing and future victims, a pastor should, at a minimum, call the police.

<sup>47</sup>C.F.W. Walther, *Law & Gospel: How to Read and Apply the Bible* 233-234 (2010).

<sup>48</sup>Wisconsin Synod Evangelical Lutheran Synod, *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* 156 (1993).

<sup>49</sup>*The Pastor-Penitent Relationship Privileged Communications: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* 12 (1999).

<sup>50</sup>According to the Missouri Synod, "Where a communication is made (whether in or outside the context of the confession) suggestive of an intended and/or imminent harmful act such that the person's or someone else's safety would be jeopardized if steps were not taken to hinder the penitent, a pastor must exercise his judgment in protecting the interests of those in danger." *The Pastor-Penitent Relationship Privileged Communications: A Report of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod* 14 (1999).

<sup>43</sup>Victor I. Vieth, "What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse," 40(4) *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 257, 261-264 (2012).

<sup>44</sup>Anna C. Salter, *Predators: Pedophiles, Rapists, And Other Sex Offenders* 29 (2003).

<sup>45</sup>This is a case the author consulted on.

<sup>46</sup>Luke 23:39-43.

## Conclusion

Martin Luther believed “Children’s faith and lives are the best, because they hold fast to the Word and simply know God, and they believe in God for certain, just as He said and promised.”<sup>51</sup> In responding to the sin of child abuse, Lutheran pastors and teachers must be careful not to damage the simple faith of the little ones in our midst. In fulfilling this obligation, the writings and conduct of Luther and C.F.W. Walther provide a treasure of sound theological practice. Let us mine these riches to the glory of God and the benefit of children.

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<sup>51</sup>Charles Daudert (Ed), *Off the Record with Martin Luther: An Original Translation of the Table Talks* 392 (2009).

# Cherishing Our Children

“Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.’” Mark 9:36-37

Over the past several years, the idea of welcoming children has taken on new meaning for congregations. Out of the growing awareness of child sexual abuse, child sex trafficking, and child pornography, congregations are being inspired to put their faith into action and do something to address and prevent these tragedies in children’s lives.

Cherish Our Children is a national Lutheran ministry of prayer, education, relationship-building, and action to prevent child sexual exploitation. We work to more deeply engage ELCA synods, congregations, and members in prevention.

We began in a Bishop’s Task Force in the Minneapolis Area Synod in 2005. Since then, we have spread to congregations in ten synods, and we are committed to expanding further.

In this article I would like to share with you how several congregations and synods are implementing this ministry.

## Prayer

We have a vision that ELCA members will pray regularly for children, ages birth to 25. Research on adolescent brain development tells us that the decision-making part of the human brain is not fully functioning until ages 23-25, so we want to keep our children, youth, and young adults in prayer during all of these critical years.

Within the baptism service of the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal, congregation members promise to pray for the child being baptized. We want to make sure congregations are fulfilling that promise.

At Valley of Peace Lutheran Church in Golden Valley, MN, congregation members are matched with children at baptism. A member of the Cherish Our Children Team is present at the baptismal font with the family, sponsors, and child to be baptized. The parents are given the name of the congregation member assigned to their child. That member will pray for that child through the age of 25, unless he/she moves or otherwise cannot fulfill that responsibility.

At Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Ashland, WI, children are prayed for by name each Sunday during the Prayers of the People. They cycle through all the children over the course of several weeks, and they include prayers for members who are assigned to pray for the children individually.



*Out of the growing awareness of child sexual abuse, child sex trafficking, and child pornography, congregations are being inspired to put their faith into action.*

First Lutheran Church in Manhattan, KS uses a variation on this method. They found the baptism dates for all the children in the congregation. Each Sunday, they pray for the children who are celebrating the anniversary of their baptism during the coming week.

At a Minneapolis Area Synod Assembly, the Cherish Our Children Task Force provided prayers for children, with different sections read in English, Spanish, and Amharic (the Semitic language used primarily in Ethiopia).

## Education

We have a vision that ELCA members will be equipped to prevent child sexual exploitation in their families, congregations, and communities. We encourage congregations and synods to provide educational opportunities for their members and the communities in which they are located.

In the Northwestern Ohio Synod, the Cherish Our Children Task Force has a goal of training every rostered leader in the “Stewards of Children” material which is created by the organization Darkness to Light. The Bishop and Task Force members see the importance of rostered leaders knowing more about how sexual abuse happens, how to prevent abuse in congregations, and how to report abuse.

A couple at a Lutheran church learned a son-in-law was involved in child pornography. Because the congregation was engaged in the Cherish Our Children ministry, the couple knew that this wasn’t just their problem, it happens to other “good” families, and their church was with them in facing this problem.

In the Upstate New York Synod, the Women of the ELCA have embraced the Cherish Our Children ministry since 2008. The women’s groups in congregations throughout the synod have started prayer ministries for children, educated members about preventing child sexual abuse, and done service projects for local organizations that work with abused children. Numerous congregations and conferences invited Patrick Crough, author of *Serpents Among Us*, to educate members about how perpetrators get access to children and groom them for abuse.

## Preaching

We have a vision that ELCA preachers – through the proclamation of the Word - will bring Christ’s love and hope into the difficult and troubling world of child sexual exploitation. Whether it’s general awareness of the injustice of child trafficking, the importance of “safe child” policies, or the promise that God is with us in our suffering – preachers have an opportunity to open up a topic that generally does not get discussed in our congregations.

This fall, I was able to be a guest presenter at a senior preaching class at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. In 2006, I completed my M.A. thesis which was entitled, “Release to the Captives: Preaching on the System of Sexual Exploitation.” I shared information from my thesis as well as preaching experiences I have had on this topic.

When I do a sermon on preventing child sexual exploitation, I use the following multi-layered “hermeneutical lens”:

- Luke 4:16-21, what I think of as Jesus’ mission, which includes proclamation;
- Other Scripture themes and stories, such as
- A widow preventing her children from being taken into slavery (2 Kings 4:1-7)
- Jesus welcoming a child (Mark 9:36-37)
- Jesus blessing the children (Mark 10:13-16)
- Paul freeing a slave-girl (Acts 16:16-19)
- Lament to God for protecting the vulnerable (Psalm 83:1-3)

- Herod killing the children (Matthew 2:13,16)
- Information about child sexual exploitation, including trafficking, child pornography, child sexual abuse and how it can be prevented;
- The service of the church, i.e. how the church can be active in mission on behalf of vulnerable children.

I also covered the following topics in the Luther class:

- Reasons to give a sermon;
- Reasons why we don’t;
- Caring for the congregation;
- Caring for yourself;
- Living in the tension.

*Preachers have an opportunity to open up a topic that generally does not get discussed in our congregations.*

I am available to give this presentation at other seminaries and conferences. Please contact our office if you are interested.

## Relationship-Building

We have a vision that ELCA members will connect with organizations in their communities that also work to prevent child sexual exploitation. There is a growing “prevention community” around the world, and more people and organizations are getting involved to change systems and behaviors so exploitation doesn’t happen in the first place. Even organizations that primarily work with the recovery and healing of victims of sexual violence often have a prevention education component of their services.

As a Diaconal Minister, my role is to stand at the intersection of church and world, bringing the needs of the world to the church, and the service of the church to the world. I make it a part of my job to be among those who provide direct service to victims of sexual violence. I learn from them about what is happening. I also hear great interest in having faith communities be a positive influence in preventing child sexual exploitation. While there are some who are very angry at and negative about “the church,” for the most part, people in the prevention community see faith communities as one of very few multi-generational opportunities for equipping people in prevention. They genuinely want faith communities to get involved.

We encourage congregations to look around in their communities, see what organizations are there, learn what is going on, and build relationships with others who care about prevention. For example, Our Saviour Lutheran Church in Rochester, NY discovered that the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has a regional office in New York. The congregation worked with them to host a forum on Internet safety which was open to the entire community.

## Action

We have a vision that ELCA congregations will be engaged in action to prevent and address child sexual exploitation. “Action” is a rather wide category. I tell people that out of your prayer for children, your educational efforts, and your relationships in the community, you will figure out your action project. Examples we have seen so far include adopting “safe child” policies, organizing service projects for local youth-serving organizations, and advocating for children to government officials and business entities.

I am a member of a “Cherish Our Children Congregation”: Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in south Minneapolis. Three years ago we passed “safe child” policies to better protect from abuse the children and youth who participate in programming within the congregation (using the Bible verses above on our cover). Last year, out of concern for the sex trafficking of children (the FBI lists Minneapolis in the top 13 for amount of child trafficking), members wrote letters to Minnesota state legislators last year, encouraging them to support “Safe Harbor” legislation to recognize trafficked children as victims of a crime rather than criminals. This fall, the Council adopted a resolution asking Backpage to do more to stop the trafficking of children that happens through that website.

This past summer at the ELCA Youth Gathering, we led four “Practice Justice” workshops, at which over 325 youth and adult leaders from 19 states learned about child sex trafficking and wrote letters to their legislators encouraging “Safe Harbor” legislation. We were pleased to expand the “Safe Harbor” work beyond Minnesota. We also had wonderful partnerships with Baptist Friendship House and Polaris Project to provide these quality workshops for the youth.

Members of Faith Lutheran Church in O’Fallon, IL wrote letters to Dairy Queen, expressing their disappointment about a certain television commercial which gave an inappropriate message to girls and boys.

## The Hope of Prevention

I do the work of preventing child sexual exploitation because I find hope in the possibility that we, as people of faith, can do something to make the life of children better. When we look from the perspective of prevention,

we see that we have choices. We see that there is more we can learn to intervene, identify, and report abuse. We see there is a great need for prophetic voices and organized action to disrupt the systems established to exploit children.

I also get excited about congregations being “good neighbors” in their communities. When we prevent sexual abuse in our congregations and families – when we work to prevent abuse and exploitation in the broader community – we can be those good neighbors. We can be known as the church that truly welcomes children.

## Resources available

To help congregation members with their prayer for children, we have a book entitled *Prayers for Cherishing Children* by Nancy Rogness. It includes prayers for each day of the month, for eight age categories of children. Please contact our office to obtain a pdf of this booklet.

We have a Congregational Manual that explains how to set-up a prayer ministry in your congregation. Please contact our office to obtain a pdf of this Manual.

We publish the Wednesday Prayer, a weekly e-devotion focused on one of the lectionary texts and preventing child sexual exploitation.

We offer a bi-monthly e-newsletter, the E-Quipped for Prevention, which provides ministry stories, resources, and how-tos.

Our website provides current and past issues of these e-publications as well as a way to join our mailing list.

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# Boundaries: A Challenge to Vulnerable Religious Professionals

As a pastoral counselor and clinical social worker of almost 40 years, I have had the privilege and responsibility of counseling over 500 pastors, religious professionals and seminarians.

Several “truths” are clear to me as a result of my work: these men and women are largely dedicated to preaching the Gospel, administering the sacraments and tending to the needs of their people. They are also often overwhelmed, naive and unprepared for the work they are asked to do. They or we at times get “in over our heads” with the people we serve. We are in Henri Nouwen’s words: Wounded Healers.

As a result, (I include myself), we are vulnerable to being caught up in the drama of our congregations and our people and may cross sexual, emotional and financial boundaries. In this essay, I propose that all Lutheran religious professionals should be required to participate in boundary and ethics training and should, especially early in ministry, be asked to participate in professionally lead peer group consultation. I will cite research done by a psychiatric staff at Baylor School of Medicine.

The following assertions about religious professionals and boundary violations inform this essay:

1. There is a high need for recognition and affirmation that increases the professional’s vulnerability to crossing boundaries.
2. There is a lack of awareness and training about boundary issues on the part of many religious professionals.
3. Most who violate boundaries are seldom perpetrators, but wander into violations innocently.
4. The religious professional is responsible for establishing and maintaining emotional, sexual and financial boundaries.
5. A psychiatric diagnosis can often be given to those who violate boundaries in a dramatic way.
6. The level of stress placed on the religious professional and his/her family, the expectation of 24 hour availability and living in a “fishbowl” increases the tendency to be unable to know boundaries and to understand one’s effect on others--to put the self in the place of the other.
7. The isolation of the pastoral office contributes to the level of stress and to the difficulty in setting limits.



*We at times get “in over our heads”  
with the people we serve.*

8. Grateful parishioners lack an understanding of how to appropriately recognize their hard working and sometimes underpaid religious leaders.
9. Those in specialized ministry who have even more intimate encounters with the faithful and those they counsel are both more vulnerable to violations due to the intimacy of the contact and usually more highly trained to spot danger signs both in themselves and their care receivers.
10. Those specialists can support other religious professionals by supportive conversation, training and consultation.

The following brief scenarios are examples of conversations between the religious professional and those in his or her life impacted by and responding to a boundary violation.

*Religious Professional to his wife: “No one really appreciates how hard I work and what I do.”*

A survey of several hundred candidate-for-ministry psychological evaluations at Care and Counseling in St. Louis suggest a very high need for recognition and affirmation. This is confirmed by a review of the profiles of those who have been in ministry and seek a review of their suitability for the work. We desire to make a difference and seek confirmation for our efforts. When we are not affirmed, we tend to feel empty. That emptiness can lead to resentment, extra work and a desire to find reward and solace at the expense of our professional relationships. This is when it may be tempting for the professional to share too much with a member of the congregation or to accept special attention.

*Religious professional to her colleague: "My best friend is a member of my congregation"*

While many who are preparing for ministry are cautioned about getting too close to congregants and counselees, many also end up becoming dependent on those relationships due to the amount of time spent with and emotional energy invested in the people served. What is more, members develop huge emotional investments in us. From their perspectives, we listen like others seldom do. We take time and emotional energy to be completely available. We often become bigger than life to our people.

The boundary that is often crossed because of these special relationships is that which divides the professional from the personal relationship.

*Religious professional to his therapist: "I never intended our relationship to become so involved! There was such a powerful feeling of love and compassion between us."*

Pastors, pastoral counselors and chaplains are often perfectionists, eager to help to a fault and sometimes omnipotent in rescue fantasies, according to a study published by Baylor College of Medicine. This study of a group of Episcopal clergy suggests that it is not helpful to label boundary violating religious professionals as "bad pastors" or as perpetrators, but rather to understand them as having a life that is out of balance and in need of support. In addition, this study also states that clergy who violate boundaries are often unaware of the impact of that violation on congregants, counselees and the larger church. They cite a growing body of research that suggests that boundary violators cannot easily "mentalize," that is imagine, what is in the mind of those who have been violated.

*Religious professional to his attorney: "My parishioner approached me. I did not seek this intimate relationship. We decided that we were both adults and could manage the relationship. It went south three months later."*

This is a rationalization and denial of professional responsibility. It is true that people initiate special relationships with us. We are often the only people in their lives

*There is a high need for recognition and affirmation that increases the professional's vulnerability to crossing boundaries.*

who work to understand what it going on.

The clergy person and religious professional is responsible for establishing and maintaining safe boundaries, settling limits and avoiding conflict of interest situations regardless of who attempts to initiate a closer or special relationship. The law is clear about this "fiduciary responsibility" as are the codes of professional ethics of all professional helping organizations.

Many relationships that begin between religious professional and congregant or care receiver seem workable and good to all involved. It is not unusual for such relationships to sour as reality sets in and the professional is seen to be the other-than-idealized person initially imagined.

*Religious professional to a colleague: "This is work to me! I have a very small spiritual life. I do not even pray or meditate regularly."*

The absence of a regular spiritual discipline creates a vacuum that might be filled by attraction to sex, money and affirmation. It is not uncommon for the religious professional to have little to no spiritual discipline and it is very common to hear religious professionals have a hard time remembering when they last worshipped with their families.

The LCMS Council of Presidents issued a statement in 1990 calling the church's attention to this challenge for the professional church worker. There is still, to my knowledge, no established guideline designed to nurture the spiritual life of the professional church worker.

*Religious professional to her district president or bishop: "I do not understand why I need to be talking with you. I also do not understand the need for you to require me to get counseling."*

Driving many boundary violations is stress, isolation, depression and anxiety. A team of psychiatrists working with clergy note in a Baylor College of Medicine article entitled, Professional Boundary Violations and Mentalizing in the Clergy, note the following:

“A variety of psychiatric disorders may underlie this feeling that one’s sense of calling has evaporated—e.g., depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. Among the consequences of this loss of purpose are professional boundary violations. Priests in this situation may become more concerned about gratifying their own needs than looking after the needs of others in their congregation.”

*Spouse to offending religious professional: “How do I know that you will not get into trouble again?”*

Once someone has crossed boundaries, promises not to do so again are not enough. It asks too much of the pastor or educator. It also puts the burden of keeping boundaries on the family in that the spouse becomes the monitor. Training, consultation and professional accountability need to be built into a rehabilitation plan. It is not uncommon for marriages to be put at jeopardy especially after a sexual or financial boundary has been crossed.

*Specialist in Pastoral Care and Counseling to a colleague: “I thought that I knew better! How many people have I counseled over the years and nothing went awry?”*

The more frequent the contact and the more intense the pastoral care, the greater the likelihood of violation. As pastoral relationships deepen and become longer lasting the resulting feelings do as well. Care receivers begin to assume that we understand them in ways others never will. They also can begin to assume certain rights of contact with us that are not available to them in other relationships. They may begin to call at odd hours or assume certain liberties with us because “we really know them.”

A special danger is that we may begin to assume some of the same things and lower our guard and begin responding to these important and wounded people in ways that we might never have imagined. This is especially true of the professional who does not access professional consultation.

So, what are we to make of all of the above scenarios? I have seen and heard them played out in my office hundreds of times. I have dealt with the painful results of boundary violations while consulting with dozens of congregations and church leaders. I have seen pastoral professions and families destroyed as a result of sexual and

financial boundaries crossed.

The research is clear. The following areas need to be addressed:

A. Education of religious professionals and congregations about boundary issues that includes the following:

- a. Discussions of the fiduciary duty of the professional to protect congregants and set limits.
- b. Teaching about the emotional forces at work when pastoral care is given and received.
- c. A description of the importance of appropriate and inappropriate touch – including with children in the congregation.
- d. Mandatory refresher seminars on boundaries at least every five years.

*I propose that all Lutheran religious professionals should be required to participate in boundary and ethics training.*

B. Addressing isolation, the single most common reasons religious professionals violate boundaries by:

- a. Requiring first call professionals to participate in professionally led colleague support groups during their first three years of ministry.
- b. Teaching congregations ways to monitor the balance in the life of their called professionals and to hold their professionals accountable to time off, relationships outside of the congregation and to family time off, where the family is expected to worship elsewhere.

C. Addressing the spiritual life of the religious professional by:

- a. Offering spiritual direction to pastors.
- b. Focusing on spiritual practices during seminary and college formation.
- c. Inviting congregations to consider offering Sundays off to their professionals, so that they can worship with families either at their calling congregation or elsewhere.

D. Remedial work and outside support needs to be given by district presidents and bishops to church workers who are in especially difficult congregations:

- a. Following workers in troubled congregations.
- b. Empowering specialists in pastoral care and counseling to be available to church workers – especially during professional church worker conferences.

c. Referring struggling church workers for counseling before boundaries are crossed and offering to pay insurance co-pays for those workers if necessary.

Calling professional church workers is a sacred act of a congregation that is endorsed by our church body. Greater attention needs to be paid to the training and nurture of those workers at the same time that lay leaders are trained to attend to the boundaries that must be preserved in congregations.

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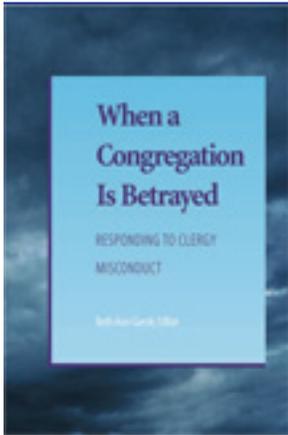
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## Book Review



***When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct***

*By Beth Ann Gaede, editor  
Herndon, VA 20006  
Used by permission*

Book review by Beth Ann Gaede for the Contributors (Candace R. Benyei, Nancy Biele, Richard B. Couser, E. Larraine Frampton, Nancy Myer Hopkins, Patricia L.

Liberty, Matthew Linden, Loren B. Mellum, Deborah J. Pope-Lance, Glennady Skully, Mary Sellon, Dan Smith)

Once a clergyperson has betrayed a congregation's trust, what can be done to help everyone affected respond effectively, experience healing, and fulfill their roles and responsibilities in the congregation and elsewhere? Specifically, how can a congregation that has been betrayed heal—that is, integrate the event into its history, identity, and ongoing life?

When a Congregation Is Betrayed offers strategic resources to help clergy and lay leaders answer these questions—and ultimately to survive and serve well in congregations where clergy misconduct has occurred. Many books, videos, curricula, and organizations address clergy misconduct and its effects on congregations, and the resource section at the end of this volume lists a number of valuable tools recommended by the contributors. In the earliest conversations that led to the development of this book, however, we asked ourselves, “What is missing? What do congregation leaders need to know that no one else has covered?” During many hours of telephone conference calls held over the course of about a year, it became clear we were being called to write a book that focuses on misconduct by clergy involving adult victims.

Those who have contributed to this volume are well aware that some misconduct in congregations involves neither clergy nor adult victims. Anyone who has paid attention to news reports in recent decades has read or heard tragic accounts of clergy who have abused children and whose misconduct has often been covered up by church authorities. Numerous books have also been written about the problem. Little has been written, however, about clergy misconduct involving adults, a more complex issue. Many people have a hard time recognizing

misconduct involving adult victims for what it is—not a matter of a “relationship” gone awry but an abuse of power. A differential of power between two adults seems subtler and more difficult to understand than the obviously unequal power between an adult and a child. Of course, we could easily blame the media for failing to cover power dynamics in clergy relationships and for focusing instead on abuse of children, an issue whose drama can be captured in headlines and sound bites. But it seems apparent to us that church leaders themselves—clergy, lay leaders, denominational officials—have little interest in wrestling with the implications of this fact: whatever their ministry setting, clergy have power and authority that can be abused. Rather than address yet again clergy abuse of children and youth, we focus instead in this resource on the abuse of adults, an issue that has gotten little attention among the general public.

The other decision we made when developing this book, one already implied, was to focus on misconduct by clergy, although we recognize that other leaders in a congregation can betray members' trust. Youth directors, musicians, childcare or Sunday school teachers, bookkeepers, and financial secretaries—anyone, paid or volunteer, who is entrusted with a responsibility or has authority over others—can violate the privilege of the role. And no matter what the offender's position, the fallout in a congregation when misconduct occurs can be deep and long lasting. Still, clergy play a unique role in the congregational system. As Rabbi Edwin Friedman, family systems therapist, explains: “The overall health and functioning of any organization depend primarily on one or two people at the top, and that is true whether the relationship system is a personal family, a sports team, an orchestra, a congregation, a religious hierarchy, or an entire nation.”<sup>1</sup> In a congregation, the pastor is usually one of the people “at the top” on whom the well-being of the entire system depends. No one else in a congregation fills the office of the pastor, a role that grants power, authority, and responsibility to the clergyperson not available to any other person in the congregation.

As the outline for this book evolved, another need became clear to us. Although many resources discuss the dynamics of clergy misconduct, nothing had been written about what we came to call “strategic survival tactics” for leaders of congregations where clergy misconduct has occurred. These leaders include both “afterpastors”—clergy (interim or settled) who follow offending pastors, and lay leaders who may themselves have witnessed or been

victimized by the offending clergyperson. Both groups of leaders, as well as the judicatory staff who support them, need guidance about how to assess and effectively respond to the misconduct, so that they as individuals and the congregation as a whole can maintain personal wellness, care for the victim/survivor, and carry out the mission and ministry to which the congregation has been called.

The large majority of clergy serve their congregations with great integrity. A relatively small percentage—by most estimates, somewhere between 10 and 15 percent—will choose to abuse the power inherent in their role. This abuse of power, or misconduct, may be sexual and may range from hugging too long or making inappropriate comments to severe offenses, such as engaging in sexual intercourse with other staff, members, and even children. Misconduct may also involve financial misdealings, including embezzling congregation funds or arranging to receive a member's estate upon the member's death. Some misconduct would probably strike observers as merely foolish or incompetent, such as attending to personal commitments and "skipping out on" a major congregation event, perhaps the annual children's Christmas pageant. This book is not primarily concerned with the lesser offenders on this continuum but rather with that small percentage of clergy who have had complaints brought against them and have been found by a careful and fair disciplinary process to be unfit for ministry in a congregation.

The contributors to this volume have all worked with betrayed congregations as afterpastors or consultants, and several have also taught and written about clergy misconduct. In this book, they draw on their professional expertise to provide nontechnical guidance for the leaders in congregations where misconduct has occurred. They write not only for people who are professionally interested in the betrayed congregations, but for those who must deal day to day with the aftermath of clergy misconduct. They give readers tools to engage congregation members in the issues surrounding clergy misconduct, so real healing can occur; provide resources to help congregations understand the victim's/survivor's experience; and offer strategies to help afterpastors and other leaders survive personally, thrive and serve well, and manage situations that might never be good.

Congregations are called to be instruments of healing in a broken world. When a congregation is betrayed by clergy misconduct, however, its capacity to bring about that healing is greatly diminished. Although all healers are in some way wounded, congregations that have been betrayed are dealt a blow that can nearly consume their energy and drain resources into activities that feed unproductive, internal anguish. Such congregations—as a body and as individuals—can no longer carry out the work God calls them to do.

Those who have contributed to this volume remind us, however, that God is all about relationships, and therefore, so are we. We follow Jesus, who has modeled for us how to be in relationships in a way that allows people to reach their greatest potential, to live authentically and ethically as they serve God and neighbor, and ultimately, to prepare for the reign of God among us. We offer this book with hope—hope for the members and leaders of congregations that have been betrayed by clergy, that they may be healed and may one day be restored to the mission and ministry to which God calls them.

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*Beth Ann Gaede is a pastor of the ELCA and an editorial consultant to the Alban Institute. In addition to "When a Congregation is Betrayed: Responding to Clergy Misconduct", she has edited the Alban publications "Congregations Talking About Homosexuality: Dialogue on a Difficult Issue", "Size Transitions in Congregations", and "Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations".*

#### Note

1. Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 221.

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