

## **Doing the Two-Step**

G. Lloyd Rediger, a Presbyterian minister (USA), emphasized that 15% clergy are on the verge of sexual malfeasance [violation of expectations] beyond the 10 percent who already have violated the expectations,<sup>i</sup> but does not mean you will know who they are or who the victims are.

What most targets of sexual harassment do, particularly within the spiritual community, is to simply leave the congregation, denomination, or even any related fellowship of any kind. Most of us do not have to stay in order to eat, pay bills, or have a roof over our heads, so removing yourself from the situation is a real option. You may or may not have told someone before leaving the church. The consequence: the offender's behavior is unchecked.

Some victims leave and try to press charges in the secular arena. Too many recipients of sexual harassment and assault think that if the courts of the land convict the perpetrator then that person will suddenly see the error of his (her) ways and repent! If repentance and mercy, and not justice, is your goal for your perpetrator then the agony of laying charges is not worth it. Research proves that conviction does not generate repentance.

Sometimes God calls us to stay. Perhaps some of us break the silence to fight the good fight, to run the race, to find out if we are still really alive or just walking shells. The denial and persecution of silence breakers is so severe by the leaders and laity alike that I urge you to stay *only* if you are convinced that God wants you to stay and work on this issue. Your first order of work is to bump up your personal time in prayer and scripture reading. Put on the full armor of God that you may be able to stand.

The second order of business is to determine to whom you can talk. This is the trickiest part of all. Talking with someone who knows the situation, the setting and its people, is a logical approach to healing from a trauma. If we were talking about a physical death within the church there would be no problem finding someone with whom to speak.

Talking with someone about this trauma within the congregation or denomination is immediately interpreted as an attack on someone's career, that is, the minister's. Unless your congregation was very healthy in the first place, and the perpetrator very new in the picture, this is pretty much the response you will receive once your chosen

contact breaks confidence and says something to another official or significant other.

When sexual malfeasance was identified in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the only concern was about morality and hypocrisy. Professional ethics as a pastor were not an issue.<sup>ii</sup> Very little has changed. You may find yourself leaving the congregation after this second step if your contact did not have the skill to know who not to talk to. Face the facts, your contact is a secondary victim (even as the rest of the congregation is) and will have a felt need to talk to someone too.

Are you being stalked by the person in question? Document everything.

- Is he suddenly showing up at choir practice when he never did before?
- Is he in the nursery?
- Do you have to use indirect pathways in the building to avoid encountering the person in question?
- Does there appear to be deliberate efforts by the person to go out of his or her way to invade your personal space, that is, to touch you in public?

Document all of it. Ask someone handy to run interference for you while you are trying to get out of the room. "I don't feel like being touched right now even to shake hands." If your brother or sister in Christ is helpful in engaging the person so you can make a smooth un-interfered exit you have actually engaged in a teaching moment about cooperation, respecting people's wishes, and respecting people's right to maintaining personal space. Don't ask the same person all the time. Spread the teaching moment around. At the same time you won't look weird always asking for interference maneuvers.

Be clear to the person in question that comments like "You have a great body" and "Nice ass" are not acceptable and are grossly inappropriate. These comments are, in fact, "small rapes".<sup>iii</sup> Practice your response in front of the mirror to become comfortable with speaking your truth aloud.

Next, record your interactions, which is easy to do with a smart phone. Practice at home first. Such recordings cannot be used in Canadian Federal court but they have so many uses. This evidence will guarantee your credibility with all who hear it, whether it the people in charge of the community or a special committee set up just to deal

with you. Transcribe the recording and hand out the typed interaction as you “recalled” it. Save the recording.

Make another recording of the meeting. Transcribe that meeting as well. Things that get said in such meetings are more suited to the Twilight Zone than in any sane setting. But no setting where a perpetrator of sexual harassment reigns is sane.

My local spiritual community kangaroo court was like that. I recorded it with a tiny recorder I purchased for the event. Transcribed, I showed it to my sexual harassment-assault counselor in the secular world. She stated that in her years of counseling, she had stopped being shocked about what she heard until reading the transcript. A few months later, she retired from counseling. It took me twenty years to really start recovering—not from the minister—from what the leaders from the church community did to me. They had used a secular judge in the congregation to slander and malign me in ways that gave me PTSD-type reactions.

By now the odds are high that the powers that be have tried to surround you to “contain” you to avoid letting the “poison” of your position get out to the congregation. Have you been threatened with legal action yet? Don’t fear it. But this is where the real problem comes in.

In secular court or in a civil lawsuit it is unlikely those who will judge a case will know the perpetrator. In church court, that is not the situation. Influential people may not only know the person in question, but also deem him highly esteemed as colleague, acquaintance, friend and also as ‘anointed’ brother (“Touch not My anointed” I Chron. 16:22). It really is the victim who is on trial.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to know what material to give a presbytery to help them determine whether anything should go to court. Odds are that by this time the victim’s character is being slandered by the threatened perpetrator and there is no such thing as an untainted jury of peers.

In the pretrial period, the defense is trying to “find discrepancies between what you said in your statement and what you are saying now. It is not uncommon for you to remember something new, forget some details, or remember something differently.”<sup>vv</sup> By the time a victim within a church setting reaches this point, he or she has no reasonable expectation that any formal statement would be protected

from the eyes or knowledge of the perpetrator. Family, friends, members of the church could harass you in turn to drop your charges. Again, follow God's lead whether or not to take this course of action.

In one case the victim just wanted to be left alone but the perpetrator had decided that a good defense was a good offense and, not only slandered this woman throughout presbytery, an elder was put up to the task of telephoning the target of all this attention during the week before Christmas to threaten her with legal action if she did not recant. She welcomed them to get together and define exactly what it was she was to recant. The leaders eventually left her alone, but slandered.

What we need in our church is a comprehensive training program for each congregation concerning these issues of abuse of power in order to repent of our security blanket of denial. An informed Body of Christ upheld in prayer by the power of the Holy Spirit is our best weapon against evil infiltrating our sanctuaries. Our committees and courts will then be filled with informed and hopefully wiser and trustworthy members whom victims can readily trust. Amen

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<sup>i</sup> Janet Booker, **UnHoly Orders: Abuse of Power That Tempts Us All**; The Identification and Recovery Process from Sexual Harassment and Assault by Clergy and Other Religious Leaders, FreedomLine Enterprises, 25 Tasker Street, St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada, L2R 3Z9, 1996, xviii. G. Lloyd Rediger, **Ministry and Sexuality**, 1990 Augsburg Fortress, 119.

<sup>ii</sup> **Unholy Orders**, Ibid., 12. Marie M. Fortune, **Is Nothing Sacred?**, Harper & Row, 1989, xii.

<sup>A</sup> Linda E. Ledray, R.N., PhD., **Recovering from Rape**, Practical Advice on Overcoming the Trauma and coping with Police, Hospitals, and Court—for survivors of Sexual assault and for Their Families, Lovers, and Friends, Henry Holt, New York, 1986, 23.

<sup>A</sup> Ledray, Ibid., 181.