



Understanding and Preventing Clergy Sexual Misconduct with Adults

Diana Garland, Ph.D
Dean, School of Social Work
Baylor University





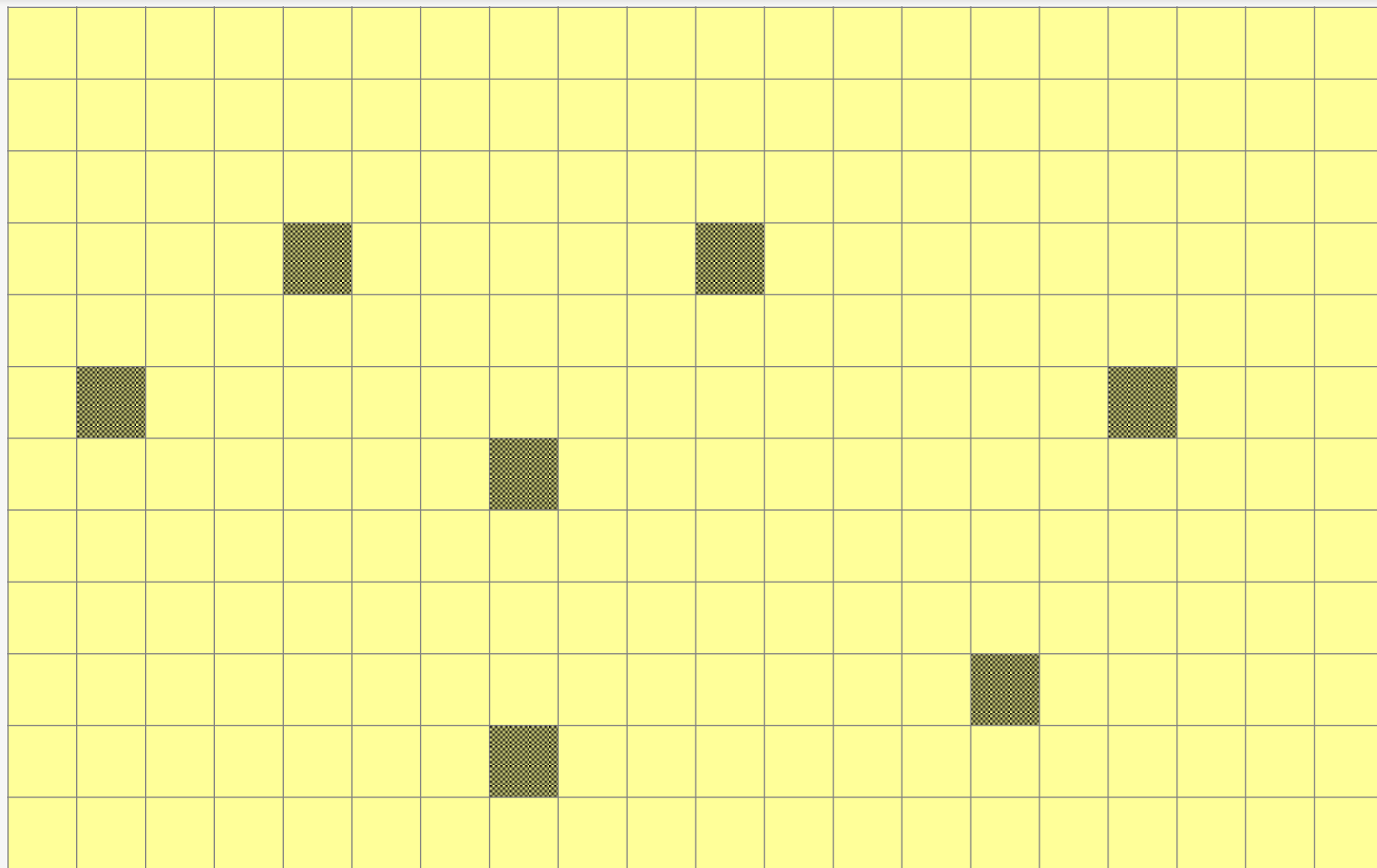
THE FACE OF CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT



What we learned:

- 1 out of 33 women in church
- 92% of these advances were “secret”
- 67% of offenders were married

Women in Average American Congregation



More Findings . . .

- 63% told “someone”
- Less than 5% told religious authority
- 8% of all have experienced CSM in their congregation

Religious groups represented:

- Catholic
- Baptist (SBC and General Convention),
- Methodist
- Lutheran
- Seventh Day Adventist
- Disciples of Christ
- Latter Day Saints
- Apostolic
- Calvary Chapel
- Christian Science
- Church of Christ
- Episcopal
- Friends (Quaker)
- Mennonite
- Evangelical
- Non-Denominational
- Reformed Judaism

About gender:

- 42 (91%) female
- Most offenders were male
- Most victims were women

How congregation allows . . .

- ✓ Ignores warning signs
- ✓ Niceness culture
- ✓ Private communication easy
- ✓ No oversight
- ✓ Conflicting roles
- ✓ Trust in the sanctuary

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Wendy's husband

“The pastor said he was sorry for what happened. He said he emotionally got too close. He said he was trying to help. He said he would keep the desk between them. My mind was fuzzy. So I agreed to let him counsel her. He would come to our office [of the family business] and counsel her there.”

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Out and about in the community, calling on congregants in the hospital or at home
Often alone in the office. There may be a secretary, but he supervises her and she depends on him for her job, so she may not feel like she can say anything, or that anyone would believe her.

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Tess . . .

He started talking to me about marriage and divorcing our spouses and working together in ministry because that is what God wanted. God had put us together for a reason. I believed him. He said, 'Sometimes there's pain, but there is a reason for it.' He talked about how he had thought about writing a book, and we would be good to write a book together. We were supposed to be together.

What We Can Do

1. Use language of misconduct and abuse, not affair.
1. Teach a Christian perspective on power.
1. Develop clear ethical guidelines.

Congregational leaders should:

- Provide spiritual guidance and teaching for congregants, congregational staff members, and members of the larger community.
- Treat staff and congregants with dignity and respect.
- Uphold integrity through honest communication.
- Nurture their personal religious life through prayer, meditation, and study.
- Maintain healthy boundaries with congregants by nurturing family relationships and/or friendships with others whom they do not also serve as religious leader.

- Refrain from making sexual overtures and engaging in sexual relationships (other than with one's spouse), or sexually harassing congregants, whether or not the leader and/or congregant is married.
- Be accountable to an identified supervisor or group of peers that conducts regular performance reviews, seeking input from members of the congregation.
- Avoid disclosing private information about congregants.
- Recognize the power dynamic in their role with congregants, using that power to seek the well being of those they serve and never for their own personal ends.
- Limit their professional role to pastor, teacher, or priest to avoid dual relationships and arbitrary boundaries with congregants.

- Provide time-limited pastoral care during times of crisis but avoid entering counseling relationships with congregants.
- Provide referrals to community agencies and professionals for congregants who need mental health or social services.

The Questions

1. Sometimes at work people find themselves the object of sexual advances or propositions from supervisors. The advances sometimes involve physical contact and sometimes just involve sexual conversations. Have you experienced such advances?
2. Now think about church, synagogue, or other religious settings. Since you turned 18, have you ever found yourself the object of sexual advances or propositions from a minister, priest, rabbi, or other clergy person or religious leader who was not your spouse or significant other?
 - Did this happen with a leader in a congregation you were yourself attending?
 - With how many different leaders has this happened to you?

... If yes, then about each

1. Did you and this leader ever become an openly acknowledged couple?
2. Was this leader someone to whom you went for counseling?
3. Was this leader someone who was at the time married to someone else?
4. Did you have sexual contact with this leader?
5. Was this leader male or female?
6. Did you become involved in an ongoing relationship with this leader?
7. Did this leader say or do anything to try to keep you from telling other people about the relationship?
8. Have you ever told anyone about this experience?
9. Did you ever tell anyone in a position of authority in your congregation, denomination, or religious group about this experience?

... and more questions ...

1. Do you know of other people who, as adults, were the object of sexual advances or propositions from a minister, priest, rabbi, or other clergy person or religious leader in a place you were attending religious services?
2. Were any of these adults close friends or family members of yours at the time they experienced this sexual advance?
3. If you or someone you know is a victim of sexual abuse, would you like to receive information about where you can go for help? If you would like to receive this information, please circle 'yes' below. By circling 'yes' you will receive this information by U.S. mail. This information will be kept confidential.

... disclaimer

These percentages all have margins of error. The widest 95% confidence interval is +/- 1.7% around the 3.9%, meaning that we are 95% confident that the percentage of female attenders reporting this experience with their own clergy is between 2.2% and 5.6%. This confidence interval will narrow when we receive the full data set. For example, if the 3.9% stays the same in the full data set but the number of female monthly attenders doubles to 958, the 95% confidence interval will narrow to +/- 1.2%.

The Race Factor

- 2.3% of White female attenders, compared to 11.8% of Black female attenders
- 50% of those victimized were Black

Other statistics

- 1758 respondents to these questions
- 43 experienced sexual harassment from someone (not just clergy)
- 24 have experienced a sexual advance from their own religious leader. Only one had sexual relations.
- Of the 24, 28 (65%) attend congregation at least monthly
- Taking sampling error into account, we are 95 percent confident that the true prevalence rate for regularly attending women lies between 2.2 and 5.6 percent.

2 Samuel 11

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. ⁽²⁾It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful.

(3) David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, "This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite." (4) So David sent messengers to get her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she went back home.

(5) The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁽⁶⁾ So David sent word to Joab, "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent Uriah to David. ⁽⁷⁾ When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. ⁽⁸⁾ Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house, and wash your feet." Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. ⁽⁹⁾ But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. ⁽¹⁰⁾ When he told David, "Uriah did not go down to his house," David said to Uriah, "You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?"

What are the differences in the Bible story and the movie rendition ??

The movie

- She sets it up—”she made him do it”

The Bible story

- He violates her private space and ritual

The movie

- She sets it up—”she made him do it”
- Uriah chose war over his wife

The Bible story

- He violates her private space and ritual
- David sent Uriah to war and had covenantal responsibility for Bathsheba

The movie

- **She sets it up—”she made him do it”**
- **Uriah chose war over his wife**
- **She was in control**

The Bible story

- He violates her private space and ritual
- David sent Uriah to war and had covenantal responsibility for Bathsheba
- He used all the power he could muster to trap her

The movie

- **She** goes knowing what awaits her and actually becomes the initiator

The Bible story

- **He** is in total control; this is not a consensual affair —it is rape.



Sexual abuse is inherently shaming



“He commits adultery with her,”

Better translation--

“he adulterates her”

“When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him” (2 Samuel 11:26).

1. Prophetic voices to tell the stories accurately of abuse and victimization.
2. Communities that support rather than shame.
3. Systemic controls on the power persons have over one another.
4. Families and communities that are safe havens.

Garland, David E., and Garland, Diana R. (2007)
*Flawed Families of the Bible: How God Works
through Imperfect Relationships* (Baker Book
House).



Understanding and responding to clergy sexual misconduct

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Workshop rules

- Know: Some attendees have experienced first-hand or second-hand clergy sexual abuse
- Respect: This is an emotional issue, and we need to be sensitive to what is and is not said and known about one another
- A disclaimer: We are using gender stereotypes here because of the issues of prevalence. But we will attempt to reach to gender inclusiveness as we talk!

Just in case . . .

This is a hard topic. Don't feel you have to share your story, and do NOT share someone else's story without their permission.



What clergy sexual abuse looks like:

Susan's story



A social worker who is known and trusted in the community welcomes into her office Susan, a 35-year-old first-time client and a member of her own church. Susan is obviously distraught. No, she answers, she has never been in counseling before. "I am not quite sure where to begin," Susan says. But she plunges into her story, as though fearful that otherwise she might lose her nerve. In a quiet voice, trembling with emotion, Susan blurts out that she has had an "affair" with their pastor. Then she is quiet for a few moments. Now rocking back and forth, tears streaming down her face, the words come quickly, in between sobs. She says she went to her pastor because her husband was depressed and uncommunicative, and she was worried about him. The pastor had listened compassionately and expressed his concern for her loneliness as a result of what he called her husband's "emotional abandonment." He encouraged Susan to come to see him regularly for counseling during this difficult time, and soon she was meeting him several times a week. She was grateful to spend time with this man who was so gentle and kind to her.

She began to meet him at a state park as well as in his office, where they could take long walks together and talk and pray in the beauty of God's creation. After several weeks, he began saying she was an answer to his prayers for someone who could help him in his ministry. In his office, he prayed with her, holding her hand in both of his. He confessed to her that his marriage was not satisfying and that he was deeply attracted to her. He would hold her close and then kiss her gently. When she became upset by his advances, he apologized profusely, saying she was just so beautiful, and he loved her; how could such a love be wrong? He bought her books, often books on prayers or spirituality, as a way to apologize, and for a time he would not touch her at all. But then he would embrace her again.

One afternoon, before she realized what was happening, they were having sexual relations in his office. Susan felt guilty and horrible at having “tempted” the pastor into this relationship, and yet she felt incapable of ending it; she thought she loved him. She felt trapped by her own feelings and desperate because there was no one with whom she could talk except the pastor himself, and he simply said he couldn’t imagine that God would want to deny them the love they had found together. He often called her at work or at other times when they could have private conversations.

She felt her life was spinning out of control, haunted by her feelings of sinfulness and fears her husband would discover what she was doing. A week ago, she decided to drop by the pastor's office unannounced to seek some comfort and direction. As she pulled her car in front of the church, however, she saw another woman leaving his office. Something about the look on the other woman's face told Susan in a flash that she was not the only one. In that moment, it was as though a spell was broken. Susan left before the pastor knew she had been there. Susan realized she needed help, and that help had to come from somewhere besides the pastor or the church. She has come to this social worker because she needs to talk to someone who will understand how desperate and horrible she feels. The words stop, but the tears and rocking continue. Then Susan says, "I just can't stop crying; I just want to die."

Issues for church leaders

- How do you think church leaders will find out about this situation?
- What does Susan need from her church?
- What would you do first?

A frame to shape your caring:

- Not a seductress but a victim of clergy sexual abuse
- Seeking help makes vulnerable
- Blaming her multiplies the abuse

Power, not consent

Even if she -

--sought it

--enjoyed it

--loved him

What terms?

- Clergy affair
- Clergy sexual misconduct
- Clergy malfeasance
- Clergy sexual abuse

Who are perpetrators?

Any religious leader, i.e., any man or woman who holds religious authority over others.

Types of perpetrators

- *Predator*
- *Wanderer*
- *Lover*

Grenz, S. J., & Bell, R. D. (2001). *Betrayal of trust: Confronting and preventing clergy sexual misconduct* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids: Baker Books.

Self report an average of
two victims



Patterns in clergy sexual abuse



1. Grooming

- Personal warmth to obscure
- Religious and spiritual language
- Desensitizing over time
- Anxiety escalates physiological attraction, intensifying the bond

Betrays sacred trust

- Uses socially sanctioned access
- Minimizes her concerns
- Slowly crosses boundaries
- Undermines her discernment

She blames herself

How was Susan “groomed?”

2. She is “caught”

- No one will believe her.
- They will blame her.
- She is isolated and has only him to talk to.
- All ways out bring shame.

In what ways was Susan caught?

3. She is bonded to him.

Trauma bonding--the emotional dependency between two persons of unequal power.

deYoung, M., and Lowry, Judith A. (1992). Traumatic bonding: Clinical implications in incest. *Child Welfare*, 71 (2), 165-175.

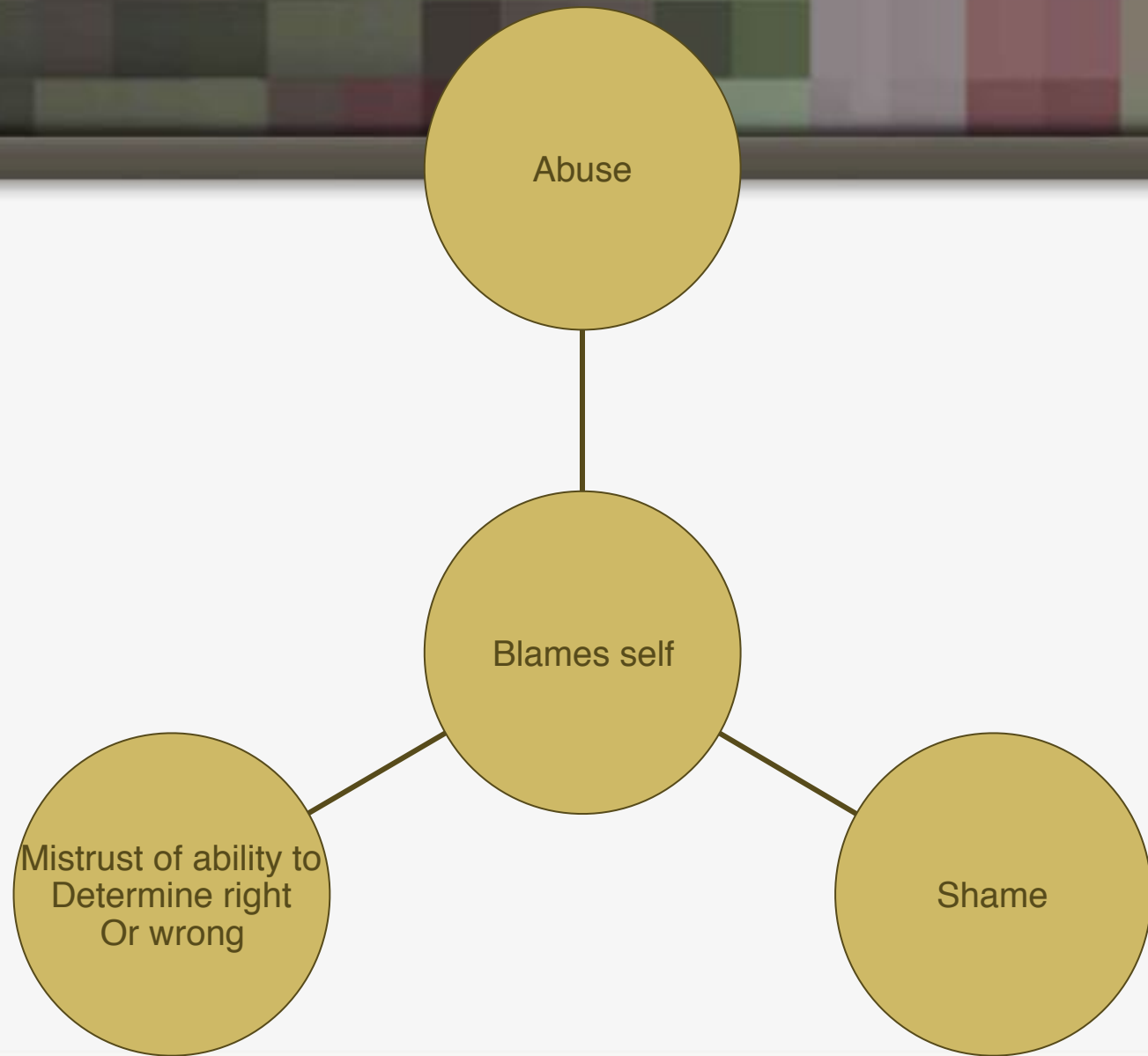
3. She blames herself and feels deeply ashamed.

Her moral agency is severely compromised because she trusts him.

Fortune, M. M. (1999). Foreword. In N. W. Poling (Ed.), *Victim to survivor: Women recoverinig from clergy sexual abuse*. Cleveland: United Church Press.

"Would this have happened if he was your neighbor and not your pastor?"

Sexual abuse is inherently
shaming.



4. Physiological and psychological symptoms.

Post-traumatic stress disorder

- Hypervigilance
- Re-experiencing
- Constriction

What symptoms does Susan
have?

5. May or may not try to end the relationship.

6. The secret is discovered.

7. The church and community responds

- Or not . . .
- She may be revictimized by the church and community
- They urge her to “forgive”

Trauma of the soul

Horst, E. A. (1998). *Recovering the lost self: Shame-healing for victims of clergy sexual abuse*.
Collegeville MN: Order of St. Benedict, Inc.

...and about forgiveness...

- Forgiveness is a gift from God
- Urging forgiveness minimizes
- Public apology maintains status quo

Call it “Evil”

She needs language for understanding what happened and is happening to her—words are power.

- Strong--Seeking help took strength.
- Abuse, not an “affair.”
- “Victim” and “survivor,” not “adulteress.”
- Pastor/teacher—not friend.

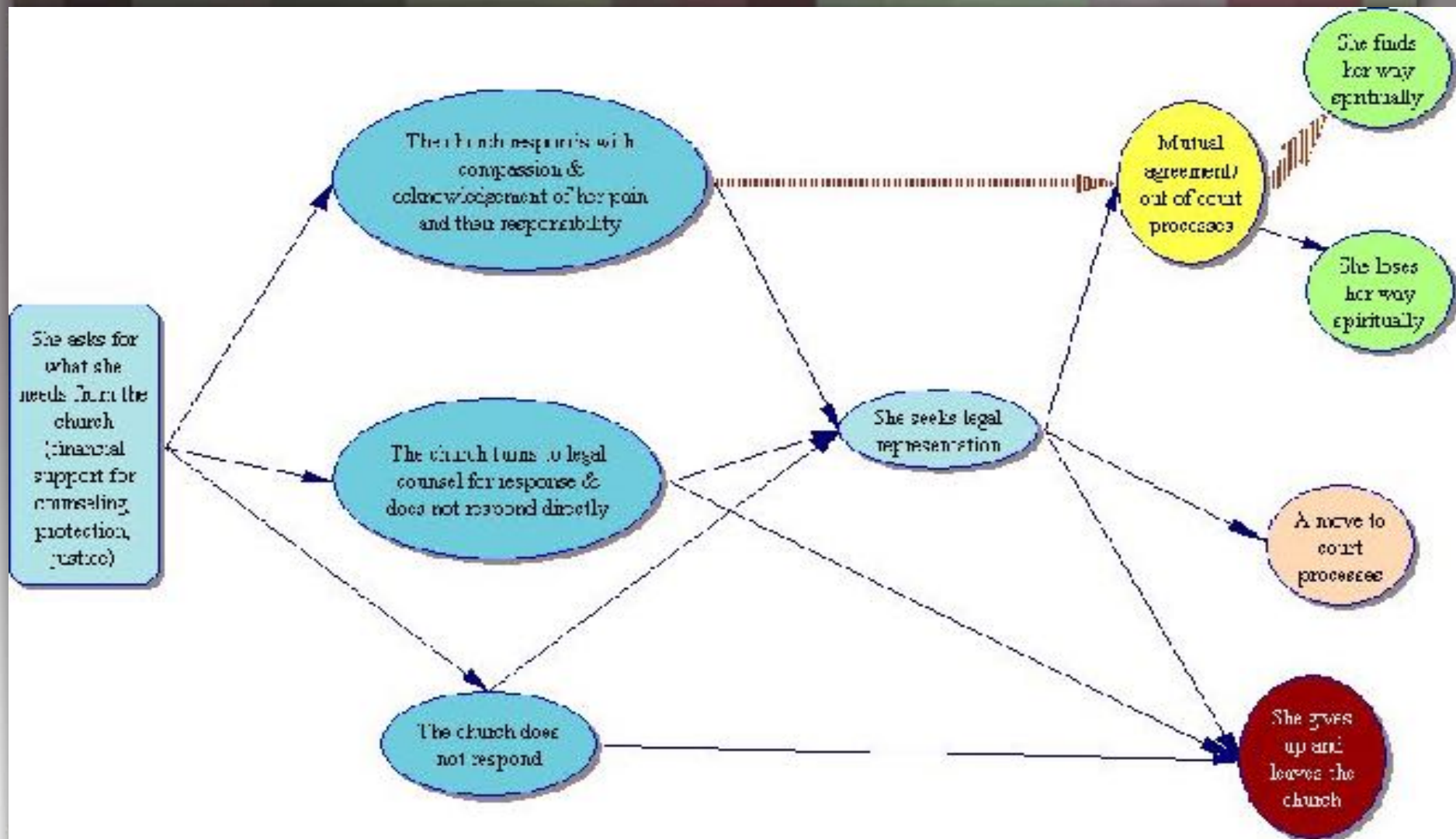
- Connect her with other survivors and their stories.

6. To report (or not)

Her options—

- doing nothing;
- reporting to church bodies to protect self and others;
- asking for reimbursement for therapy and other costs;
- filing a complaint to an ethical standards or licensing board;
- (if a student or employee) filing a complaint with the local Equal Opportunity Employment Commission;
- filing a civil suit for damages; or
- filing a criminal complaint

The church response determines legal involvement



And what about spouses?

- Cautioning not to direct their rage at the victim often comes too late and is unrealistic.
- As she understands, she sounds like she is making excuses.
- May have already been family vulnerability.
- Also may be a crisis of vocation.



***Beyond justice comes
healing***



About forgiveness...

- No substitute for justice
- Forgiving self
- Forgiving God
- Forgiving the perpetrator and others who victimized her

KEY REFERENCES

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