Strategies for Counselors and Christian Leaders

Responding to Abuse in the Church

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My professional worlds

Tired yet of abuse in church news?

God has placed us in such a time as this:
- To lead an awakened church in caring for the least of these within our midst
- To illustrate Christian concern for justice to those outside the church

Learning objectives

- Review common pitfalls...in church responses to abuse allegations in the church
- Explore benefits and challenges of managing your multiple roles
- Effective strategies for leading congregations and church leaders

Putting it another way...

- Identify why we need to be prepared to be church consultants
- Clarify consultant roles and responsibilities
- Develop action steps

Danger? Abuse allegations tempt us to act before we are ready
### I. Mis-steps and Pit-falls

In the church, leaders, AND consultants

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### Why?

- Why do churches and individuals fail to respond properly to abuse allegations?
  - Individual reasons?
  - Corporate reasons?

  No one is for child abuse... So why do many fail to respond well?

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### Problems even after response?

- Focus on "getting past" scandal
- Half-truths
- Silence
- Sharing the blame
- Seeing problem as isolated incident

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### We never do “nothing”

> “It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.”

*Judith Hermann, Trauma & Recovery, p. 7*

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### Remember:

- The first decisions/actions after learning about an abuse allegation WILL determine how well a church will respond
  - Crises always encourage reactivity
  - Your job is to help leaders to take a breath before responding

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### What about us?

- Our failures include
  - Failures to respond well to abuse allegations
  - Failures to clarify our role/purpose
  - Failures to follow consultant best practices

  When confusion reigns... we become either reactive or passive
II. Consultant Roles
Managing roles and expectations

The church NEEDS you!
- Someone who
  - Understands the causes and impact of abuse
  - Understands how offenders operate
  - Loves the church and isn’t out to shame
  - Can make recommendations for next steps and point out resources
  - Help keep everyone’s eye on the RIGHT goals

The players in the drama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAD</th>
<th>SUPPORTING</th>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paid staff</td>
<td>Lay leaders</td>
<td>Congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alleged perpetrator</td>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>Victims of other abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim(s)</td>
<td>Family members</td>
<td>Larger community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigators?</td>
<td>Counselors</td>
<td>The press?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laywers?</td>
<td>Consultants</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Church board</td>
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What role(s) do you play?
- Fact-finder?
- Mandated reporter?
- Adjudicating church discipline?
- Counselor (to whom?)
- Consultant to church board?
- Communications director?
- Mediator?
- Member?

Example:
- Consultant to Senior Pastor on difficult cases
- Advises church board
  - Asked to meet with alleged perpetrator to hear story and to make recommendations to church
  - Later asked to be perpetrator’s counselor
- Concerns?

Benefits and challenges
- You get it; you understand; you can help
  - But...
- What are you REALLY being asked to do?
- Role overlap creates opportunity for misunderstanding, hurt feelings, legal liability
Managing roles

- Informed consent is your friend
  - Don’t be passive, offer possible clear roles and limits to those roles
  - Define roles
  - Acknowledge multiple relationships
  - Discuss conflicts of interest
  - Discuss options
  - Clarify limits to confidentiality
  - Be wary of unintended breaches
  - Be wary of private or sidebar conversations

- Avoid tempting roles
  - Do not offer legal counsel!
  - Do not assess individual you have not met!

- Clarify remuneration
  - Gratis? Hourly rate? Either way, devise a contract!

Determine your role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Advisor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have depth</td>
<td>Have depth AND breadth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell</td>
<td>Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide answers</td>
<td>Ask great questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control or uninvolved</td>
<td>Collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supply expertise</td>
<td>Supply insight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze</td>
<td>Synthesize</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


Know when to back out

- Reasons you might bow out of your role
  - Mis-representation of your roles
  - Repeated refusals to follow basic plan
  - Harm to clients
  - Remember who you serve!

Self-assessment and care?

- Watch out for burnout
- Watch out for embitterment
- Watch out for arrogance
- Watch out for loss of faith and worship

You cannot sit on a garbage pile and not begin to smell

What is your antidote?
III. Effective Strategies
Educate • Deter • Train • Respond

Core consultant tasks
- Listen well
- Assess system/individual SWOT
- Cast vision
- Identify solutions & resources
- Maintain motivation
- Manage pace
- Build hope
- Review progress

Core consulting arenas
- Educate
  - Abuse; impact; foundations for church responses
- Deter with Policies
  - To deter predators
  - To avoid risk
- Train
  - Moving from idea to action
- Respond
  - Ministry to victims, perpetrators and congregation

A visual to help?
- Repent
- Rectify
- Ministry
- Network
- Plan and Train
- Educate

Preparing for mercy ministry
- Educate
  - Abuse/impact
  - Abusers
- Deter with Policy
  - Allegations
  - Prevention
  - Assessment
- Train and Respond
  - Victim/family
  - Offender/family
  - Community

Define: values/goals
- What do you want to undergird your work?
  - Protection of the least of these (victim/offender)
- Mercy Ministry focus (vs. outcome)
  - What would be considered a mercy?
Additional values?

- Love and truth?
- Purity?
- Redemption?
- Healing? Restoration? (To what?)
- Engagement with non-church experts?
- Fairness?
  - Is there a danger to this?

Preparing for mercy ministry

Educate

- The whole church
  - Start with Scripture
    - True Religion: James 1:27
    - Mandate to submit to governments: Ro 13; 1 Pet 2
  - Note: more than just to avoid the millstone!

Educate

- Develop a theology of oppression to explain impact of trauma
  - 5 facets of oppression (the opposite of love)
    - Abuse of power
    - Deception and false teaching
    - Failure to lead
    - Objectification
    - Forced false worship
  - Failure to love violates the *imago dei* and the Trinity?

Communal *Imago dei*?

*Human beings reflect the character and essence of God most fully* when they relate to each other as fellow members of a covenant community—one founded on unity, diversity, and sacrificial love.

Distorted *Imago dei*?

So...

If personal identity forms through interwoven relationships with other members and with God—a reflection of the perfect communion within and between the members of the Godhead—then evil done by one community member against another violates the true picture of communion as expressed in the Trinity.

Monroe, in Schmutzer (ed.), *The Long Journey Home* (ch. 13)
Incidence of abuse
- 75x more likely than pediatric cancer
- 40% of pre-teens have been solicited on-line
- 30% women abused before age 18
- 15% men abuse before age 18

Acknowledge lasting impact on individuals
- Relational anxiety
- Physiological alterations
- Spiritual confusion

Identify community helps:
- Safe, hope-filled, boundaried relationships that enable
  - Victim to be heard
  - To have dominion

Develop a larger view of healing
- What constitutes healing?
- How do we participate in God’s healing?
- Remember: some healing is immediate, other healing grows day by day

Entire church re: offending behavior
- Why it finds a home in the church
- How predators tend to act
  - Who they choose
  - How they use religion and faith as a cover
  - How they respond when accused
- Entire church on mandate to report
  - Biblical and legal

Explore ancillary themes: forgiveness, reconciliation, restoration, restitution, etc.
- What is the rush?
  - Why forgiveness now?
  - Point in time? Attitude?
  - Why reconciliation now? What bothers us most about brokenness?
- What does repentance look like?
  - What about restitution?

Get to know your local law enforcement, child protection advocates, prosecutors, counselors
- Treat them as teachers and supporters, not enemies!
- Learn from other Christian groups
Final education reminder:

- Consider your own propensity for sin
  - It isn’t just other people who are vulnerable
  - Choose to live in the light with fellow sinners

Three important books

- Langberg, D. *On the Threshold of Hope*
- Salter, A. *Predators: Pedophiles, rapists, and…*
- Schmutzer, A. *The Long Journey Home*

Preparing for mercy ministry

- Educate
  - Abuse/impact
  - Abusers
- Deter with Policy
  - Allegations
  - Prevention
  - Assessment
- Train and Respond
  - Victim/family
  - Offender/family
  - Community

Don’t reinvent ministry wheels

- Learn from other churches
  - Prevention and deterrence policies
  - Ministry to victims
  - Ministry to offenders

Deterrence policy

- Background checks and beyond
  - Childcare/Teen ministry regulations
  - Risk reduction (e.g., limiting contact)
  - Family training

Allegation policy

- Who is in charge? Who manages details? Who knows the details?
- What will happen once abuse is known?
  - Reporting? Assessing? Communications? Ministry supervision?
  - Special case for leader abuse?

Do not make decisions in large-group settings!
Sample procedure for clergy sexual abuse case

Victim related interventions
- Stabilize
  - Address safety matters
  - Prioritize the victim's connection to worship
  - Determine leadership oversight (don't forget gender issues)
  - Speak to attempts to lay partial blame on victim
- Support
  - Form small group of "listeners" who can support victim's voice and therapy

Offender related interventions
- Commitment focus
  - Focus on big picture motivations and main truths
  - Encourage action while pressure is on
  - Validate small signs of repentance
- Support
  - Provide ongoing safe place for spiritual care for offender and family

Sample procedure for spiritual care teams

Key assessments
- Victims
  - Spiritual needs of victims and family members
  - Ongoing legal/civil stressors
- Offenders
  - Ongoing legal/civil/employment stressors
  - Motivations of offender/family; Stated goals?
  - Transparency? Caught? Confessed?

Spiritual care team approach
- Small group designed to pastor
  - Contains both sexes
  - Wise, not necessarily professional
- Supported by leadership and outside resources
- Place for worship, self-evaluation, encouragement, and growth
The purpose of the SCT is...
- Support and assistance [for] acute spiritual needs
- Receive comfort, opportunity to dig deeply and repent deeply, and grow spiritually (there may be other roots, but team will explore spiritual roots)
- To bring hope to those who are broken, disillusioned, and in need of restoration

From Wilson et al, Restoring the Fallen

Prepare the SCTs
- Spiritual work means warfare: Worship!
- Group learning (biblical and experiential)
  - Abuse, abuse of power, deception/denial, their impact on others, protection, true and false repentance, restoration, restitution, forgiveness, healing, etc.
  - Restoration processes (time, process, fruit?)

Group training
- Group functioning needs practice!
  - With and without ministry target
    - Who leads, who confronts?
    - How are decisions made?
    - Who communicates with outsiders?
  - Common areas of weakness?
    - Validation; good questions; listening for what is missing

SCT trajectory for restoration
- Protection from self and others; boundaries set
- Truth-telling about the abuse
- Submission to process and acceptance of spiritual mentors
- Discovery of roots of abuse and other sin (naming things from God’s view; hearing from others)

SCT trajectory for restoration
- Deeper Truth-telling about life patterns and God’s sanctifying work
- Restitution (acknowledges injustice and seeks to correct it)
- Repentance (from actions and attitudes)
- Reconnection to the larger body of Christ
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t forget about the church!</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Common message in sin revelations in the church?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pray for brother _______. Don’t talk about it.</td>
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<td>- Assume there may be</td>
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<td>- Hurts in the church body</td>
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<td>- Confusion</td>
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<td>- Others who need to repent</td>
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<th>Address key topics</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>- How does God meet us in our times of trouble?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What does it mean to love? To forgive? To hold accountable?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What is grace?</td>
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<td>- What is healing in a broken world?</td>
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<th>Prepare for pitfalls!</th>
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<tr>
<td>- False or partial repentance</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Blaming/defensiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pressure for mechanical restoration</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Calls for fairness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Power struggles</td>
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<td>- Devaluing the grace of restriction</td>
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<th>A word to the guides</th>
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<tr>
<td>- Watch out for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loneliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Bitterness</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Remember who and why you serve</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Remember your own need for holiness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Restore gently...repent boldly</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fixing past mistakes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Assessing failures</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Acknowledging mistakes and impact</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Rectifying errors</td>
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When the offender is a leader
- Refuse all forms of cover-up
- Do not allow person to leave with their reputation
- Call it what it is: pastoral sexual abuse
- Provide spiritual care; don't promise restoration to position
- Choose truth as an adornment over reputation

Case 1: Who needs to know?
- 51 year old missionary on furlough
  - Undisclosed history of teen porn use; discovered by daughter’s fiance
  - Denies acting out since coming to Christ (at 22)
    - Admits to date rape at 18
  - Consultant focus
    - Guiding values?
    - Assessment/Actions?
    - Response?

Case 2: Can you believe her?
- 14 year old adopted daughter reports AF is having sex with her
  - Teen is known to be a chronic liar
  - Consultant focus
    - Guiding values?
    - Assessment/Actions?
    - Response?

Case 3: Offender returns
- 2 cases
  - Member wants to return to church after serving sentence (no victim in church)?
  - Member wants to return to church after serving sentence (victim in church)?
  - Guiding principles?
  - Ministry responses?

A vision for the church?
- PHP 3:12 I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
- ISA 61:1 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

www.wisecounsel.wordpress.com
### Helpful websites


### Helpful articles & chapters


### Helpful books