

MINISTRY TO THE CLERGY OFFENDER'S FAMILY

Derek and Ann Legg, family therapists who deal with offending clergy, state that, "The family of the clergy person who has been a sexual offender is truly a primary victim of his or her betrayal. The spouse has suffered a betrayal of the marriage vows, a betrayal of trust in an intimate partner, loss of reputation, loss of role in their church and community, and sometimes even loss of faith in God. If there are children, they suffer the loss of a secure family and faithful parents, loss of reputation, and possible loss of their school and friends. Parents and siblings of the offending person may suffer humiliation, grief, loss of reputation and friends".

There are several common themes that run through the families of offending clergy.

Betrayal

The breach of trust that occurs through infidelity brings with it a sense of heartbreaking betrayal. It does not matter whether the object of the violation was male or female, young or old. The relationship has been betrayed. The health and recovery of the marital relationship of the offender and spouse is not often an ongoing concern of the church they have been serving.

Loss of Status and Role

Though the spouse of offending clergy is "not guilty", they often are included in the censure. In a sense, both were called to the church. They have lived and served in the fishbowl together. Now the spouse is without a place to be. There is no one to share the anger, hurt, humiliation, pain, and fear. "Who am I now without this place in life?"

Economic Issues

Many times there are no severance packages for those guilty of sexual misconduct. The loss of monthly income, often the loss of church owned housing, are frightening realities. Even when food and support is delivered by members of the church, pride and shame must be swallowed with every contact. "How will we make it? What will we do?"

Illness

Depression often occurs in the spouse in the aftermath of sexual misconduct on the part of the clergy. Emotional stress is capable of bringing on many forms of serious mental and physical illness.

Blame

Often blame is charged to the spouse for not having fulfilled the needs of the clergy spouse. Somehow they are guilty of having failed to prevent whatever sexual misconduct occurred. It is simply hard for some churches and members to fault their spiritual leadership.

Repercussions For The Family

The children of offending clergy are hit hard. Their trust levels have been destroyed. They must deal with the anger that comes from humiliation and change. In smaller towns, “everyone knows what happened”. Often it means new schools, new friends, new sports teams, etc. The security of family has been destroyed and they are afraid.

Churches must be made aware of all these needs and many more for the family of offending clergy. Love, nurture, counseling, support are just a few of the things they need. How will a church, who itself has been wounded, care for the family of the clergy caught in sexual misconduct?

FURTHER CONTACTS:

Counseling and Psychological Services Center

Victim Response Teams