

Shalom!

A JOURNAL FOR THE PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

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Responding to Abuse in the Church

THIRTY YEARS AGO, the Spring 1991 edition of *Shalom!* was on “Confronting Sexual Abuse.” This was in the wider context of the Anita Hill sexual harassment allegation against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, a significant case of sexual abuse by a Brethren in Christ lay leader, and denominational conferences on sexual abuse. It was a difficult time, and opened my eyes to the reality of abuse, especially within the church context. The stories were painful in 1991. Thirty years later, the stories are still painful to read.

We might like to think that we have come a long way since 1991, but then we hear after his death last year how Ravi Zacharias, revered among many evangelical Christians, had harassed and abused multiple women for many years even while he was carrying on a very public and respected ministry. Other prominent politicians and Christian leaders have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct, and there seems to be no end to the stories of sexual abuse in families, even Christian families. And of course, there is the ongoing scandal within the Catholic Church of sexual abuse by priests and its coverup for many years.

Perhaps some think that we in the Brethren in Christ have generally been shielded from this problem, but we haven't been. One of the stories in the 1991 edition was by a woman who was sexually abused decades ago by her father, a Brethren in Christ pastor whose name would likely be known by some readers. I have little doubt that there are untold stories in our churches

right now. Studies have shown that the prevalence of sexual abuse in Christian families is very similar to the general population, and those studies don't necessarily include abuse perpetrated by a pastor or youth leader.

This edition of *Shalom!* focuses on responding to abuse in the church—both when leaders or regular churchgoers are the perpetrators (not only of sexual abuse but also spiritual abuse) and when victim-survivors of abuse in other settings need the loving care of the church. Two Anabaptist-related organizations addressing child abuse and abuse by church leaders, respectively, offer their resources. A summary of the Brethren in Christ US procedures for addressing sexual harassment complaints among its employees provides one model for how congregations and other church agencies can be prepared in the event of allegations. Then there are the stories: sexual abuse by a father, by a future father-in-law, and an example of the effects of a generational cycle of abuse.

Let's shine light on the darkness of abuse and commit ourselves to ending it:

For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light—for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:7-11).

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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Only in the Future: A Story of Hurt and Healing

Echoing Hope: An Excerpt

By Kurt Willems

JOY AND PAIN aren't enemies. They are companions. The highs and lows of life dance together more often than we'd like to admit. When life graces us with contentment, we may feel enticed to ignore hidden layers of struggle. When stress bombards our momentary happiness, it's as though those gifts that energized us are now elusive, like oil through our fingers. Joy and pain, hope and anguish, stability and disruption—these stand shoulder to shoulder in the real world. As a generally optimistic person, it's taken me years to see that my positive outlook was directly shaped by an insecure childhood. But it wasn't all bad.

In 1994, I was a lanky fourth grader with

two front teeth that hardly fit my face and unruly hair that was either styled as a flattop or forced to succumb to Grandma Wahl's clippers. Yet I was a generally cute kid according to most of the pictures.

California's Central Valley was home. Sunshine and outdoor play, rec league sports, playdates (we didn't call them that back then), the churning of Grandpa's homemade ice cream, trampoline dunk contests with uncles and cousins, occasional trips to the mall's toy store, and swimming pools to cool me down—these frequently cultivated joy and grit in me as a child.

My parents divorced when I was a toddler, and in the years after, Mom had primary custody and Dad cared for me every other weekend. Not an ideal arrangement for any child, but having both parents in your life—even if not in the same household—is a gift that not all share.

On New Year's Day of my fourth-grade year, Dad remarried and asked me to be his best man. Although we were somewhat deprived of time together, we had a great relationship. At home with Mom, joy and pain coexisted in a more obvious way. With a new boyfriend entering our lives when I was about four, the joy she brought to me as a nurturing mother was intertwined with the pain of abuse. There was fear. There was joy.

The greatest blessing during those years were the gifts of a younger brother and sister. Many of my early memories involve us being silly or having adventures together. My brother and sister are six and eight years younger, so being "Bubba" to them was a role I took pride in.

I'd later learn that my brother and sister didn't show up on our doorstep as gifts from a stork. They were the beautiful gifts that came from a tragic relationship. From about 1989 until 1995, Mom endured an abusive relationship. I doubt it started that way, but I can't recall a time when he felt like a safe presence. With him, my primary emotion was fear. Numerous times, Mom was abused physically and verbally in front of me. I saw it all. I experienced his violence directly at

times as well.

One situation shortly after Dad's wedding sticks with me, and it isn't unlike other stories of abuse from those years. I can describe it from the perspective of all five senses because that's how vivid this memory is to me. (Even now as I type, tears are starting to well up.)

Recalling the place and time in my mind, I can feel it. The fear sweeping over my body as I lay in my lofted bed as a fourth-grade kiddo. The feeling of being smacked in the face about three times as I lay helpless.

The memory is also something I can see. The flash of light—although difficult to describe—that seems like it happened milliseconds before the hand impacted my face. The wall of my bedroom that I faced to try to escape the danger. The blurs fading in and out as tears clouded my vision. The window in my room that faced the street, perhaps the next level of escape if I dared try.

I can still hear this moment of abuse. The screams of my mom pleading with her boyfriend to stop hitting her and to leave me alone. The shaming yell of being called a bastard. The slamming of a treasured picture frame containing a recent image of me and my dad posing, as groom and best man, for the wedding album. The shredding sound of the photo being ripped into pieces.

The smell stays with me as well. The musty scent of an old pillow as I buried my face to protect myself from a possible second wave of violence.

I also taste the intensity of this moment. The salty drizzle flowing down my cheeks toward my mouth. The bitter flavor that comes when you've been force-fed an overdose of trauma.

I remember how it ended each time too: with the loud roar of a motorcycle driving away. I was safe, for now.

As much as I have wanted to forget that moment when my mom's long-term boyfriend came home drunk and beat her and smacked me, it lingers. The scars are real. They will always be there, no matter how much the wounds might heal. Pain and joy



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didn't coexist in that moment. Only pain that echoed in my inner emptiness. My helplessness. Fear. Anger. It was like my home life was a dark cave from which escape was momentary, only to be confined to the darkness again and again. I knew Jesus when I was at church, but did he know me when I was at home? Many times I felt all alone, wondering if my vacant cries for rescue would be answered.

I needed Jesus to be in the room with fourth-grade Kurt. I needed him, like the disciples claimed to experience, to mysteriously appear with me without needing the front door. I had composed the place, and he was nowhere to be found in my moment of great need. Where is Jesus? I couldn't see him. At least not yet.

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Church in Seattle, WA, a Brethren in Christ church plant. He also maintains the resource website Theology Curator (theologycurator.com) and hosts the Theology Curator podcast.

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Dove's Nest: Keeping Children Safe

By Anna Groff

CHILDREN ARE QUICK to love and wired to trust, and Jesus understood that. In Matthew 18, Jesus elevated children (which was quite countercultural) and their faith as the "greatest in the kingdom of heaven." He also understood how easily their simple trust and love can be taken advantage of.

According to child advocate Victor Vieth, the reference to a "stumbling block" (Matthew 18:6 NRSV) could be a reference to any sin, but especially those sins that damage one's faith. These sins are viewed by God in the harshest possible terms, as we read in the millstone drowning passage. Some scholars believe that Jesus is especially condemning the sin of sexual abuse here, referring to relating to a child in a sexual manner.

Reading this makes many of us squirm with discomfort and fear. But Jesus did not shy away. He treasured and protected children, just like we are called to do in our context. Child abuse has occurred during all time periods, the time of Jesus and today. This message remains important for us to hear in church settings, especially since 93 percent of perpetrators describe themselves as "religious."

Jesus also knew how destructive it is for children when sexual and spiritual abuse are interwoven. Christian counselor Diane Langberg writes, "Children, like adults, learn about the abstract by way of the concrete. For example, we grasp infinity by looking into space. We grasp a bit of eternity by gazing at the ocean. Or we learn about God's love through the love in our home." But for a victim or survivor, they may learn about love with and through the experience of sexual abuse.

Therefore, Dove's Nest: Faith Communities Keeping Children and Youth Safe has been working tirelessly for 12 years to prevent all kinds of child abuse and neglect in all settings. Our steps for safety include:

- Create and implement protection policies for faith communities;
- Train adults in abuse prevention and healthy boundaries;
- Empower kids through the Circle of Grace curriculum;
- Offer consultations for policies and situations.

I am hopeful. Churches are educating adult volunteers on best practices and implementing policies on how to respond to boundary violations/abuse. Leaders are creatively supporting families during the pandemic and listening in new ways to survivors and their wisdom.

In 2019, many leaders requested resources on healthy boundaries, appropriate touch, and modeling consent. When COVID hit, these requests dramatically changed. Parents found themselves navigating digital safety with their children; churches worried about keeping kids safe from the virus, in addition to abuse; and we all worried about the mental health of the members of our various communities.

The pandemic has constrained our in-person trainings. Nevertheless, this past year we have offered online and in-person events and consultations across North America. We also produced several new virtual trainings, which are available to you and your churches:

COVID-19 and Safety Training

This live Zoom training addresses the

unique vulnerability of children and youth during COVID-19 and what your church can do to prevent harm and support families during this challenging time and how we can prepare for the summer and fall as faith communities. It also includes best practices and safety tips for Zoom and virtual kids' programming for churches.

Understanding Trauma

This recorded Zoom or live Zoom training is an excellent resource for churches wanting to dig deeper into understanding and preventing various types of trauma as well as actively supporting survivors in faith communities. It includes information on the various types of trauma, brain development, trauma triggers, and an overview of Institutional Courage principles developed by Jennifer Freyd. There is an analysis of the core values of Anabaptist faith communities with special attention on how to balance peace, reconciliation, and justice when it comes to protecting the vulnerable.

38-Minute Training Video for Adult Volunteers

This 101 abuse prevention and healthy boundaries training video is designed specifically for adults volunteering in faith communities, such as churches, camps, or schools. In 38 minutes, the video covers information on child abuse and Jesus's message regarding safety for children, including why and how to implement a child protection policy, an overview of the Circle of Grace Christian safe environment curriculum for children and youth, reporting suspected abuse, tech safety and social media, child-on-child perpetration, and consent and safe touch.

Amish and Old Order Mennonites: Working Together to Prevent Child Abuse and Increase Child Safety (Cultural Awareness Training)

This 90-minute online training video provides valuable information for social service professionals on how to relate to Amish and Old Order Mennonite families and communities. Produced and led by Dove's Nest founder Dr. Jeanette Harder, it equips workers to conduct investigations, provide and connect families to services, and partner with Plain communities to prevent child abuse and neglect. This resource is offered as a stand-alone video training or as an enriched

training, including live Zoom consultation.

During the many changes of the past year, Dove's Nest remained uniquely positioned to keep all kids safer—from eight-year-old Sam, who joins virtual church and Zooms daily for school, to eight-year-old Sarah, an Amish girl without a screen in her life!

Jesus calls us to work to keep all children safe. We live out the Gospel message when we pay attention to the faith of children, show them God's love through our love, and respect their boundaries. We invite you to join us in this important work in your family, your church, and your community.

Anna Groff is the executive director of Dove's Nest, based in Omaha, NE. You can access the resources described at dovesnest.net.

Editor's note: A number of Brethren in Christ churches have already taken advantage of Dove's Nest trainings. Dove's Nest is eager to provide resources and otherwise engage Brethren in Christ congregations. Contact info@dovesnest.net.

#churchtoo: The Mistakes We Make

By Nicole Saylor

FOR 12 YEARS, a convicted child molester was one of my pastors in a church not affiliated with the Brethren in Christ. When his record came to light, our church (including me) and our leaders made just about every mistake that could be made. We naively responded out of a place of emotional attachments to our pastor and to the church itself. Regardless of church polity or theological leanings, research shows that we tend to make similar devastating and dangerous mistakes when responding to abusers in our midst. This article is intended to help guide church leaders when past or current abuse is suspected or alleged, as well as provide awareness for anyone attending a church so you can hold your leaders accountable and make informed decisions for your family.

#1 Mistake: Not getting outside counsel

This mistake is very common and extremely damaging. Even if you happen to have in-depth training in abuse response protocols, you are incapable of making unbiased decisions if you are connected with the institution in question, or if you know the victim, the accused, or their family members. Very early in your response process, call in an independent church abuse consultant (I recommend Jimmy Hinton, jimmyhinton.org), or an organization such as GRACE (netgrace.org). It wasn't until we began getting outside counsel that our previous church made any corrective steps. By then, the rip-

ples of so many years of dangerously wrong decisions had reached far into the community.

Key takeaway: An expert consultation could be the difference between you being an agent of healing or an agent of additional trauma.

Mistake: Lack of reporting

You are not an investigator, and even if you are, you are not an unbiased party to this situation. You are not trained to determine the veracity or the potential criminality of the allegation. If the situation involves a child, you must report potential abuse to law enforcement first, even if you can't imagine that it is true. If you're not sure that the alleged behavior constitutes a crime, report it anyway and let law enforcement sort it out. Once you have reported to law enforcement, then follow your church and denominational protocols. My husband made a mandated report that turned our lives upside down, but it was absolutely necessary, even though it went against the wishes of other church leaders.

Key takeaway: You personally have the ethical—and usually legal—requirement to report alleged or suspected child abuse to law enforcement, despite anyone else's opinion or direction on the matter.

Mistake: Solely obeying the lawyers

Your church or denominational attorney will likely be an important part of the team

which must be convened when there are allegations of abuse, but a lawyer need not be blindly obeyed. An attorney's duty is to protect and advocate for his or her client (in this case, the institution), which may not align with your mandate to protect and advocate for the vulnerable and the oppressed. An example of this from our previous church is when the police investigator required the church to send out letters to the parents of children who had attended our community preschool. Because of the advice of the church attorney, the letter was extremely vague; it did not name the pastor, his roles at the preschool, or his criminal convictions. The intent of the letter was to comply with law enforcement while minimizing damage to the reputation of the church, not to sincerely discover if children had been abused.

Key takeaway: Always weigh your biblical duty to care for the people in your church and community against the advice of your attorney.

Mistake: Misusing spiritual language or ideas

Most survivors of abuse in church contexts report that the church's response to their abuse caused more long-term damage than the act of abuse itself. With this terrible reality in mind, humbly guard yourself against using spiritually manipulative words and actions. There should be no pressure on victims or congregations to forgive an abuser. It isn't "gossip" to talk about abuse, to ask

questions, or to seek information. This is not the time to preach on “church unity” or “submission” to church leaders. Resist the temptation to manufacture a beautiful story of healing and redemption in the midst of a chaotic and traumatic situation. In our former church, leaders made all of these mistakes. One of the most damaging to us personally was a public call “to not let the devil continue to use troubles to divide us.” Through this prayer, those of us who were asking questions and requesting accountability were equated with the work of Satan.

Key takeaway: Bringing an allegation of abuse into the light is not an attack on the church or the reputation of Jesus. Leaders must humbly shepherd their people rather than use spiritual control.

Mistake: Blindly believing the accused’s narrative

Abusers are deceivers; there’s a reason people are usually shocked when abuse comes to light. They use half-truths, emotional manipulation, minimization, and flat-out lies to deceive you into believing a false narrative. They refer to the accuser’s addictions, troubled past, or history of abuse to cause you to doubt the claims of abuse. In our case, the narrative was this: a long time ago a troubled teen made a false allegation, and to save the accuser from the shame of being exposed as a liar in court, our pastor pleaded “no contest.” Years later, when lay members properly researched the publicly available records, we learned that this narrative was mostly false. While it is true that you are not an investigator, you *do* need to seek truth. Talk to previous employers. Look up court records. Talk to the parole officer. What were the initial charges? Can you get a copy of the police report? What was the sentence?

Key takeaway: Make every attempt to verify the facts in the accused’s version of the story. The guidance of an independent abuse consultant will be helpful if you aren’t sure how to proceed.

Mistake: Misunderstanding repentance

Pastor and abuse expert Jimmy Hinton says, “It’s not just what wolves do, it’s who they are.” They are not broken sheep who stumble into sin; they are predatory wolves who sneak into the flock and use religious concepts to devour the sheep. As such, they

know how to act and what to say when caught. True repentance is not a tearful confession. Repentance is a complete turning away from the sin. For a child sexual abuser, repentance includes accepting lifelong legal, social, and/or vocational consequences (such as never again being a pastor, a teacher, or a coach). The vast majority of sexual abusers return to their deceptive and deviant ways.

When his criminal record became known by the congregation, our former pastor tearfully apologized to the church for not telling us about his criminal history. Many congregants immediately laid hands on him in prayer as they expressed their forgiveness and gratitude for his years of ministry. Most saw it as a beautiful expression of Christian ideals, yet it was all a manipulative show by an abuser. How do I know that? A year later, he was preaching in another congregation—a congregation that he had (once again) not told about his criminal history. This is evidence of his lack of repentance, despite his convincing tears and apparent brokenness for the exact same behavior a year earlier.

Key takeaway: Carefully discern true repentance from emotional and spiritual manipulation. If the words of repentance do not align with the actions of repentance, then the repentance is false, or at least dangerously incomplete.

These mistakes are depressingly common and so very detrimental to our calling to live out the Gospel. Ironically, because of my former church leaders’ attempts to hide the truth and manipulate a certain outcome, the story of this small congregation became front-page news in a national newspaper.

Here is my prayer for the Brethren in Christ family of congregations:

Jesus, help us to reflect the love that you have for the oppressed and the vulnerable. Let us be agents of healing and not of additional trauma. Please shine the light of truth onto dark secrets to bring about healing from sexual abuse, especially abuse perpetrated within our own faith communities. May we respond to abuse allegations and survivors’ stories with the humility and wisdom that comes from knowing you.

Nicole Saylor and her husband are the parents of five children. She has a degree in music therapy, but

spends her days caring for the needs of her children and advocating for children with ichthyosis (a genetic skin condition). She and her family attend Mechanicsburg (PA) Community Church (Brethren in Christ).

Resources:

1. Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment: www.netgrace.org.
2. Abuse Advocate and Pastor Jimmy Hinton: www.jimmyhinton.org.
3. USA Today “The Tongue is a Fire” (the investigative journalism story about our former church): www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2020/02/13/southern-baptist-sex-abuse-pastors-history-divided-church/4586698002/
4. Survivor Sanctuary podcast episode, “Interview with a Whistleblower: Meet Nicole Saylor.”

Editor’s Notes

Subscription renewals and contributions:

Thank you for your very generous response to the 2021 subscription renewal letter. Our expenses in 2020 totalled almost \$4,000, and already we’ve exceeded that amount. Of course, printing and postage costs continue to increase, so if you haven’t already renewed and/or contributed, we still encourage you to do so. The subscription rate is \$20 for one year, and we continue to welcome additional contributions. Checks should be payable to Brethren in Christ US and sent to the editor (address on page 2), or renew online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom/.

Topics for 2021: Last time, I noted that potential topics include foundations for active peacemaking, stories from the global Brethren in Christ Church, and economic justice. Given what is happening in the world and the church, we decided to interject this edition on responding to abuse in the church. Contact the editor if you’re interested in writing or if you have other suggestions for topics.

Spiritual Abuse and the Unconsciously Narcissistic Pastor

By Gwen White

WE DON'T LIKE to talk about power and pastors, but it's an important topic. The role of the pastor in many churches today places the senior (or solo) pastor in a position of authority that can encourage the development of an unconscious narcissistic slant toward relationships. The performance orientation that is needed to prepare and deliver sermons and design worship events can erode the pastor's humility in ways that are subtle and relentless. Parishioners' tendency to admire their pastors and impose high expectations on them for perfection creates an atmosphere in which secrecy about flaws can breed a denial of self-interest and human aggression that leads to grievous misuse of power. Reports of abuse of pastoral power and authority are becoming more pronounced. Here are some signs that abuse may be occurring and some recommendations for how to help with recovery from such abuse.

Signs that a pastor may be struggling:

- Lack empathy for their parishioners and an inability to take other's perspectives into consideration;
- Blaming others for difficulties and failures;
- When someone is discussing their own feelings/situation, shifting the conversation to concerns the pastor cares about or offers personal anecdotes that seem to indicate others (particularly the pastor) have bigger issues;
- Making parishioners feel responsible to meet their pastor's emotional needs, which may even take precedence over their own emotional needs;
- Thinking of parishioners as commodities, a kind of container for the pastor's self-esteem so that congregations are expected to give their pastors affirmation, admiration, and approval without exception;
- Allowing incidents to build up where parishioners report feeling manipulated to do or say things;
- Conditioning parishioners to see that their own worth is connected to what

they can provide for others or accomplish for others, particularly the pastor or mission they suggest;

- Not teaching about mutuality in relationships and often focusing on authority and "doing the right thing" (as defined by the pastor);
- Creating a situation where parishioners report an increasing inability to be emotionally close to the pastor.

Possible traits of a narcissistic pastor:

- *Flamboyant extrovert*: Entertainer, loved by the masses yet does not offer the same warmth and charisma to those who are in closer contact;
- *Accomplishment oriented*: Success and praise depends on what others can do, not who they are;
- *Psychosomatic*: Might use illness, aches and pains to manipulate others and to force attention to be placed on the pastor;
- *Secretly mean*: They have a public and private self. They do not want others to know who they really are and protect their "private space."
- *Emotionally needy*: This may not be obvious to onlookers, but these pastors are often emotional in more private settings and expect others to take care of their needs.

Signs that individual parishioners may be susceptible to pastoral abuse:

- They question their own judgment, thoughts and feelings.
- They tend to be oversensitive, think others will attack them, and they overact to what others say and do.
- They tend to find themselves in relationships with others who do not treat them well.
- Some are depressed and think they are unworthy of anything positive/love.
- Some do not notice their own wounds because they are used to tending to others.

What others can do to help people who have experienced spiritual abuse by a pastor:

- *Accept and grieve*: It is important that others validate the experience of a person who has been manipulated and used by a spiritual leader. They need to know that others see the injury they have experienced and will stand with them as they grieve the losses involved.
- *Explore autonomy*: Narcissistic pastors do not recognize their parishioner's initiatives and needs as separate from themselves, so those recovering from such treatment need time and encouragement to explore their gifts and contributions. They also need affirmation for exercising new levels of independent thought and action.
- *Feel worthy of love*: Everyone needs to know they are loved and worthy of it, but especially a person who has experienced guilt and manipulation by a spiritual leader will need reminders of God's love and welcome for them.
- *Engage in interpersonal growth*: Growth after trauma is a new field of exploration in psychology. Those who are recovering from events that caused a deep sense of threat to their security (eternal condition) and their attachment to others (God as judgmental and demanding) need to reframe these experiences and find new meaning in their own spiritual encounters.
- *Heal the internal fragile self*: Often what those who are recovering from spiritual abuse report is that their sense of themselves was altered by their encounters with abusive spiritual leaders. They experienced high levels of anxiety, grief, shame and self-abasement. Sometimes memories of these events will emerge over time. As the person is able to acknowledge these difficult feelings and practices of self-abuse, they begin to heal from dependency and other problematic results of the abuse.

Our churches would do well to be on the lookout for those who have fled spiritual abuse. In our sermons, worship music, and

groups, we can promote empathy, authenticity, kindness, compassion, honesty, vulnerability, and forgiveness as an antidote to the poison of spiritual abuse. People (including our leaders) need to experience among us the compassion of the Living Christ who demonstrates God's love for individuals and for the world based not on obeying the di-

rections set out by any group, but in genuine encounters with the Holy Spirit. We all have some narcissistic features, and in times of stress we act out of self-absorbed perspectives. In such times, the grace of our God is available. No secrets. No need to hide. No blaming and shaming. Repentance is a normal part of the Christian life. Let's practice

these graces together.

Gwen White directs Circle Counseling, Philadelphia, PA and attends Circle of Hope. She is a licensed psychologist, recently retired from teaching at Eastern University, and chairs the MCC US board.

Brethren in Christ US Sexual Harassment Procedures

Compiled from information provided by Peter Guinther, Human Resources Administrator, BIC US

WHAT FOLLOWS IS a condensed version of the document, "Brethren in Christ US Harassment Investigation Procedures," and applies only to direct employees of the denomination (e.g., headquarters staff and missionaries) and not to regional conferences and local congregations. However, it is probably fair to say that the procedures provide a blueprint for how sexual misconduct ought to be handled at all levels of church life.

In his cover note to the procedures, Peter Guinther noted:

For our BIC US staff, we have anti-harassment policies in our Employee Handbook. As a member of the Society for Human Resources Management, I receive continuous updates on recommended policies and procedures, and I pass these along to the directors as we review our handbook. Every two years we conduct anti-harassment training among all of our staff. This training is in the format of learning modules produced by Brotherhood Mutual. Every one of our staff completed this training before the end of January this year. After the training is completed and I receive the certificate of completion from each employee, I send them the Harassment Response Procedures as a reminder of our definitions and procedures should they have a claim they would like to make.

Whenever we have a new hire at BIC US, we run a background check, and if we have any volunteers who will be working with children, we have them complete the required state and FBI child abuse clearances. Over the past two years, the World Missions department has been

diligent in developing child abuse and neglect policies and protocols so as to address the issue among our international workers. We have several persons who have now been trained in "Response Team Training," should ever a claim of child abuse or neglect come to our attention, and we recently found a volunteer to serve as our child safety officer. World Missions belongs to the Child Safety and Protection Network, and we hope to have all our missionaries trained shortly in how to identify and report abusive situations.

Summary of the procedures:¹

Definitions of harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when, for example: a) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment; b) submission or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or c) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working environment.

Receiving a complaint: A harassment complaint need not be written. Responses will be conducted promptly. A response team will be chosen carefully, consisting of a facilitator, the human resources administrator (unless the alleged offender), a Leadership Council member, and may include others from a sister organization like Messiah University or Messiah Lifeways.

Interviews will be conducted confiden-

tially. Confidentiality helps to assure the integrity of the investigation—preventing destruction of evidence, tampering with witness testimony, etc. Notes of interviews, responses, dates/times, efforts, results, actions, and refusals will be kept. Gratuitous conclusions and speculations will be avoided, and what is said and seen will be recorded.

Interviewing the complainant: The interview of the complainant will be carefully planned beforehand and conducted in a private, neutral place. At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator should identify his or her role and ask the complainant whether he or she is comfortable with the facilitator and believes that an impartial response investigation can be conducted. If not, another person should be identified as the facilitator. The facilitator should also explain that BIC US is conducting a prompt and thorough investigation and if it determines that it has, will take appropriate corrective action. In addition, the facilitator should assure the complainant that harassment claims are taken seriously, information will be shared on a need-to-know basis only, and explain the procedure and expected time frame.

During the interview the facilitator should allow the complainant to complete a report form, find out exactly what happened, determine any prior history, determine any physical evidence (emails, voice mails, notes, gifts, etc.), find out whether there are potential witnesses, review key allegations, ask the complainant for suggestions on how the issue can be resolved, and explain the BIC US non-retaliation policy.

Together, the facilitator and team should not make any judgments until after the full investigation is concluded, and make a cred-

ibility determination at the time of the interview. The policy continues with instructions for planning the rest of the investigation and interviewing other witnesses, and then describes the interview process with the alleged offender.

Interviewing the alleged offender: At the beginning of the meeting, the facilitator should explain that a complaint has been brought, tell the alleged offender that BIC US prohibits retaliation, that the account must be truthful, and that information will be shared only on a need-to-know basis.

During the interview, the facilitator should explain the details of the allegations, obtain the alleged offender's account of what happened, and ask for potential witnesses. If the allegations are denied, the facilitator should ask about the complainant's possible

motivations; if the alleged offender says that conduct was welcome, the facilitator should ask for facts. In addition, the facilitator should ask for any physical evidence (letters, notes, emails, etc.) and whether the alleged offender is aware of the BIC US no-harassment policy and has had any anti-harassment training.

Reaching a conclusion, closing the investigation, and further follow-up: The response team will determine whether the conduct occurred and whether it violated BIC US policy, its severity, the pervasiveness of the behavior, and the degree of physical or mental harm caused by the conduct. When the conclusion has been reached, the response team will communicate to the complainant, each witness, and the alleged offender. All of these meetings should be documented. A

separate file for each investigation of sexual misconduct should be set up, containing a log of actions, interview notes, copies of all communications, witness statements, all documents which establish or refute the allegations, a copy of the current policy, notes about closing meetings, and any other follow-up meetings.

Endnote:

¹The BIC US procedures document is taken from two online sources: "Investigating Claims of Harassment: A Step-by-Step 'How To'—Part 1: The Complaint" (tinyurl.com/4xnpzejt), and "Part 2: Interviewing the Complainant and Planning the Remainder of the Investigation" (tinyurl.com/4xnpzejt), both by Mimi Moore. This article is a significantly condensed version.

Kyrie Eleison

By Zach Spidel

I KNOW A family that has been homeless for the last year and a half. Brandy (I'll call her) and her three children are dear to me and their story has broken my heart. Child Protective Services and other social service agencies are aware of their case. They were kicked out of the shelter for a time, could go back now, but choose not to do so. Instead, they're sleeping on various friends' couches and floors or in Brandy's dilapidated van. Our church has twice put Brandy in a new home and twice watched her and her children destroy those places in the chaotic dysfunction of their familial life. Our church has twice gotten Brandy a vehicle and watched as the vehicles were slowly destroyed.

Brandy doesn't really know how to care for such things, for herself, or for her three kids. The destruction and the chaos are not expressions of malice on her part, but they are real and they make it hard for us at the church or for social services to know what we can do to help. All this misery, as you might have been guessed, is the fruit of abuse. Brandy was abused by her stepfather as a child, and when she confronted her mother about this, she was thrown out onto the street at the age of 14 constituting another

sort of abuse. Her mother, before her, had been abused by a series of people, including by her husband who nearly killed her and whose early release from prison caused terror in the whole family.

The father of Brandy's children beat her and sexually assaulted her and did both in front of the kids at various times. She went back to him repeatedly, though I begged her as her pastor not to do so. Brandy's eldest son, who has seen and suffered so much, has become increasingly violent. To control him, Brandy tries to use more violence. She hits him, spits on him, and scratches him. He has left bruises all over her body in turn. In a recent event, nearly every member of the family was fighting every other member, leaving marks inside and out. Brandy's son now has a court date and will stand before a judge. I want to cry when I juxtapose that image in my mind with memories I have of him as a six-year-old eating dinner at my table and goofing off with other kids I had over at the time.

When Brandy's mother first shared the news of this latest incident with me, I was in the midst of preparing a sermon on David and Goliath. I had been meditating on how much bigger God is than all human prob-



lems and sin. Even so, I confess that my faith faltered a bit as I listened to the story told in intimate and disturbing detail. I felt completely overwhelmed in the face of this news. You see, I have personally worked with this family, sometimes at great personal expense in time, money, and energy, for nearly a decade. I don't say that to applaud myself, but to note for you why, after all that effort, I felt despair nibbling at my heart. Perhaps nothing is going to work? Perhaps this family's story can only end in tragedy? Perhaps I am a fraud? (Yes, I'm selfish and fallen enough to have thought about what this story meant about me.) I was afraid there was no hope; I was ashamed of what I felt to be my own inadequacies as a pastor; and, on account of my fear and my shame, I trembled before the giant of abuse. He shouted defiance at this little member of God's armies. He boasted. He bragged. He said that nothing and no one could stop him. I almost believed him . . . almost, until the Lord placed

in my hands one of the more potent spiritual weapons at our disposal—the power of memory.

Then I called to mind the deeds of the Lord. I remembered his mighty works of long ago. . . (Psalm 77:11). The Holy Spirit reminded me of other giants Jesus has slain in my own life. My own father grew up in an abusive environment. His story is not mine to tell in its entirety here, but he still suffers from PTSD due to some of the things he saw and suffered in his childhood. Like most abusive homes, his had moments of love. My dad's parents, like all those in Brandy's family, meant well. They were damaged people who loved as best they knew how. Sometimes, they just didn't know very well. Sometimes, their own pain got the better of them. So they passed that pain, in violent, sometimes

terrifying forms along to my dad. But he (thanks to God) did not pass that pain along further still to me or to my siblings. The giant of abuse was slain in my own family.

Now, as I think about the enormity of the pain and dysfunction that abuse has created in Brandy's family, I know I cannot slay the giant which bestrides their lives. But I know something else too; I know that Jesus is in the Goliath killing business. Abuse is a monster, a towering figure beside which even the Old Testament's Nephilim seem small. And yet there is hope for Brandy and her family. I can't quite imagine how things could get better from here, but I know Jesus has a better imagination than mine. I know he can make forgiveness, renewal, and change realities in their lives. I know that I can be a witness to that fact in my own life and a friend

to each member of this family insofar as they will let me. I know that when face to face with the knee-weakening juggernaut of abuse, I can cry out to Jesus with that prayer he so especially commended in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector: *kyrie eleison!*

Lord, have mercy on Brandy, and her children, and her mother. Lord, have mercy on my father and his parents and my own young daughter. Lord, have mercy upon every person and family and church intimidated, scarred, and scared of abuse. Lord, have mercy.

Zach Spidel is pastor of The Shepherd's Table, Dayton, OH.

Opening Church Misconduct Files as Ministry of Reconciliation

By Laura Sider Jost

IT IS SAID that when one person has harmed another, “if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church” (Matthew 18:17), but we know that the church can harm too. In the name of mercy, we have enabled abuse. In the name of reconciliation, we have pressed for forgiveness and unity where Jesus rather came to “turn a man against his father” (Matthew 10:35). Practitioners of restorative justice for sexual abuse focus on establishing victim-centered safety, truth, and accountability first. Only then can participants seek their own, often separate, paths to healing and reconciliation in community.

If churches are to bring Christ's ministry of reconciliation to the world, they must apply the principles of restorative justice to their institution. Sexual abuse is not simply a private problem of spiritual or mental health. It is a public health problem and a human rights problem. It calls for a church-wide truth and reconciliation commission. Mennonite Abuse Prevention (MAP), an independent nonprofit based in Harrisonburg, Virginia and Newton, Kansas, aims to make it easier to report and prevent sexual violence

among Anabaptists in the historic peace church tradition, including the Brethren in Christ. We maintain a confidential database of more than 200 reported cases of harassment, assault, and related abuses of power, as well as a public list of more than 50 credibly documented cases on our website. Many cases in the confidential database have already been credibly documented and are awaiting publication.

- An Anabaptist minister in Canada was found responsible for sexually violating women and children over many years. His church quietly removed his credentials, but the former minister returned to leadership roles in organizations that were not aware of this history of abuse. Years later, the church inexplicably and erroneously honored him publicly for 40 years of ordination. Victims of his abuses were terrified by his ongoing, unaccountable access to vulnerable people. They contacted MAP for support.
- An Anabaptist minister and licensed social worker in the US was found responsible for sexually abusing a person in his pastoral care, but the abuse was never re-

ported to his social work board. He moved to another state, continued to practice social work, and was later found to have abused clients again. MAP discovered the pattern through in-depth research, and it appears that no one had been aware of his repeated offenses: not the church, or the social work board, or those he had harmed.

Sexual violence is enabled in community and must be addressed in community: religious and cultural traditions need tools that help them fill the gaps and resist injustices of other response systems, while being accountable outside themselves. To prevent harm, we need mechanisms for routinely claiming and transforming the ways our identity systems can fail to prevent harm.

In every case we work on, MAP endeavors to serve and center victim-survivors and whistleblowers, working toward greater transparency and accountability in Anabaptist communities. In every case, we endeavor to show how churches respond to sexual harm, including the policies they use and the systems of power in play, providing a resource for tracking and understanding the

quality of those responses.

Mennonite Church USA recently updated their misconduct file sharing protocol to allow church agencies and related entities to inquire about past misconduct of credentialed leaders. The update also encourages conference leaders to revisit misconduct cases where previous processes may have “lacked integrity.” MAP commended the change, while noting that congregants and others in community with church leaders

need a way to know about abuses of power directly, so they don't have to rely on others in positions of power who may have conflicts of interest or who may not share their standards for reconciliation and restoration.

Opening church misconduct files is the work of a people reconciling with themselves, their neighbors, and God. Claiming and transforming the harm we have harbored is how we witness for Christ's ministry of reconciliation.

MAP holds reports of abuse cases in the Brethren in Christ church that have not yet been published. We welcome contact from anyone with information or documentation related to Brethren in Christ cases at info@themaplist.org or 540-227-4745.

Laura Sider Jost is executive director of Mennonite Abuse Prevention. She lives in Harrisonburg, VA with her husband and three children (and, full disclosure, is the editor's niece!).

I Believe in Miracles and Ghosts

By Carol Hand

SEXUAL ABUSE IS non-consensual and unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats, or taking advantage of victims. Most victims and perpetrators know each other.

In 2017, Harvey Weinstein, a famous Hollywood producer, was accused by more than 80 women of sexual abuse, ranging from making some uncomfortable with his words or requests all the way to rape.

It seems to have been a tipping point for victims to say enough is enough. Scores of men and some women have been fired or quit their high profile job or political position. #Metoo went viral as women and men came forward with their own horror stories of abuse and hurt. The big news item in early 2018 relating to young women and teens was when Dr. Larry Nasser, a premier doctor for the sport of gymnastics, received a 175-year sentence for sexually abusing over 150 women, many as young as 15. Over 100 gave impact statements directly to Nasser as to what this has done to their emotional, mental, and physical health.

Unfortunately these abuses and coercions are not just relegated to the world culture but have permeated even the church as a distortion of God's created perfection. Recently, the sexual deviancy of Ravi Zacharias has broken our hearts. Let our hearts break for his manipulated victims too.

The Scriptures tell the stories of sexual abuse victims. These tough stories are real life, real pain, and God does not whitewash or sweep under the carpet the human brokenness and sin. Dinah, Tamar, Bathsheba,

and others show us the depravity of mankind and the horrific lifelong hurt and injury that comes from it.

Between the ages of 15-17, I was groomed by an adult male authority figure in my church who I trusted and admired. He was a father figure, a spiritual mentor, my pastor, and my husband's dad. Talk about a very tangled web to unweave! We as a couple look at each other and give praise to God because our continuing love and commitment to our marriage of almost 48 years shows that God is still in the miracle business and this is our story.

For me, even at the ages of 15-17, there were these uncomfortable voices in my mind, “Danger! Something's not right!” But my father figure/pastor was saying out loud to me, “This is what fathers and daughters do.” Not having a close relationship with my own father, I wasn't sure of what normal and healthy fathers and daughters did, and so I was brainwashed, through verbal bullying, and the demeaning of my physical and mental attributes. I listened to the loud voice of my church father figure/pastor.

There came a point, when I was 17 and this person's touch progressed to a new level, that something inside me said, “No more. This is wrong!” I told another teenager in the church what had happened, but I should have gone to the police or my parents. I didn't want to “hurt the name of Jesus or the influence of my church.” I now wonder how many times those thoughts have been expressed by well-meaning church members or victims.

I am sure that many others were abused by my father-in-law. I did confront him on two occasions through the years, but he never felt that he had done anything inappropriate. He became angry and said, “You are trying to ruin me!” In fact, after telling his wife about my accusations, he said to me as a kind of weird apology that she told him he should not have done those things.

That reaction, I have come to understand, is a classic textbook mindset of a pedophile/sexual abuser. I regret that I did not get help working through the effects of sexual abuse sooner. In fact, I spent 10 years hating my father-in-law until God gently spoke to me about forgiving him. It takes a lot of energy to hate someone, and I came to the place of saying, “God, I'm willing to be made willing to forgive.”

I regret that I did not do more to stop it from happening to others, but that is what I've been doing these past years. In 2016, when my husband Pat's mom was near death, Pat and I found ourselves alone with his dad in the ICU waiting area. Pat's dad had been diagnosed with cancer and only had a few months to live. Pat, unknown to me, had decided to have a heart-to-heart chat with his dad to hopefully create a moment for repentance and restoration.

Pat, in his great way with people, gently and confidently once again brought up the sexual accusations of my teen years. As I was sitting there next to Pat and his 89-year-old dad, his dad said, speaking over my head as if I wasn't even in the room, “If I apologize to her, I would have to apologize to hundreds

of others.” Take a moment and let that statement impact your spirit.

This is one story. There are doubtless dozens of men and women reading this right now, living in secret shame and hurt. You have done nothing wrong! It is not your fault! There is freedom and healing in Christ.

If you have been abused there is help for you, not to merely be a survivor but also a thriver in Jesus. You do not have to be alone any longer. If there is anything that is said now that can help rescue you or someone else from this terrible abuse or help lead you and those who love and support you towards healing and wholeness, that would be another miracle.

Undoubtedly, there are also violators reading this article. If you are a violator, I beg you to fall into the arms of God and his love and grace, and beg for mercy and forgiveness. Face the consequences and seek the mercy of the court. You are breaking the law and you must stop. Turn yourself in to the criminal justice system for your crime. You do not understand the lifelong sentence you have placed on your victim and those who love them.

But if you refuse to stop, know that we will stand next to your victim, not behind the reputation of the church, or pastor, or “the cause of Christ.” We desire to model the great shepherd of John 10.

On the day my father-in-law died, I was in Asheville, North Carolina, packing our house to make our move to Wainfleet, Ontario. I had just donated some items to the local thrift shop and went in to check out the spring clothing selection. I remember where I was standing when Pat called me to tell me he just received a call from his brother that

his dad had died. We hung up and I heard a calm voice in my spirit say, “I’m sorry.” I know you are,” I replied quietly out loud. “And I have already forgiven you.” I believe in miracles and ghosts.

Some additional questions and answers:

Why is our culture quick to expose sex abuse and the church seems quick to cover it up? Unfortunately, churches have been good at wearing masks (“it’s all good”) and we feel like we have to protect Jesus and the Gospel. We just can’t believe this kind of stuff is so close to us.

I’m afraid to talk to my kids about this but afraid not to as well. What should I do? We warn our kids to look both ways when crossing the street. We warn them not to touch a hot stove or fire. We must warn them about people who want to touch them where swimsuits cover us—that’s not cool! But we can’t live in fear. We must remain calm. There are good men and women, family and friends, and teachers and pastors. We must learn to respect each other as God’s creation.

If I am a victim of sexual abuse, can’t I just find healing in praying more and reading more scripture? Our analogy: In 2018, I broke my leg. I could read Scripture and pray and find comfort and help, but I had to go to the doctor to get the specialized help I needed for the broken bone. God has made us to need people and need help outside ourselves.

What if I am currently being sexually abused or was in the past, or I know someone who is? Do not live in shame. This is not your fault. You are not alone any longer! Tell someone who will help you do something about it.

Carol Hand is a life coach for Coaching Life Leaders,

a ministry founded by Carol and her husband Pat. They also serve as the pastoral couple at the Wainfleet, ON congregation of Be In Christ Church of Canada. You can contact her at coachinglifeleaders@gmail.com.

Recommended resources in Southern Ontario:

- Elisha House offers a healing group for those who been impacted by sexual abuse called Shelter from the Storm. It’s offered at least two times a year or as needed. Elisha House also offers individual counseling. Contact elishahouse.on.ca or 905-735-9934.
- MCC Sexual Misconduct and Abuse Resource Response Team (SMARRT): <https://mcccanada.ca/learn/more/sexual-misconduct-abuse-resource-response-team-smarrt>.
- Life in the Vine, Liz Stryker, Biblical Counselling Services: 905-899-2939.
- South Niagara Life Ministries: Fort Erie, 905-871-0236; Port Colborne, 905-350-2363.
- Bayridge Counselling Centres: 905-319-1488.
- Attachment and Trauma Treatment Centre for Healing, Lori Gill: 905-684-9333.
- Lidkea, Stob, and Associates: 905-684-5050.
- Radius Child and Youth Services: radiuschild-youthservices.ca.
- Niagara Stress and Trauma Clinic: stresandtraumarelief.com.
- Niagara Sexual Assault Centre: niagara-sexualassaultcentre.com.
- Victim services Niagara: victimservices-niagara.ca.

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into the light. While these are not the words the author uses, she does write about experiencing exactly that phenomenon. Keeping secrets cripples us, while voicing secrets empowers us. Hurts and wounds kept in the dark are overwhelming, while bringing them into the light cuts them down to size. This book was one way to give voice to hurt and bring secrets into the cleansing light.

While the story is dramatic, the writing lacks a certain literary melody to give it buoy-

ancy and life, thus failing to fully transport the reader. Too often, unnecessary details are given that do not enhance or move the story, and other pieces of information are explained repeatedly as if the reader is not already aware of them. Pet phrases are also overused leaving the reader wanting some more imaginative choices. One can feel the book is still in manuscript form needing the cool eye and firm hand of a capable editor.

In the end, *Light Shines in the Darkness*

is a book of searching, healing, and survival that readers may find helpful in their own journeys as it can be healing and encouraging to see one’s own struggles in someone else’s story. The author hopes that this book may bring light and voice to those in silence and darkness.

Lois Saylor attends the Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church and serves on the Shalom! editorial committee.

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BOOK REVIEW

Only in the Future: A Story of Hurt and Healing

By Lois Saylor

LIGHT SHINES IN *the Darkness: My Healing Journey Through Sexual Abuse and Depression* by Lucille F. Sider is a book about self-discovery and at the same time self-delusion. It is a self-told story spanning more than 50 years from age six to over 60, entailing a journey of hurt and healing with three connecting and intertwined concerns: a foundational diagnosis of bi-polar disorder, several episodes of sexual abuse, and a restrictive religious upbringing (in a Brethren in Christ family in Canada). These three overriding influences create a life of recurring depression and mania, losses and regrouping, finding new worship expressions, and seeking sustainable ways to foster mental and spiritual health. The author's strong intellect, an abiding faith, and strong will (although sometimes defeated by depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome) propel her to keep pursuing health, healing, and wholeness.

In the narrative, we learn about her family life, her continuing education, various work and life experiences: clinical and pastoral work, two marriages and divorces, her son, close supportive friends, her spiritual journey, and the trials and triumphs in the world of mental health programs and treat-

ments. She relates several different sexual abuse episodes realistically without ever becoming overly explicit, which will help the uninitiated understand the issues without getting overwhelmed by them.

The writing style itself reflects a rhythm of too-high highs and debilitating lows. One gets the impression this may not be the author's intent but simply a by-product of her struggles. It can feel as if there are times when she is unaware of her lavish highs and overly profusive language. A more cogent and effective writing style occurs when she relates the arrest and criminal procedures of one of her abusers in a chapter called "Fifty Years." The title hints at how long she waited for this moment as she relates various reckonings of past events in her family's life. And here the reader ardently roots for right to be done.

Sprinkled throughout the text are helpful truths or lessons. At one point she writes, "When one has an emotional breakdown, it tricks you into believing that you are inadequate in all areas of life—finances, profession, friendships, parenting" (150). Often these truths are prefaced by a recurring tagline of "I will realize later" or some variant thereof which underscores the idea that during the struggles these truths are often hid-

den and discovered "only in the future" (230). When working with seniors, she notes that projects are helpful to mental health, but "having a purpose is crucial to . . . well-being" (134). There is both a link and a difference between a project and the higher calling of purpose.

Like others before her, she concludes that holding resentment towards an abuser only hurts herself and that "Only living out of mercy and forgiveness will I be free" (259). However, these are truths that cannot be forced on hurting and abused people. Individuals must be allowed to have these realizations in their own time in the healing process. There is one instance of a family member bringing up forgiveness which seemed too soon and inappropriate. We must allow that forgiveness and mercy will wax and wane as wounds reopen and heal again. For the author, her time of contemplating forgiveness comes late in life and through a mystical experience. It comes when God deems the time right and brings his healing power.

One lesson or truth other books on depression and abuse explore is that of giving a voice to one's secret hurts or bringing them

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