

Those In Power

By Jan and Lon Tuin

We believe it is God's desire that men and women work together in the church, side-by-side, as sisters and brothers. That is how God intended it before sin alienated his creation, his family. We must work together to put a stop to this grave calamity in our world of faith.

It is the position of Tamar's Voice that the professional person is 100% responsible for keeping the relationship with his parishioners/clients from being sexualized in word or deed.

While a victim was a participant in the inappropriate relationship, she was not responsible. For therapy purposes, it is important she recognize her involvement, but the pastor/counselor is 100% responsible for the problem relationship.

People who enter into a counseling relationship with a pastor/counselor have several serious issues before they come into his/her office. After abuse takes place, the parishioner/client leaves the office with several more issues piled on top of the original presenting issues. This makes a bad situation much worse.

We asked victims to respond to questions concerning their immediate needs at the time of disclosure, their ongoing needs, and what would it take to feel justice had been done?

The responses stated that the church leadership needs to understand the problem for what it is. They need to confront the perpetrator and call for his resignation.

The victim also needs immediate attention. The leaders need to assure her she will receive safe care for her wounded spirit and psyche.

The leadership also needs to be forthright and honest with the congregation. The need to explain that their pastor abused his power and one of their own was his victim.

Victims felt a need for the offender to be truthful, humble, and contrite, to understand the rationalizations that led him to the trouble, and to publicly accept total responsibility. They would like to see him sign up for treatment, and be accountable for that treatment. They also think he needs to remove himself from the congregation which he offended and stay out of contact with the victim.

The church body needs to support the victims (clergy's family, the victim, and the victim's family). This includes allowing them to have a voice, listening carefully to what they say, believe them when they express their hurts, cry with them, love, rather than judge. Although forgiveness is an important step in the healing process, victims should

not be rushed into a premature forgiveness. It is a process that must be given time; maybe months and possibly years.

The church also needs to deal with its own pain and obtain whatever help is needed to find healing. Outside sources can be very helpful at this point in a congregation's life. Help is available to provide leadership, support, and wisdom to the congregation that is willing to take advantage of it.

The church should also be diligent to search out other victims who may exist within the congregation and make counseling available to all. The counseling needs to be objective, which means the victims, should have a choice as to who their counselor will be. The church's own counseling program may not be objective.

The number of counseling sessions should be determined by consultation with the victim and the counselor. It may take a few or many sessions. Spending money on needed sessions may save the church money in the long run. They need to recognize they should shoulder some responsibility for damage done by their employee.

The congregation needs to understand clergy sexual abuse. They need to educate themselves as to how it can be prevented and how to deal with it if it does occur. They also need to give prayerful support and care for the victims, refrain from gossip while dealing with facts, and understand if the victims decide to leave the church or even to leave town.

When discussing justice with victims, they expressed a need for the perpetrator to acknowledge that it was abuse, not an "affair" and to offer a sincere apology to the victims, the church, and his own family. Victims do not see money as justice, but rather the restoration of their financial losses. Justice is the restoration of the power to speak, to be heard, and respected. Justice is the community's willingness to acknowledge abuse, name it as wrong, and hold the perpetrator accountable.