

Responding to sexual abuse in church settings

Upon my election as Anglican Bishop of Tasmania in 2000, I heard the stories of people who had suffered child sexual abuse. At my first media conference I apologised to all victims of child sexual abuse.

As the crisis of the church's failure to respond to child sexual abuse unfolded, I met more and more survivors, reports of abuse appeared in the media and a growing suspicion of clergy was palpable. I was out of my depth and in urgent need of guidance.

God's gift to the Diocese in this darkest hour was an intelligent, wise and experienced advisor. Without her guidance I would have been at a loss. Despite my best intentions I would have compounded the pain of the survivors who came to see me.

In the following pages you will find Spirit-given insight beyond our superficial understanding of this devastating tragedy. You will be led to a deeper appreciation of the issues confronting congregations and denominational leaders as we seek to respond to survivors and offenders and above all protect children.

My advisor wishes to remain anonymous but has agreed to make available to you the fruit of her experience and reflection in assisting churches to be better prepared to deal with the complex and varied issues involved when responding to child sexual abuse.

May God help us to keep the child at the centre of all we undertake.

I wholeheartedly commend this article to you.

Bishop John Harrower OAM

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A current edition of this document
can be found at the following website.
imaginarydiocese.org/bishopjohn/

As you are aware, the Royal Commission has revealed that churches can too easily miss the mark when they respond to child sexual abuse and cause untold additional harm.

If we are to better protect children, bishops, pastors and priests need to be alerted to the many situations and ways in which their well-intentioned decisions and actions can expose children to further risk and suffering.

This article lists common blind spots that have led to so much damage. It includes guidelines, hints and sample scripts to help leaders of denominations and leaders of local congregations to be wise shepherds when responding to children and adults, victims and offenders and individuals and congregations about such difficult issues.

While certainly not claiming to be authoritative nor exhaustive, this article has never-the-less been appreciated by bishops, pastors, those responsible for training the next generation of clergy and those who recognise the need to both alert and equip all church leaders to tackle this better.

This document is not intended to distract from your obligations to comply with government legislation, inform police or follow your denomination's protocols.

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I pray that this article will stir others to write even better insights and share them with others. I welcome feedback sent by email. I will read every email. However, please understand that I am not able to reply or give advise or assistance.

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Chapter 1

Better protection of children is the top priority

We will consider the need to protect children who have been abused and children who will be exposed to abuse if we do not respond much more wisely in a range of circumstances.

Recommendations that either directly or indirectly strengthen this priority can be found right throughout this document but especially in chapter 2 and chapters 8–17. Better protection of children is not confined to a single chapter because to improve this will require a range of chapters: some looking at the mistakes of the past, others looking at how offenders commonly behave and others looking at the strengths and weaknesses of safe ministry programs. It will require sections that look at what might hinder reporting, how to respond to a man who admits this temptation to you or wants to join your congregation after his time in jail. It will require chapters on the common mistakes that even well-intentioned ministers can make which inadvertently put children at higher risk.

To begin with, I will introduce just a few risks. If we are to better protect children, a key area that needs more careful thought is what we say to and do with offenders. Too often in the past, the ways some clergy tried to offer pastoral care and hope to offenders, resulted in more children being harmed. The ways we commonly talk about grace are too often misused by offenders to avoid engaging with change. This leaves children at higher risk. chapter 12 offers some alternatives that are still scripturally based, and still reflect the glory of grace, but are harder for offenders to misuse.

Children have also been put at more risk when pastors and priests focused too exclusively on the past, such as supporting an offender to find grace for his past. This led churches to becoming too easily satisfied when offenders expressed remorse for what they had done, sometimes trusting that just some good intentions would then take care of child safety in the future.

A related blind spot has been that some clergy became so used to dealing with the moral failures of the individual, that they just proceeded along that familiar path. They somehow overlooked that this is broader than just this individual's failure in his battle with his temptation. It is also a crime against others, a crime that can be very hard to stop and a crime with vulnerable victims who can be damaged for life. Some pastors paid too little attention to what roles and contexts could no longer be considered safe for an offender (see chapter 13). Counsellors and ministers beware: only thinking pastorally about the offender in the seat in front of you and helping him onto a better path is not sufficient. We need to make sure we always remain alert to the wider picture that includes our role to act strongly to do all we can to ensure the protection of past and potential victims.

If we are to better protect children another area that needs constant attention from those in senior leadership is the effectiveness of church processes in delivering this improved safety. See chapter 14.

To reflect the different traditions and because the stories in this article come from many denominations I will occasionally rotate the titles pastor, minister, clergy and priest. For convenience I will use the pronoun “he” for offenders but this should not be taken to imply that women do not abuse. In fact, the numbers of women who abuse and the damage they cause is under-recognised.

Chapter 2

What we learn from the past

You will recall that when stories of abuse in church settings first started to emerge, large numbers of the clergy and senior church leaders around the world who were caught in that first wave, floundered. It is the church's great shame that so many chose to ignore victims or cover up abuse. Those whose motives were good, also often did not know enough to be taking the role of decision maker about these issues. Many did not understand the dangers, the impacts on victims or how offenders can behave. Many followed the common practice of that time which was "when you were unsure what to do, seek advice only from a more senior clergyman and perhaps a lawyer." This approach did not shed anywhere near enough light onto the situation, and decisions were made that led to many more victims suffering great harm.

An important lesson to learn from that first era is that abuse is a complex issue. If you consider just one or two issues, or mostly one party, the right path can seem to point clearly in one direction. However, if you factor in more issues, including the needs of all vulnerable parties, an understanding of offender behaviour and a bigger range of biblical themes, the better path can point in exactly the opposite direction.

Some leaders who chose the first path viewed matters through the lens of one legal issue or one biblical theme and were later gutted at the damage that flowed from their poor decisions. It exposed how naïve their safety precautions had been, how limited the advice they had sought was and how few factors they had considered. Please be warned. You too can confidently head in the wrong direction when you have some truth but not enough truth.

Another vital lesson from that era was that the church needed to work with the police. Another was that when the issue is abuse, ignorance is extremely dangerous and just having good motives will not be enough to help you navigate this without causing more harm. You would have hoped that we had also learned from that era, that when the issue is child abuse, it is far from an adequate model to have mainly clergy, lawyers and administrators making the decisions. Sadly, this is a default position that many churches (both at local and denominational level) are so often in practice still inclined to revert to, even when those with more expertise in abuse matters are available to advise.

The conclusion is, that in addition to informing police, the church component is best tackled with an around-the-table multi-disciplinary approach. This should always include those with much more experience with abuse issues to combine with the legal advice, to bring together all the insights, to prioritise, and to forge safer solutions. See chapter 17.

Even in that first era, God had not left the church without warnings. Often it was people of low status but experience and passion who had pleaded with church leaders to handle things differently. Some gave weight to those voices, some did not. The church was not the only profession to be too slow to believe victims and make changes. For example, the practice of law and court procedures were structured in such a way that for decades only the tiniest fraction of child abuse cases ever reached conviction. This also failed to stop offenders and failed our most damaged and vulnerable.

In the second era, after that first set of inadequate and damaging responses by church leaders, various groups pushed for this to be handled better. These included survivors, parents, lawyers, nuns, individual clergy, and many who had looked after victims. The laity was a big part of that push. In many denominations, two outcomes followed. First, more protocols were written (for example, that police were to be informed). The second was that more committees were voted into being, whose role was to gather people with more expertise in abuse issues, to assist church leaders to manage this better. (For convenience, I will refer to these as “abuse committees” although they had various titles and sometimes included other functions). I am not saying that these protocols and committees were in every case right, but those church leaders who recognised how little they knew about all that could go wrong, treated this additional advice as “gold”—gold that the church desperately needed if it was to stop adding to the pain and damage of the past. However, I am afraid it would be wrong to assume that this additional expertise from committees or protocols was in all cases consulted, respected or deemed necessary, by pastors or church hierarchies. It is hard to take advice if you aren’t convinced you need it and there were still many church leadership teams who did not give more than token value to the contribution of the committees or protocols. A few even began to treat them either as ignorant and a challenge to their authority that was best sidelined or an unnecessary resource that they would call on only when felt unsure. Even churches that had signed up some of the top people in the abuse field as their advisors, still too often chose not to check in with them before they made decisions or public statements. This too often left their expert advisors shaking their heads in disbelief at what the church leaders had said, done or not done. Some leaders later said to these advisors, “I would have consulted you if I hadn’t known what to do, but the right way forward seemed obvious to me, so I didn’t see that I needed to ask you first for your input.”

So in this second era, there was still too much damage that should have been avoidable, given this was a period when advice was more readily available and at hand. For example, many of the senior church leaders from various denominations, who we recently watched admitting their failures to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, had actually had an abuse committee available to them during the years when they had been making the damaging decisions that now bought them before the Commission. After matters came to light, some of these committees were shocked and troubled to hear these were issues about which they had never been consulted, or had been consulted about far too late. Yet some senior leaders had, sometimes for long periods, been discussing these same issues with other advisors and making decisions without inviting input from their committees. Even their decisions to “not act yet”, should not have been made without including people in those discussions who could have told them the impact this might have on past victims or potential victims. These senior leaders may have had good intentions, but if they had sought and valued advice from their committees, that action alone would very likely have prevented so many of the mistakes and long-term damage that they were now humbly admitting to the Commission. Some clearly had not believed they were in need of their committee’s advice or had, over time, drawn a conclusion they would not agree with, or respect the advice they were likely to get, so it was better not to ask.

Yet it is revealing that the matters they were admitting to the Commission, show that the same leaders who felt justified in not seeking advice from their committees, had themselves been off track. Some had been in desperate need of guiding onto a better course by those who knew more about abuse, more about what could go wrong and more about what issues needed to be given priority.

There is a good chance that you will be better equipped to respond at both denominational level and congregational level after reading the many practical hints that make up the bulk of this article, but given the past, my strongest advice is something that can be harder to hear. That advice is to deeply grasp, that at whatever level of the church hierarchy you are, you will never know enough to avoid all the potential problems and wisely respond to this complex issue on your own. The moment you start to believe that you don't need close and ongoing guidance, especially from those with much more experience in the abuse area, will be the moment you can cause the most damage.

We can learn from this second era that abuse is a tricky issue where leaders can all too frequently have a false confidence that they do not need advice, and already know the right path, and yet be so unaware of where their actions might be leading to even more harm for victims. When the issue is child abuse, you will possibly not realise the things you don't know, but those risks that are outside your awareness, can have dire consequences for victims and the church. We are accustomed to asking for advice only when we don't know what to do. My plea is, when the issue is child abuse, even if you feel sure you do know what to do, and even if the issue seems minor, call for help from those with much more experience and expertise. That would be a big shift for clergy, but in the light of inquiries around the world, I urge you to make that shift. If there is insufficient help from within your organisation, consult groups such as John Mark Ministries.

In general, the laity is keen for their bishops or leaders to seek more advice from the abuse sector. Your best option is to have good advisors who you keep in the loop about absolutely everything to do with abuse. This would include responding to survivors, police, media releases, rumours, offenders, policies, prevention and helping congregations impacted by abuse. Different people can contribute different expertise and you may need a team to get a fuller package, but please include at least one whom you keep close to the action, who has cared for abuse survivors over years, and not just spent a few dozen hours listening to some of their stories.

Those with long-term involvement are the ones most likely to have developed the sensitivity and understanding of a victim's journey. (Survivors pick up on this almost instantly and know when it is missing.) These are the ones most likely to have developed an antenna to their issues, which is an asset to both the survivors and the church. This skill is a bit invisible to those who don't have it, so advisors who have assisted survivors for years, or are survivors themselves, can often annoy the lawyers, bishops and media advisors. This is because when they point out that the other's well-intentioned policies, practices or speeches could backfire or cause unintended injury or anger, it can sometimes seem like valueless nit picking to the others.

But what if you believe your abuse advisor is misguided or not up to the task? It would be wise not to follow the path that several fronting the Royal Commission did, who just reached that conclusion by themselves, or in partnership with a colleague who shared their views, and then found some way to avoid listening to them. Before you conclude that your advisor is

wrong or has little value, it is far safer to first call in an opinion from someone from that same sector who has even more expertise. Find a top person in the church abuse area and get them to talk to you and the committee / advisor. Get everyone to share what risks they were trying to address by the positions they took. You may even find, like others before you, that it was your own failure to perceive the complexities, rather than a failure on the part of your advisors. However, if they are found to be not up to the task, it is better to replace them or bring in others with different skills onto a team to complement them, rather than trust yourself to tackle this without including advice from the abuse sector.

So, after considering history, including the Royal Commission, whatever your role in this is, you might want to ask yourself: If well respected senior church leaders and so many of even the well-intentioned clergy who came before me could get this so wrong, can I dare to presume I am recognising enough of the issues? When so much is at stake, dare I take even the smallest step, even if it seems so minor to me and so obviously the right thing to do, without first consulting someone with the experience to tell me the risks this step might pose to the wellbeing of those who are already victims. Might this step somehow put others at risk of becoming victims in the future? Who will tell me how offenders often behave so that I can avoid being deceived or trapped? Won't I always need to consult someone with the experience to be able to tell me the mistakes well-meaning clergy have made in the past in just these circumstances, and that resulted in so much damage to victims, individual congregations and the wider church? Won't I need that person to use their experience to instead generate pathways for me that minimise those specific risks? Shouldn't I be keeping an eye out for those whom God has given a burden to for handling all this better? Won't I need to work with the police from the start? Won't I also need good legal advice, and a team approach where all the light and expertise is shared around the table, even if that leads to strong debates and even people telling me that I am wrong?

This article aims help you with these matters. This article does not cover every issue and is no substitute for protocols adopted by your organisation. Hopefully your church, mission or organisation has provided you with protocols. This article is an opportunity to offer you observations and suggestions gained from our time working with victims, offenders and churches. I am hoping that this document will prompt others to offer even better insights. I have been helping survivors of sexual abuse for many years. I have also spent years wrestling with this issue for various churches and mission organisations. I am not claiming to be an expert or that this collection is always right but I do believe that the practical hints and warnings contained here are worth your serious consideration.

In this article I draw your attention to blind spots or issues that church leaders commonly miss seeing which despite the best motives can lead to great damage. So often this occurs when leaders have some truth but not enough truth.

Chapter 3

How to tell a congregation that a leader or parishioner has abused

I will include here a series of suggestions that can be useful in other contexts and could have been itemised separately, but by demonstrating how they can be used together in a talk to help a congregation, I suspect their usefulness to you may be increased. This was written in collaboration with a church leader so that he could then read it to his congregation.

This chapter includes helpful ways to talk about grace when the offence is so dark, and some useful biblical passages for when talking to offenders. It also includes ways to help congregations not become enemies with each other when abuse is revealed.

It also gives an opportunity to demonstrate another significant hint: with every issue you face in the abuse area, always pause to deliberately think ahead of all that might go wrong if you took this path. In particular, look for how doing this, or indeed doing nothing, might impact current victims and potential victims. Ask yourself, what problems arose in other places when tackling this and who might get hurt by this? If one proceeds after considering only the happy endings, so much damage can result.

You need to look for all the risks to plan carefully but not all the risks should be given equal weight, which is often where many blind spots occur and where you need the most advice. For example, some churches came to a halt when they ran into an insurance risk. However, compared with the ongoing risks to victims if they kept delaying, it was well past the time they should have pushed past that insurance risk.

One skill is to be able to identify the risks, and a second skill is to see if there are effective ways to mitigate those risks and be proactive about them. The ability to identify risks certainly grows with increased awareness of history and how things have gone wrong in other locations. However, abuse survivors themselves or those who have walked with survivors over many years and have developed those antennae we spoke of earlier, will be able to contribute a different set of risks to factor in. Better protocols have done much pre-thinking for you about certain risks, but there won't always be ready-made protocols for all of the dilemmas that land on your desk.

The following talk shows how to present many of the needs and risks to a congregation. These needs and risks were identified when we began to design a response for a particular congregation. Words were then chosen to reduce each risk or meet each need in the specific situation in which this congregation found itself. This talk and a second quite different supportive intervention were given during special meetings, not during normal services.

Because there are always unique variables to consider this script will not be transferable to every situation and is not a substitute for getting both legal and abuse advice.

Talk to a congregation when a parishioner was facing charges related to child sexual abuse

**I have some news to impart that grieves me greatly.
A parishioner ...**

They had checked if it was legal to name him in this way and did so to avoid the risk of suspicion falling on innocent men if no name had been given.

... is facing charges in the Supreme Court that relate to the sexual abuse of a minor. He is expected to plead guilty.

There are risks if you give out too much information but, by looking at the past, it is clear that many congregations took many years to heal when they were given too little information. This was the compromise reached.

The offences referred to are serious and spanned several years. The person who brought this to police is now an adult. [Name] held no leadership position in this parish and did not carry our accreditation to work with children and has therefore had no role in children's ministry here. The hearing will be held in the coming weeks. Timing this announcement has been tricky, but we wanted to give you some time to hear, to pray, to ask questions and arrange support before events become more widely known.

The court in these cases rightly seeks to protect the identity of any victim. To do that, they often also need to suppress the name of the accused. A suppression order is put in place to protect a survivor from suffering the additional awfulness of having their story exposed. The current suppression order does permit us to name him verbally to you in this way, but we must not publish or print [Name]'s name or hers in connection to this charge. It also prevents us all writing anything online that might do that, even after the hearing. We can talk about it as a parish family, but please do not spread names beyond the parish family, or it can spread so quickly and we risk doing her great damage. It will be your choice whether to discuss this with your children or teenagers, but please do not tell them his name until you discuss with us beforehand ways you might do that. Also consider the benefits of delaying a few weeks in case you might then, at the same time, be able to tell them that this man no longer attends church here.

This compromise was reached because teenagers can live online and be prone to exchange information as a currency of friendship or status. A different choice may have been made in different circumstances but in this case the risk to the victim, plus the risk of this spreading to the school-yard of a young relative of the victim, was higher than the benefit of telling a small group of teenagers more data. The offender in this case had not been a church leader and had had no role with teenagers. He was also pleading guilty and so would no longer be with them in the congregation.

If you are passing this on to a spouse or child or friend in the parish, please make sure we emphasise and remind each other why our gift to a victim must be "no names beyond the parish family" or it will quickly spread to places where the survivor is known.

The following part was included to counter the risk that the congregation might get offside over concern their leaders had not considered enough issues or taken enough action. Giving more information reduces this risk.

Let me give you some background. [Name] came to tell me himself about the charges. In the period when he had not yet been tried or found guilty, and right up to the point when he decided to plead guilty just a few weeks back, I was trying to juggle various key issues.

You may not have agreed precisely with where I drew the lines in the sand, but these were the issues I was trying to juggle:

First. How best to work to keep children safe?

Second. When the charges are of this nature, a man's reputation can be ruined even before he has been found guilty. What did I need to be careful about in order not to prejudice a trial?

Third. If too much knowledge is given out, was I also exposing the name of the victim? Victims usually ask that their names be suppressed.

What actions did we take? The police had already been informed. We informed the bishop. He involved the Director of Professional Standards to guide us and gather another person to assist. If there was a way of reaching out to the woman concerned, we would have, but we judged it not appropriate at this point, given a complicated situation.

Even though there had been no conviction yet, we tried hard to ensure that children were safe. We entered a specific agreement with him about where he could be and when. For example, he was never permitted to be on the grounds mid-week at those times when an activity involving children was scheduled. On Sunday mornings, four of us rotated to make sure he was never out of our sight. We also provided pastoral assistance to the man and his wife on this journey.

In recent weeks, just as we were working out how to tell the congregation more information, he decided to plead guilty. In response to that, I told him that his attendance at a daytime church service where children attended was no longer appropriate, and that our evening service was now more appropriate.

Given the risk that this news could impact the considerable numbers found in any congregation who have themselves suffered sexual abuse or who have loved ones who have, several steps were chosen. It was decided that there would be prayers at the end for all victims of abuse, and that this group would have a better chance of taking in this talk if it was read twice. It was also decided that another way to assist them was to make a strong early statement that acknowledged the huge damage that abuse can cause. It was recognised that it could be offensive to this group and others if there was no such statement well before any talk of help for an offender.

The following was said with pauses and weight, glancing at the lay leaders who had been lined up beside him, making it clear that the whole leadership was behind this.

Let me make two statements here that your whole leadership team wants to emphasise. First, we are in strong agreement that the sexual abuse of a child or young person is a terribly destruc-

tive crime that can cause much trauma and lasting damage. A victim's trust can be destroyed, their sexuality damaged, their sense of safety lost and their identity and confidence shattered. They can be crippled by a sense of shame for things that were not their fault. They can wrestle for years with anger, fear, pain, anxiety and shame. So many of them hunger years later, for the validation of being believed. Second, we state strongly, that the sexual abuse of a child is absolutely contrary to the way of Christ. It is a betrayal at many, many levels, including a betrayal of the gospel.

Next, all the parties who might need care were listed and considered.

We know that it will be likely that some of you here tonight will find this story has stirred up painful issues, either from your own story or from that of someone you care about. We have several counsellors available. At any stage during the evening, you may approach any of the group on this pew who will take you to a quiet place to chat. Please don't leave distressed and on your own. You may find you need extra care in the time ahead, and feel free to ask for that.

We will be writing to the woman who has brought her story to police, but it is possible that our offer of help will not be taken up. Would some of you please undertake a particular role to pray for her?

Regarding care for the wife of the accused, I am thankful that many of you will make sure that she will be warmly cared for and not left on the outer, nor have to suffer the awkwardness of having people stop talking whenever she approaches. I have some other suggestions for her care, and you might have some later also.

I will come to [Name] in a moment, but my next statement is about our parish, our church family.

The big risk I was trying to mitigate here is that some congregations in the past have been left deeply divided for fifteen or more years over this issue. People can become very angry at other parishioners or leaders for supporting or failing to support different parties. Parishioners desperately need a framework that will make sense to them and enable them to still value each other's contribution and proceed together in a wiser and safer way.

This congregation is a body with many different parts, each making a different contribution, and each focusing on different ministries. It is okay, and even to be expected, that we will each respond to this news in different ways. For some of you, your response might be to invest even more energy into child safety. For a great many of you, your top response will rightly be very angry on behalf of this victim and indeed all victims. [Pause.] You might then be very bewildered if a person sitting next to you in church one Sunday wants to talk about grace! Perhaps we could imagine this situation as if you are both holding up placards about different big truths. An offender actually needs the message on

both these placards. The church also needs the message on both these placards and more besides. All of these responses and big truths are important.

I would be worried if no one was very angry on behalf of victims. I would be worried if no one was holding a placard that said, "We must stay on alert to make sure children are safe" or "Care for victims better." I would be worried if no one asked, "How does grace fit in here and how can we be wise in assisting a grace journey?" When handling tough issues like this the church needs the full picture, the full variety. Hasn't the church got into trouble when it thought it could manage these tough issues with just one placard?

Let's not treat other parishioners who may be holding a different placard as the opposition. We need each other in this body. Whether your response is to care for the victim, or to back safe ministry programs that keep us on alert, or care for the wife or help the offender, let's not do it as lone opposing voices but in partnerships, grateful for the complementary contribution of other members. But, please, let's all be open to keep learning more, because let's face it, this abuse issue is very tricky, and dashing off simplistic "one placard" responses is seldom the best or safest way forward.

You may find that even within yourself, you have a changing parade of strong responses. Sometimes you might be wanting to think about grace, but at other times you might feel extremely angry at him, and at other times just deep sadness. You will not be alone in having such a mixture of responses, especially in these early days. So, come and talk to me if you want to assist. Also, come and talk to any of the leadership if the fact that we are responding in different ways is becoming a problem. Preserving our deeper unity is vital here. Also, please pray for the leadership because this has been tough and it is tough.

Lastly, some statements about help for an offender.

Here I was trying to head off several risks. One that has occurred in quite a few churches is when a member of the congregation becomes trapped as an enmeshed supporter, sometimes even dedicating their money and lives to visiting the offender and backing his minimised version. We also needed to mitigate the risk of clergy or laity prematurely assuring him that he is now forgiven. Another problem to solve was how to increase understanding without giving out confidential information. The final important need was to find some helpful way we might shape conversations about those who sexually abuse, in a way that retains a high view of grace, but at the same time gives clergy, congregations and offenders themselves, an understanding of the long journey an offender may need to go on, if he is to stop conning himself enough to have a much more real, open and less self-protected encounter with God and his grace that he so needs. This question is important to grapple with as it faces up to the dilemmas that so many church folk have with this topic, and if not addressed well, leads to division.

Let me talk generally here, rather than about this particular case. You see, I certainly am not claiming to have a complete understanding of this particular situation, nor of course would I reveal private matters to you. However, others from outside this parish,

who have wider experience, have told us what can commonly be the case. It is this general wisdom that I pass on to you. Please hear it as general wisdom and not as facts about this case. Increasing our understanding will help us respond more wisely.

When we care for an offender, there are many issues to consider. On the very basic level, there is a man in a hard situation entering prison, needing some initial pastoral care, whether those caring for him are able to point him to a way forward or not. That is why we have several chaplains who visit the prison and our clergy will also visit at times, particularly during the transition period.

Can an offender be helped to repentance and forgiveness? The short answer is, yes, but unfortunately this is not a common outcome. The reason this is not a common outcome is not that their sin is so dark that it is beyond grace but principally because they cling to their defences and blindfolds. It is these defences that get in the way of repentance.

But Christians often want to ask additional questions.

You see, it is very common for offenders over the years, to erect defences or blindfolds to protect themselves from facing the truth about what they had been doing, the truth about the damage they caused, the truth about what they were prepared to do to keep their victims from disclosing, the truth about all the people they manipulated or deceived. Instead, most offenders con themselves and minimise the damage they cause. Some project blame onto their victims and others cook up justifications or excuses. Some live in denial, harden their hearts or find some other way to keep themselves in the dark. Those who had aspirations to appear good often adopted even thicker blindfolds. The trouble is, those same defences, projections or blindfolds will now make their journey to repentance very difficult. Thus, their journey to see the damage and repent is usually a slow one, consisting of many painful steps to face what they had been unwilling to face before. It is a bit like the journey an alcoholic might need to go on.

A quick absolution seldom helps them make this tough journey to dismantle their blindfolds. In fact, the bishop has declared that when the issue is child abuse (an issue that can be complex and fraught), parish priests are not permitted to pronounce an absolution. He has arranged for one priest to be trained and licensed to perform that role. That priest can come when required. That frees the rest of us to play a different role, but it is still tricky.

At one level, many offenders may already deeply wish they had not done this. They may be very tearful, they may use religious language, they may want to feel clean and leave the past behind them but true repentance is deeper than all of these. Zacchaeus is a good model of repentance. Zacchaeus, having looked into the face of Jesus, recognised that he was fully known, fully loved, fully welcomed and fully forgiven. He then chose to live in the light rather than in the dark. He fully faced the darkness he had chosen before and the consequences for others and then, fuelled by God's help and utter mercy, he let this bite into his daily choices. His model is far more life-changing than the notion that repentance is "only about me and my journey". You see, some have a limited

grasp on repentance, thinking it is nothing more than asking “to have a blot removed from my personal piety record, while all the time keeping my head under the blanket or blindfold to avoid seeing the damage I keep doing”. Many of those trapped in addictions or long-term behaviours that hurt others deceive themselves in this way.

Ask someone to read aloud 1 John chapter 1 verses 5 to 10.

1 John 1 can be useful to help us talk to offenders and understand a grace journey. These verses hold out a great promise to an offender—a promise of complete cleansing from all unrighteousness—but first there are some conditions. These verses include a call to an offender to leave behind darkness and their practice of keeping things hidden, even from themselves. A very rough paraphrase says, “Stop conning yourself and pretending you haven’t sinned. Instead, be prepared to live with the light on all the time”. This passage uses words that do not suggest coming for a quick wash and then dashing back to the dark again but refer to choosing a way of living every day, of living in the light, walking in the light, learning to live with the light on all the time, learning to live each day utterly open to God. The passage makes it very clear this walking in the light is not about being sinless now. In fact, an alcoholic may not learn to live in the light until he has hit rock-bottom, standing up in regular AA meetings, admitting, “I am an alcoholic and I can’t manage this on my own. I have hurt people very badly. I am stuck and so need my Higher Power.”

Living in the light is about being willing to see things clearly (dropping our blindfolds and excuses) and thus also involves being willing to be seen. This passage talks about confessing, (which after all involves facing things out in full light) but it then adds the obvious point of needing to stay out in that light. Most offenders are not willing to go on this journey to dismantle their blindfolds and learn to live in the light. Some are. They can need assistance to slowly make that journey, step by painful step. That journey is seldom accomplished in one rush of tears. It often takes time and a willingness to face, bit by bit, what they may have been unable or unwilling to face before. We might call this process “learning to walk in the light”.

You can see that walking with any offender on this journey is not for the naïve, or impatient or fainthearted. If it is on your heart to help this man or visit him, please only do it as part of a parish effort under the leadership of the clergy. Do not just go off on your own path. By first learning together about possible pitfalls, and combining our different contributions, we will be more help.

We plan to have another meeting in a few weeks to keep you informed, to support each other, to grieve the darkness and also give thanks for the light that the darkness has not overcome.

As there was so much to take in, this talk was read a second time. Then there were questions and prayers for all parties and for all victims of abuse. A second quite different supportive intervention was held some weeks later.

If the offender had been a church leader, a congregation would be so devastated, they would need many more skilled interventions of different

styles and spaced over many months. Individuals who had received such harm from him would need much help. Paradoxically, those who had received good things through him would now also need help. A team would be needed for some time.

To design and deliver those interventions and supports, why not consider bringing in someone with a great deal of expertise and experience in helping congregations with this?

The next key priority is to focus on better care for victims. We need to provide better ongoing support and care for victims whether they disclose when still children or later as adults and whether the abuser was a family member or a church worker. We need to be aware that, all too often, we made the hurdles too hard for those who were bringing complaints that they had been abused by a church worker. Too often we added to their distress. All are bringing to us very disturbing issues in their lives and this next set of four chapters will help pastors and bishops better understand a survivor's journey and how to be more supportive when we respond to them.

When the meaning is obvious, I will use the word "survivor" instead of "victim" to avoid the implication that victims are trapped by what has happened to them and better acknowledge their brave steps forward.

Better care for victims

Chapter 4

When hearing a disclosure from a child

Throughout this article I use the word child in the legal sense. This includes those teenagers who are still under the age of consent.

When a child discloses, our main task is to be believing and gently facilitating so that the child may feel comfortable enough to continue sharing their story. This is different to long and in-depth quizzing that aims to get to the bottom of every detail before passing it on to police. That sort of strong questioning of children should be left to police and child protection workers who are trained in interviewing children; otherwise a clever lawyer may assert that you had led the witness, and cast doubt on everything the child said. It is vital to listen very carefully so that we can write down the actual words the child used as soon as practical after they disclosed and then report these to both police and Child Protection.

If a child first asks you if you can keep their secret, you could reply, "I am very good at keeping secrets. However, if I think someone might have been really hurt or might get hurt I might need to tell people who could help."

After a young child discloses, reassure them that, "You did the right thing to tell me". Don't unduly delay your call to civil authorities, as the child may reveal they have spoken to you and get into more trouble.

As things don't always go to plan, don't make sweeping promises.

You can crush a child's call for help by letting them feel that they are not believed or, even worse, calling them naughty for telling lies. Please avoid these most destructive responses. Act believing, be gently facilitating, and leave it to the police to sort out.

Other pastors have made another serious mistake after a child disclosed. They believed the child but chose to tackle the offender themselves, believing they had a good chance of getting the offender to change his ways without needing to call in the police, or before calling police. While this might seem to be a good plan, in chapter 10 I explain why this is dangerous and can be very damaging.

Chapter 5

Being aware of the legacies with which survivors of abuse struggle

The damage abuse causes varies with each person and situation but let me just list a few:

- a. Many survivors struggle all their lives with feelings of guilt and shame for things that were not their fault.
- b. Most suffer from damaging low self-worth.
- c. Mental health damage can include depression, extreme anxiety, and all too often suicide. PTSD and complex trauma responses are not uncommon. See chapter 6. The past may intrude with flashbacks and the effects of trauma can be long-lasting. Some find they can suddenly be tipped into feeling an anxiety or anger that is out of proportion to the current situation.
- d. Some have trouble dealing with authority figures.
- e. Some feel powerless and desperate. Many end up with addictions.
- f. For some, their sense of safety is lost and their identity and confidence are shattered.
- g. Many can't concentrate on schooling so fail to reach their academic potential. Even when the abuse is over they may start and stop diplomas many times or change jobs frequently. A few drive themselves relentlessly to high achievement levels to counter the shame. See Appendix A.
- h. Damage in the area of sexuality can vary from minor to acute. It can range from the sexualisation of emotions to the temptation to abuse. In some cases abuse influences such things as the age and gender that attracts them. Others can feel in a sexual void as if they do not belong in any group. Some males can be plagued with doubts ranging from whether "he was in danger of abusing" to "did the abuser pick him because he must have been gay". For some females the legacy can be a lack of pleasure in sex or regularly engaging in high-risk pick-ups. For some young girls who were made to feel like a wife or soulmate the abuser can remain their primary attachment for decades and even through subsequent marriages.
- i. Another legacy can include spiritual damage such as loss of faith in God or trust in the church. Many women abused by their father find it difficult to relate to God as Father. Others find that the anger they feel at God robs them of the solace they used to find in their faith.
- j. Many understandably find trusting hard, with romantic and other relationships too often affected. Others feel different to their peers and suffer from loneliness, alienation and a lack of love.
- k. Many long for the validation of being believed and have a deep dread of not being believed.
- l. There are a few males who say they are not aware of any residual negative effects.

Not all the damage comes from the physical abuse. Too often the damage was amplified and added to by the slurs, threats, manipulations, blame, humiliations or violence that the abuser used to try to control his victims and keep them from speaking out. Words like “no one will ever believe you”, “you are a slut”, “this is all your fault”, “if you tell, I will kill your mother and it will be your fault”, “I know you are gay and one of us”, all added to long-term confusion and pain.

Other confusing damage came when good things like much-needed attention and affection were paired with abuse. Another type of damage occurred when the people the child disclosed to did not believe them or protect them.

We need to grasp that we shouldn’t always think of abuse as a series of rapes or other physical incidents. In some cases, it can be better viewed as a “corrupting and violating relationship”¹ that is trying to change, corrupt or trap a child into doing or submitting to a range of things that lead to sexual gratification for the offender.

This can lead to damage in so many ways. For example, a corrupting relationship might include making the victim feel special but also involve plying them with alcohol, showing them pornography, getting them to touch other children sexually or procure other youngsters for him. It can include paying them with cash or treats in order to let him do things to them or photograph them. It includes trapping a youngster online to send more intimate photographs, or threatening them with more exposure if they don’t. One common form of damage that comes from a corrupting and violating relationship is that it can so often leave the victim with a legacy of feeling guilty and complicit.

The sad thing is that many survivors don’t know how a corrupting relationship works so, when others try to later reassure them that what happened was not their fault, their minds dispute this and tell them, “You don’t know the whole story. If you really knew what I liked or did back then, you would not think me so innocent. After all, I was aroused by what he did, or I enjoyed feeling his special one, or I took his money, or I agreed to do that to another child.”

We need to unlock for them the power imbalance (chapter 10) and explain how the abuser sometimes employed these strategies to make them feel special and attached, or complicit and guilty so that they would not tell. Survivors can often recall the feelings they were left with but not the way he engineered this, perhaps with comments like, “You took the money, so you are a prostitute.” Understandably, confusion and guilt are common and powerful legacies because youngsters may have liked some parts of what the relationship gave them but not others.

Some felt so powerless when suffering abuse that as adults they continue to feel powerless and helpless. Other youngsters found ways to regain power. Rather than feel that utter helplessness again, they preferred to take back power, even if what they did to regain power, also made them feel guilty or got them into trouble. Some of them abused other boys or behaved violently to others. There can be fallout in their adult lives from the different ways they tried to take back power. Too many end up in prison.

Listening to the long line of men and women at the Royal Commission weep and speak of their pain and difficult lives even decades on is far more powerful than any list of damages. It shatters the justifications offenders often tell themselves that this “does no harm,” or “is quickly left behind and easily forgotten,” or that he or she “seemed okay with it at the time”.

Chapter 6

When an adult reveals their abuse as a child by a church worker

This chapter will be useful for pastors but of additional value for those handling complaints at denominational level.

Church personnel who are blind to the range of devastating effects that abuse can leave, can cause harm in a variety of ways when survivors bring such complaints. First, they can treat abuse as something that should be able to be quickly put behind one, especially if one has been prayed for. Some church folk, out of their own anxiety to have this fixed, even start to subtly blame the survivor for “not being better yet”. Second, they can create protocols and processes that are oblivious to common struggles that abuse survivors have and so multiply their distress even when trying to help. Third, they often fail to deliberately factor in things that might assist a survivor through this.

1. Understand that many survivors suffer from PTSD or complex trauma symptoms

Research is revealing more about how violence and abuse in the early years of life can affect how a young child’s brain develops, and can affect how that child thinks, acts and feels for the rest of their lives. It can affect the hard wiring of the brain and increase the risk of ongoing problems such as learning difficulties, problems controlling anger, mental health issues, addictions and suicidal thoughts.

**Brain Wave Trust
www.brainwave.org.nz**

It is salutary to remember that a child who lives with violence is forever changed but not forever damaged as there is a lot we can do to improve their future prospects. **Baker Cunningham**

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) responses might include hyper-arousal, in which a survivor is constantly on high alert for danger. This response can occur even after a single terrible event. For example, some survivors cannot sit in a room unless they have unobstructed and clear access to the door and get more agitated if you position them in such a way that they would need to push past you to escape. This is especially so if you are a male half blocking their exit.

With PTSD the past can intrude in the form of flashbacks or triggers. However, one of the main reasons that the impact of child abuse can go beyond even PTSD responses, is because, unlike a crash or a fire, it is interpersonal in nature and that increases its impact. The impact can also be greater if the trauma occurred during formative years, was repeated, inflicted by caregivers or involved terror.

Complex trauma is defined as “repeated extreme interpersonal trauma resulting from adverse childhood events”². All this can profoundly affect the still developing self. For example, the harm can be severely disruptive of the survivor’s capacity to manage internal states. They can have a lot of

trouble self-soothing or regulating effect. “Research establishes that if we cannot self-regulate (manage internal states and impulse control) we will seek alternative means of doing so in the forms of defences and/or addictions.”³ “Complex trauma sufferers have sustained assaults to their ability to connect to themselves and others.”⁴ As Tim Hein writes, “Coping with trauma is exhausting, overwhelming, and destructive.”⁵

This hint is not about advising you how to treat this trauma, but rather how to conduct all interactions in ways that are more respectful of their journey and trigger the fewest problems for those who have suffered trauma. There are now best practice guidelines⁶ available to help organisations respond more helpfully when their client group includes many who have suffered trauma. Trauma Informed Care includes, at the very least, the key themes of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration and empowerment. Active listening that involves warm attention and taking the time to really hear is also important. If you deliberately factor these into your interactions with survivors right from the start, fewer troubles will develop.

2. Survivors need to be responded to by those who understand their journey and issues

Right from when they first make contact to bring a complaint, survivors should be answered and helped through the process by someone with long experience listening to and caring for victims. Even persons who are very well meaning but do not have this understanding can sometimes just grate on them, alienate them or cause them despair. Survivors can tell when this understanding is not there. Churches have too often presumed, because they meant well towards survivors, that they already knew enough to proceed wisely, and that just any well-meaning person could do this job.

Also at least one of any panel assessing their story needs to have that long experience caring for victims. Giving such people the lead role helps the survivor feel comfortable enough to tell all the story and share such traumatic and private material. They also help the church get a better grasp of the authenticity of the situation, and the church would be wise to give much weight to their input.

3. Survivors dread not being believed

It is very common for a young victim of abuse to have had drilled into them by an offender who was trying to ensure their silence, that “no one would believe them if they told”. Some offenders who were church workers said, “Who would the church believe, me a minister or you?” Thus, a great many survivors of abuse hunger for the validation of being believed and carry a strong dread of not being believed or of their voice not being valued, especially by the church where the offender was a leader or member. They can, as a result, be extremely sensitive to whether they feel believed. It is vital if a child is disclosing abuse that your demeanour conveys that you believe every word and then pass it to the police to sort it all out. However, it can be trickier if the one bringing you their story is a survivor who is now an adult. If you have a role where you are free to tell an adult immediately if you believe them then by all means do that. However, those who represent the church in senior positions can sometimes be in a position where they cannot always do that at this stage.

4. The dilemmas bishops and other senior leaders face when asked “Do you believe me?” before a case has been investigated or established

To a survivor whose case has not yet been examined, senior church officials are sometimes in a position where they cannot say that they believe an allegation until after there has been an investigation, in much the same way that a judge cannot. The trouble is that in this situation, giving the appearance of being distant or cool impartiality, it is far too damaging, because the survivor will nearly always interpret that as meaning, “You already have made up your mind that you do not believe me.” Similarly if the person survivors speak to on the telephone, or the assessors they tell their story to, or the ones they need to relate to in order to make claims, have little understanding of their issues and are too cool, remote and business-like, the survivor, already stressed over bringing all this up again, will often interpret that to mean they are disbelieved. This can lead them to fall back into old trauma responses such as getting very anxious or very angry.

However, if you arrange things, so that the people connecting to them have had long experience with victims, the survivors can recognise that their journey is understood, and the result can be very different. It is a skilled task to be able to convey enough warmth, support, respect and genuine understanding of their issues, and to offer unrushed time as one warmly and attentively listens to what they are saying, in order that they feel understood and comfortable enough to keep talking or participating in an investigation. If you do this well and unobtrusively, survivors pick up that they are understood, and the result is that you will seldom hear that desperate cry: “Do you believe me?”

My suggestion to a bishop or church leader in this situation, is, if you hear, “Do you believe me?” first think of it as a wake-up call that you have possibly been giving out unhelpful messages. Perhaps your concentration has slipped, and you haven’t been tracking enough with the speaker. Perhaps you have not been warmly emotionally present with them but part of you has been off in your head worrying about the long-term consequences. Perhaps you have had your hand over your mouth and have been leaning back and away from them in your chair, rather than being more vulnerable and fully present and listening most carefully. So adjust these first.

Second, if the question has already been directly asked, and the situation prevents you from saying that you believe that individual’s story, you could try the following.

Reply to their pain by making a general statement that you are free to say emphatically and that expresses your heart. You can then acknowledge their struggles and empower them with choices about the way forward.

Answer 1: You could lean forward a tad and with pauses and emphasis answer,

**I take what you have told me very seriously indeed.
The abuse of a young person is a most dreadful betrayal.
It is so damaging and such a hard burden to live with.
With your help I will make sure that this is investigated.**

Later you could add,

**What you are describing is a crime.
May we support you and help you take this to the police?**

Answer 2:

I view child abuse as a most awful betrayal. The huge pain survivors carry makes me so angry and so sad. The betrayal is even bigger if the offender was a priest, trusted to represent God and safety. If you want us to conduct an inquiry into this, we are certainly willing to do so.

This is appropriate if the offender has died and a police inquiry is not an option.

5. Support and empower with choices

Example 1.

**You don't have to decide right now,
but I wonder what you were wanting to happen next?**

Options will vary with each denomination's protocols but will often include support to tell the police and or a signed complaint that launches a church investigation. For those not able to face even that, another option can include counselling expenses for an extended period with independent (not church-based) counsellors. This can be provided without the need for prior investigation but knowing that this path cannot lead to a verdict.

Example 2. Regarding the choice about police, you could say,

**I would like to hear what you want to happen next.
But I'll be up front, our first choice would be to support you and help you take this to the police.**

Sometimes survivor will be willing to accept help to take a first step of just telling the police even if they are not yet prepared to cooperate with a criminal investigation and trial. Sometimes the priest is dead. Sometimes an adult survivor may exercise their choice not to participate in a criminal trial but still seek an apology or want the church to investigate in the hope that the offender might be removed from being a priest. If an adult survivor elects not to talk to the police, some churches ask them to sign a dated statement that simply says something like, "The church offered to support me to take this to the police, but I have chosen at this point not to do that. The church has assured me that, if I change my mind in the future, they will willingly support me to talk to the police." Such a record can protect you from later accusations from press or those who come after you, that it was you who tried to keep this in-house and away from the police. Some churches find other ways to keep the police in the loop but of course for privacy reasons, can't reveal the name of the adult complainant until they give permission (sometimes called a blind report). Until these adult survivors are ready to cooperate with police, there can be no police investigation anyway. It is different for minors as all details must then always be fully reported.

Example 3.

I appreciate that it has cost you a lot to come and share this with me. Thank you. I take what you have said very seriously. It will now be the job of others to assess this and look carefully at any

evidence and give all parties a chance to comment. Can you wait until that is over? When that process is complete I promise you we will talk again and I will tell you the conclusion of that inquiry. In the meantime, I would like to offer you someone to support you and assist you through this process.

Don't overwhelm with full complex paper work at that first meeting. Perhaps tell them someone will ring and offer to meet with them again in about three days, just to check on them, to learn more about what they are wanting to happen and answer questions. This person will give them more detailed documents that spell out some choices they might like to consider. Inform them that these documents are also on your web site.

6. Factoring in a survivor's anxiety about time, delays, process and the need for frequent updates

The issues that cause the most breakdowns between churches and survivors are if they are responded to by people who don't understand their issues, and if there are long time delays in a process that is too long and complicated. An inadequate or untimely response can leave survivors feeling very angry and hurt. We know that survivors who are now adults can still carry issues of vulnerability, powerlessness or high anxiety, so they can be re-traumatised by a process that is very protracted and has many steps. It is common for survivors to become very anxious, agitated and strung out because this is a major issue in their lives and they desire the constant feedback that might make the wait more manageable. This overlaps with the issue of "maybe I haven't been believed", which is not relieved until the final verdict comes in as to if there is sufficient evidence to establish the case, and until the monetary figure is decided. Until that time, they can worry over and over as to whether they didn't tell people enough details about this bit or that bit.

The time delays are now longer because not only are churches investigating the complaints, they are often now, with good motives, allocating funds, but the process to decide how much funds is often adding yet more time delays. Again, with the best of motives and trying to make the process more independent and transparent, churches often now out source key parts in this process to independent senior people in the community to either assess the validity of the claim or the amount to be paid. This puts the process at the mercy of a lot of outside people's busyness, holidays and time schedules. Sometimes the independent person called in to assess the figure decided he or she needed to add their own assessments into the process, just multiplying the hurdles. Learn from this how hard it can be to be fast, transparent, independent and legally sound without adding to trauma. All church processes should be reviewed before being locked in by abuse advisors, if not survivors themselves, as this is the group who will rightly try to force you to make this simpler and briefer and better able to be fast tracked. This has to be a top priority because this issue has proved powerful enough to nullify all the good work people have contributed on the way and leave survivors and churches parting on very bad terms.

Some compromises or creativity must occur. For example, if the cap for funds is perhaps commonly reached for severe cases, multiple abusers or when damage is obvious, maybe there needs to be inserted into church procedures an option that if church authorities are of the opinion that a claim would likely reach the level of the cap, that they can agree to bypass some

of the steps. Maybe they could then ask whatever panel had first concluded that the case had been established if they were also of the opinion that this case would warrant the full amount, and then be able to pay that survivor that full amount right then. What considerable additional trauma and lengthy time delays that small change alone would have avoided.

Maybe we could also ensure there are more people authorised to conduct aspects of the process to ensure things don't grind to a halt when a key party is on leave. Certainly we should never let a process drift but someone who knows how this impacts survivors, needs to have the power to keep pushing all parties to find ways to conclude it more quickly.

Chapter 7

Pastoring a congregation when caring for a member who has been abused

Those who have been abused need shepherds. However, if we are to be helpful, we need to be aware of pitfalls and the ways we could make their journey even harder. Their wounds have many layers, not the least being that for many, their boundaries have been breached and their choices overrun. Over my years of caring for survivors, I have at times been so aware of Jesus being so gentle, so patient and so respectful of the boundaries of those who had been harmed in these ways, that it has made me weep at His kindness.

Despite our best intentions, too often, we his under-shepherds, can be impatient or forceful, or paralyse survivors with guilt, or override their boundaries and choices, or put unhelpful pressure on their wounds. My aim in this article is not to train you to become a skilled counsellor of abuse victims, but rather to concentrate on your role as shepherd. You and your congregation can provide valuable things like supportive relationships, warmth, partnership, understanding, safety, as well as ministry that helps reveal God's love and provision for them. My aim here is to illustrate (1) different ways your ministry may bless; (2) some pitfalls, that if not grasped, can derail your care; and (3) ways to work in partnerships with others.

For example, victims who are still children need to be referred to professionals with expertise in helping such children. So, I confine these additional comments to those who were sexually abused as minors, but who are now men and women at various stages of coping with what has happened to them. There is a high likelihood that you will have several in your congregation. If you are not alert to that possibility, you will not pick up their hints as they test out how receptive you will be to hear their story and the problems they still carry. After an adult reveals their story, offer to assist those who need more help to source professional help. Even then, you and your congregation can often play a significant role in their support and the furthering of their recovery journey.

A measure of healing can be delivered relationally. You can provide a safe and caring community where they are accepted and belong and where it is okay at times to be upset or vulnerable. (This is even more valuable if you can provide a support person who understands their journey.) Don't underestimate the power of a willingness to really listen, and a courage to enter their dark places with them and cope with their strong emotions. I suspect we have underestimated how occasionally being given focused kind attention by someone "who knows what has happened to me and what I struggle with, when so few others know my journey" both comforts and steadies survivors. We don't always have to concentrate on fixing things but sharing the journey in the context of relationship and in a safe manner, can also be so helpful (as it can be with grief).

You can play a significant role if you understand that substantial improvement is possible, but that this is an issue that is often not rapidly or neatly solved. As sexual abuse affects many layers, don't expect recovery

to proceed always in straight lines. There can be dips and cycles in their journey to a richer calmer life. This is especially so if the abuse was long-term, at the hands of a caregiver or if terror was involved. Even when they are mostly okay, they can remain vulnerable to events retriggering or destabilising them in the short term. Just accept those wobbles and increase the level of support until they regain their previous equilibrium. For example, they may need extra support around times when they happen to see the perpetrator again or when it is in the media.

Another measure of healing can come via professionals such as psychologists who specialise in abuse or complex trauma. In recent years, so much more has been learned about how memories are stored and what might help recovery from trauma. They too can be part of God's provision for a survivor. It is a blind spot to think that pastors can or should be able to provide all that survivors need.

A measure of healing can come from delivering justice and from stopping a predator. Offer to assist them to tell the police, recognising that the result is not always as satisfying as they hoped.

Another measure of healing can come by recognising the Gospel at work. This includes things like prayer and forgiving others. Jesus is more easily recognised as healer when the healing is rapid, but many experience him as their healing companion through a slower recovery journey. There is a big variety in abuse journeys. Things certainly do not happen the same way for all, but I have sometimes been with survivors when they reported that during our time of prayer, Jesus had taken the sting out of horrific memories. During prayer times, He granted to others who had felt so dirty and damaged a deep sense of being washed and renewed. For others it was a soothing of their terror, enabling them to become stronger and much calmer as they tackled life (although still needing support for their ongoing journey.) What wonderful stories of God's provision but it is not the same path for all survivors. For many, their journey is a slower struggle, requiring long periods of counselling or support. Sometimes their journey is a bit of both.

You have some tools that secular therapists may not have, but be gentle, relational and wise rather than fast, loud or forceful. Don't just launch into ministry but talk about it with them beforehand and listen if they are hesitant. For someone who has already suffered trauma, some styles of ministry could be experienced as further trauma. In fact, warm active listening and quiet prayer can be some of your main tools. Protect survivors from church folk who have a one size fits all idea of the way forward. These people may imply that there is never a place for secular therapists, that it is the victim's failure if they have not been healed the instant they were prayed for or that any later wobbles indicate a lack of faith. A focus on healing without an understanding of suffering is usually not enough.

Church members who have been abused also often want you to help them wrestle with spiritual issues. Their questions can include, "Why did God let this happen when I pleaded with Him to stop this?" There can be a whole reservoir of anger against God. (Reading Tim Hein may assist you as you help survivors with these issues.⁷) Many continue to struggle with such issues as guilt, shame, anger or anxiety, so maintain an awareness of their issues and vulnerabilities. For example, if the sermon you plan to give might unnecessarily unsettle them or make them feel condemned, when

they were not the group you were wanting to challenge, put qualifiers into your sermon.

For those abused by their fathers, it can cause fewer roadblocks if you refer to “Jesus” rather than “God the Father” when you speak or pray with them, at least in the early days. This group often have great trouble seeing someone described as “Our Father” as being loving or safe to come close to. Be alert as disclosures may come on youth camps, in pre-marriage counseling or even from an age group older than you might expect. Some may have repressed the memory of abuse at the time, but much later in life have to start dealing with the full emotional load as the memories surface. It is never wise to go digging for memories, or suggest to someone that the difficulties they suffer might indicate there might have been abuse in their past, as that can add the power of suggestion. However, do not automatically be dismissive if detailed memories start bubbling up. A recent experience such as moving into a nursing home, where people keep walking uninvited into their bedrooms, can be the sort of trigger that lifts the lid off old abuse, leaving the survivor in a state of fear and hyper-vigilance. Just telling them there is nothing to be frightened of will not solve this fear that has its roots in the past. As memories surface, this can also bring new mental health challenges and spiritual challenges. As in most cases, a team approach can be helpful. That might include yourself, a professional, plus a parishioner who is kind, gentle, a great listener, one who faithfully keeps them in their prayers and is willing to grow in understanding of their issues.

Where does forgiving fit in? The Bible makes it clear that forgiving others is a God appointed and God-backed plan. It is also one of God’s survival tools to help us live in this broken world with more freedom, even after we have been badly hurt. (I don’t use the words “total freedom” because for that we may need to wait for heaven). Yes, we are all called to use this difficult survival tool, yet some priests and pastors can urge it at a time, or in a manner, that just leave survivors feeling condemned, paralysed, powerless and more angry. Others drop onto survivors this expectation to forgive, but do not give them any practical tools to help them get there. We can also make forgiving harder for survivors, if, by our rush to get them to forgive, we have inadvertently minimised the awfulness of the offence, or the damage they still carry, or the degree of difficulty forgiving this will be. We can make it harder if we make it seem that they should just forget this and move on or make them feel like a failure for not having already completed their forgiveness journey. For ways forward see Appendix A.

We need to factor in that abuse can leave a legacy that sabotages how they see and tackle things. Also, some of them were worked over by demolition experts who intended to leave them feeling so powerless and worthless, or so paralysed by guilt, that they would not speak out. If we are uneducated about their wounds or their journeys, or perhaps in some attempt to escape our own discomfort over not being able to easily fix this, we drop more guilt onto them about forgiving, we can unintentionally collude with those same destructive forces from their past. We can hinder rather than assist their journey. A survivor’s story Appendix A shows how one well-meaning minister made her journey to forgiveness so much harder. So, for many victims of child abuse, the least helpful tools to encourage forgiving are “ought”, “guilt” and “failure” because these, along with “worthlessness”, were either a legacy of abuse, or some of the weapons used to control them. See alternatives in Appendix A.

Help them see we can forgive and still insist an offender is not excused from the legal or other consequences and restrictions that would protect other vulnerable parties. Protecting the vulnerable is also a priority of scripture (Proverbs 3:8–9). One can forgive the past, but often the need to protect the vulnerable, will necessitate new arrangements into the future. See chapter 13 and Appendix A.

Forgiving can be very freeing, but sometimes priests and pastors assume that because they have seen it be so powerful and liberating in other situations, it follows that forgiving must always be the very first step, or even more limiting, the only step or only help needed.

I am not convinced that God always takes victims through forgiveness as their very first step. (Jesus didn't always raise issues with people in the order that others thought that he should. The crowd probably thought Jesus' first step with the woman taken in adultery and with Zacchaeus, should have been to put a spotlight on their sin, but he instead invited himself to tea.) Before coming to forgiving the offences, some survivors first need nurture and safety and to grow in awareness that they even matter and that therefore the offences against them matter. Others seem to need a considerable time processing before forgiving. Others go through a very angry phase first. Forgiving for others seems to need several bites, as a survivor becomes able to take yet another step. For some it seems to be a process that God takes them on step by step. Still others, perhaps in response to our sermons, can be trying to assume the additional burden of responsibility to forgive, before they have even escaped the misplaced self-blame and feeling of responsibility for the abuse itself. Sometimes we may need to respond differently to how we might with other people. I recall Jesus stooping and writing in the sand rather than overwhelm one woman with even more shame and condemnation.

Some can seem to just need to leave it behind them for a bit, and not think about the past too much for a little while. I can recall one young woman whose top need when she finally escaped the family home, seemed to be to have the freedom to be the child that she had never been allowed to be, and to discover there were some good things in life and some safe people. (Her abuse had not been sexual but had been horrific and long-term). For her, forgiving didn't become the top issue until about three years later when she could see the impact her past was having on her life and relationships. She was then more prepared to do the hard work of forgiving. With an awareness of heaven's backing, she tackled and forgave one by one a great number of past betrayals and so many episodes of physical and emotional abuse. She found great benefit and much improved relationships through this. She found the diagrams in Appendix A a big help. It helped her diagnose just what was making it even harder for her to forgive, and then gave her a tool to enable her to release those who had hurt her so badly. The freedom this gave her, enabled her to live a life of so much laughter, gratitude and contribution to others for the next 35 years.

Forgiving can certainly bring much more freedom but people can also need other strands of healing. When different tragedies hit this woman much later in life, a therapist coming from a very different perspective was able to undo a few more of the old knots, at least enough for the next stage of the journey. It is common for over a survivor's life, for there to be more than one period when help is needed, and for that later help to come via perhaps a very different approach.

It is another blind spot to view all periods of being angry as necessarily negative. Not all anger is an indication that someone is stuck and not all anger is a blockage to forgiving. Anger can sometimes play a role in the cycles of getting stronger. I appreciate the following example is processing recent abuse of an adult rather than historical abuse of a child but note the different cycles this young woman went through over some months. You can't get more committed to forgiving than as this 20-year-old did, when at the very time a group of men were pack-raping her and damaging her body so brutally, she was asking God to forgive them. Her first counsellor was very angry at what had happened and was trying to get her to be angry also, but that was too alien to where she found herself at that time, so she stopped attending. Some months down the track and in her own time, as her body healed, and she gradually got stronger, and with support that was more permission-giving rather than prescriptive, she did enter some months of being very angry indeed. Then some months on again, she again chose to forgive. It is not uncommon for anger to be part of naming what happened as abuse, so very wrong and so very damaging. It can also be part of reclaiming one's strength and ability to defend one's boundaries again. For others who had no power and no voice at the time, anger can be part of reclaiming their power and their voice. Isn't it all worth being angry about? Did it not sound as if Jesus was angry when he said it would be better if one group who harmed children had never been born?

Yet some survivors can certainly stay stuck in anger and an understandable outrage for decades, and this sometimes spills over into dysfunctional and unnecessary battles with all and sundry. Some of these have PTSD. This is all understandable but not a great way to live or make friends or influence people. Knowing when and how to challenge those stuck in anger to try another path, and when and how to raise the issue of forgiving others, is not simple and will often require us to pause and choose less usual ways of approaching things. More help in Appendix A.

Given how they have been harmed, it is also your responsibility to make wise choices that protect the boundaries of survivors, and to try to deliver the richness of what you and your congregation can provide, with less risk. Sometimes the risk of harm can be reduced if you work in partnerships with other under-shepherds and other professionals.

For example, as helping this issue can take many hours, I would urge male clergy not to take the role of main long-term counsellor or caregiver for a female abuse survivor (nor if gay, to take that role for any survivor of the gender you are attracted to). Unintended damage can so easily happen. Well-trained male counsellors may perform this role, but your training in things like transference is much less and you have a complex shepherd's role to a whole congregation that can be derailed. Anyone who provides significant support to a victim of child abuse must realise it is likely that they could be cast in some role connected to the original abuse, and this can be tricky for males as the abuser was often male. (For example, some survivors may have hated what a father did, but still longed for him to love her.) With this issue there is also a higher risk of dependency. That needs to be handled wisely and kindly, which is easier if the possibility of romantic attraction has not become an extra complicating factor. Sharing such topics promotes intimacy and love-starved victims can very easily fall in love with someone who is kind to them, especially if this has involved many hours with just the two of you together. Taking advantage of their feelings would

be an unethical exploitation of vulnerability and very damaging. For some, their boundaries have been breached so many times, they will be more at risk from you or others, which is the last thing they need. Even if you are sure you wouldn't respond, if you have met them frequently on their own (which increased that chance of intimacy) and they fall in love with you, you have possibly sabotaged being able to help them in the future and left them to struggle with the additional pain of yet another unmet longing. Recall that for some, their emotions have been sexualised, so if you are the gender of the abuser, or someone of the gender a victim is attracted to, don't provide physical comfort like hugs.

Those who have been abused can be more likely to experience behaviour as another violation that may not appear abusive to many others.

You and your team will need to be more careful with boundaries to protect them and protect yourself from misunderstandings. (Even youth group leaders need to be careful when dealing with a minor who has been abused and avoid putting the minor or themselves in any compromising situations.) Try not to convey rejection as you protect boundaries. Also, be aware that a very tiny number can out of their confusion and turmoil, make false allegations. So, if you are a male minister, it can be safer for everyone if you join some sessions with their usual counsellor or supporter and contribute in that context rather than meeting them over the long term just by yourself. If long-term counselling is required, it can be better to refer that to a qualified person and you remain the supporter who meets them much less frequently.

However, it is a damaging blind spot to so shy away from them that they feel rejected. You have much to offer but it just needs to be offered more safely. Survivors will be helped if they sense they are not just being fobbed off to others but that their priest or pastor considers this a major ordeal they are contending with and is fully backing them. You could remind them that every Wednesday you regularly pray for their journey and can be invited to join in some sessions with their regular counsellor or supporter. Ensure some meetings occur. You might perhaps every four months have a regular afternoon tea together with you and your spouse to hear how it is going, give the gift of listening, share the pain, celebrate any progress or periods when things were easier, affirm where you see God using them and seek God for any next steps or blessings.

If you are working with survivors you can find yourself experiencing secondary trauma so be alert if you need to seek professional assistance for debriefing and support.

A final key warning. If you, as an adult, ever broke the law by sexually assaulting or having sexual contact with an underage person, please do not attempt to be involved with this ministry to others who have been hurt in this way. It is not enough that you might now be forgiven, or want to make up for it, or are sure that no one knows your past. Always find a way to quickly redirect this ministry to others. Otherwise, when discovered, your deception will be experienced by survivors and your institution as very damaging and yet another violation of their trust.

Understanding and responding to those who abuse

Chapter 8

The implications for children and churches of different types of offenders

This is the first of seven chapters on understanding more about those who abuse and responding to them.

It is quite common for children to have been put at more risk when church leaders were ignorant of these matters or were lied to or manipulated by offenders. Responding to offenders can require different strategies.

1. The great majority of men and women who were abused never go on to abuse

Many survivors have had a hard life but the last thing they would contemplate doing is harming a child in the way they were harmed. This group has suffered enough without us presuming they will abuse. For the great majority there is not even any temptation to abuse children, but for some, a legacy of their abuse does include a sexual attraction that has an increased focus on minors. Those left with this legacy and who have chosen never to abuse, deserve our respect and gratitude. They remind us abuse is always a choice, even if it is tough. These have possibly been wise enough to have avoided high-risk involvement with children and kept clear-sighted, without blindfolds or self-serving justifications. However, once someone crosses the line and offends even once, the world tilts. The likelihood of re-offense is increased and his actions now place the protection of children as the top priority, because the consequences can be so dire.

2. A considerable percentage of offenders were themselves abused

Yes, only a low fraction of those who were abused go on to abuse, but we are confronted with how damaging abuse can be, when we see the chilling figures when the statement is reversed. The percentages differ from subgroup to subgroup but in certain categories, the figures are nudging close to 100%. The way of categorising offenders has varied over the years. For example, many therapists today might tell you that they have never dealt with someone who had “abused children under ten” who had not himself been abused when a child. Or looking at research done by Frieda Briggs some years back, and using the categories in use at that time, one subgroup was designated “fixated paedophiles”. This was a small subgroup who were only sexually attracted to minors and didn’t seek sex with adult males or females.⁸ Of this fixated group, close to a hundred percent were themselves abused when children, often by multiple offenders. Such very high figures mean that this is no natural variation, but this group have been so badly affected by the abuse they suffered.

There was however, another subgroup in her research on those who offended against minors, where the percentage who were themselves abused was far lower. This subgroup was designated “non-fixated”. These abused minors but were also sexually attracted to or having sex with adult heterosexual or adult homosexual partners. (For example in Catholic

and Anglican settings there were examples of this other subgroup who offended against sometimes large numbers of minors.) Yes many in this subgroup had also been abused, but the percentage was much lower in this category, because the numbers were diluted by others who had never been abused, but just indulged the availability, control, added sexual thrill, or lack of threat to their self-esteem associated with having sex with a minor. For example, many of the fathers who abused the girls in their families had never themselves been abused, but perhaps just exercised some sense of entitlement.

Most who have sex with adults do not also try to make sexual contact with minors but this shows us there is a group of heterosexual and homosexual ones who do and who choose to breach that boundary for a variety of reasons. The damage done by this non-fixated group destroys the myth, that because someone has sex with adults, an allegation against them by a minor must by definition be false or even discriminatory. Another chilling point that underlines the power that abuse can have to mess with such precious things as sexuality, arousal patterns and socialisation, shows up in the gender of the child to which some subgroups are attracted. (Note that in the following example I am not generalising beyond this smallish subgroup where the results were very strong.) This was the male-fixated paedophile subgroup who you recall had nearly all been abused and were only sexually attracted to minors. If those who fall into this particular subgroup of victims go on to abuse, “the gender of his original abuser determines the gender of his later victims: with few exceptions, the boys abused by male perpetrators went on to abuse boys; the boys abused by women committed offences against women; and offenders who had been abused by both males and females, victimised children of both sexes”⁹

The fact that many offenders have been abused has the following implications for churches.

- a. We are beholden to act strongly to stop this being passed on and creating still more offenders and victims.
- b. The sexual abuse of young people either within the family or outside has been far more damaging than was first realised.
- c. The Royal Commission reported that 90% of the victims in some churches were boys. This is a startling figure and at odds with the percentages in the community. Wise prevention must factor in that in these churches, those attracted to boys (from both the fixated and non-fixated group who were having sex with adult males as well as boys) is where the bulk of the trouble has been coming from. It was not just that there were more perpetrators who were attracted to boys than those attracted to girls, but on average each had more victims, adding to the risk these men posed.
- d. We can treat the offenders who were so hurt themselves during childhood with understanding and care, but it is a mistake to let that lead to giving those who offend more chances—or not reporting them—or even worse, reinstating them to positions of influence, trust or access to children. Each of these responses has too high a chance of leading to more victims, and just multiplying into the future the damage of the past.
- e. It is also a mistake to treat offenders as if they have no choice whether to offend or not. Abuse is always a choice, even if resisting is a hard choice.

Some offenders now choose to lower their sex drive by using prescription drugs under medical supervision, but this is not always a simple solution.

- f. Just admonishing and pronouncing forgiveness is not enough assistance. A good specialised program (sometimes available in jail or community) can also help offenders to see things more clearly and choose more wisely. This is very valuable as it can certainly reduce the overall number of children harmed in the community, but that is very different to claiming that it cures a particular offender. This means that while some may even stop offending, as a leader with responsibilities for the welfare of others, you cannot afford to assume this, reinstate them or relax ongoing consideration of which roles or contexts can no longer be considered safe for them.
- g. Despite the legal definition, some who abuse youngsters aged from 11 to 15 do not consider their victims as “children” and don’t see themselves “child abusers”. You might have fewer unproductive conversations with this group if you refer to victims as “youngsters”, “kids” or “minors”. Unfortunately, as the testimony of their victims before the Royal Commission shows, these abusers are deceiving themselves because the harm done to this age group can also be massive.

3. Teenage males make up a significant proportion of offenders against both boys and girls

This also has implications for churches.

- a. On camps we need to be alert to boys abusing other boys as well as girls. If a boy seems unnaturally fearful of sharing a tent for a second night with a boy, don’t just mindlessly jolly him along. (Report harmful sexual behaviour by minors to police, but the Royal Commission is hoping to initiate phone referral pathways for minors engaging in these behaviours.)
- b. It is true that their teenage years may well be the only time in their lives that some offend. Perhaps when they were closer in age to a girlfriend who was a tad underage.

However, it can be a blind spot to underestimate all teenage offending. About half of serial child abusers (who we dread getting access to our organisations) began abusing while still in their teens.

For example, the fixated paedophiles can start offending quite young. So, if someone with an offence against their name while a teenager applies some years later to lead on a camp, it is wise to be very cautious. Do not just agree and quickly dismiss the past as nothing more than the troubles of youth. Remember that victims, particularly young males, often do not report until decades later, so the fact that there have been no further convictions is not an automatic green light. At the very least, get someone with considerable experience in this area to take a very careful look at the components of that offence, and not just his version of it. Statistically, if the victim was a boy, there is a higher risk of further victims.

- c. Keeping the above in mind and after making sure the police are informed, the pastoral approach one takes with an offender who is young, unsophisticated or coming to God for the first time may be a bit different than if the offender has been a church attender or leader for years. An older seasoned offender will often misuse many things to stay in the dark unchallenged, and that group who are already very familiar with the story of grace, can often even be misusing the theology of grace and other Scripture. They can

need to be challenged in different ways (see chapter 12). Encourage young offenders about grace, but just admonishing and helping a young offender find forgiveness is not enough: they need wise ongoing help. Try to get them the best, even if that means he uses your office to Skype his regular appointments with a specialist in this area. However, the risks are still very high and you will still need to restrict him from many contexts and roles.

4. Offenders vary enormously

Not all offenders have the same degree of compulsion. Some offenders are socially inadequate or have disabilities, but this excuse doesn't apply to priests, judges and others who were clever and often escaped conviction. One subgroup of offenders are sociopaths. This group usually make no attempt to build a relationship and can take advantage of any sexual opportunity. These can be more likely than some other groups to use force rather than persuasion or seduction. Some of these offend opportunistically in toilets. One tiny subset even get gratification from the control, humiliation and torture of children.

A much larger subgroup groom and build a relationship (some are identifying with their victim and almost re-enacting or reprocessing their own abuse). For this large subgroup, "the most common form of seduction is to insinuate themselves into the trust of the child victim and when possible, the trust of that child's parents or guardians. Typically, this type of offender is attracted to a child of a particular age who is perceived as being emotionally neglected or vulnerable."¹⁰ The sexual contact is not the only source of damage. The relationship itself can be damaging when it is designed to entrap with attention and affection, but also corrupt, confuse or lead the child to feel complicit or guilty.

5. Implications for churches of offenders who build a relationship with their victim

- a. Those who abuse in church settings commonly but not always belong in this subgroup.
- b. This group can blend in more easily in church settings as either a parishioner or leader.
- c. This group's offending will not be confined to Sunday mornings. Can you see the problem with a model where a minister does not inform or warn others if he or she knows of convictions or admissions, but instead just relies on keeping his or her eye on the offender during Sunday mornings? That will not provide enough safety because it would not alert you that, mid-week and out of your awareness, an offender of this type may well already be offending. He may have used the credibility of being a fellow worshiper, to make himself the "helpful male" to a single mum in your church and be already taking her children camping.
- d. The credibility gained from being a fellow church attender or a priest can be a strong tool in his seduction, as most parents or indeed children would not just trust anyone. So, you will be looking for ways to take away from any known offender, his tools of credibility and its twin, a "context to build relationship." When you think about this, there are few effective ways to do this other than to remove him from all ministry and leadership. After his time in jail, tell him that a necessary condition before he can attend a service or

small group, is if he agrees that everyone there, especially parents, will be informed of his past.

- e. Given that telling everyone in a church of more than about forty people has many problems, an alternative is he attends a small service where no children attend or a small mid-week all adult meeting, where in both situations, everyone has been told his past history. This can also offer the offender the potential for real relationships and support that he so needs.

6. Sex is not their only problem

As a pastor, be warned that by the time an offender has been abusing for a while, many have lost the battle with their conscience about several other issues as well. These battles have often been lost over time as they made dozens of even small choices which, while not the abuse itself, were dark choices designed to hide the abuse, control or coerce the victim, or compartmentalise abuse, so that they could continue to get what they wanted, with less pain or challenge to themselves. There was often a progression to these choices. For example, he may have made a series of choices that progressively took him on a path to becoming more callous and indifferent to the plight of victims or more willing to control, threaten or deceive. After all these choices, things like deception or power and control have also often become entrenched in their lives. This should warn you that you can't afford to be simplistic or naïve around any offenders. It can be a second blind spot, if you presume that these additional entrenched behaviours (such as deception and control) won't now also insert themselves into their dealings with you and your congregation. (More in chapters 9, 10 and 11.)

We do neither their potential victims nor offenders any favours if we underplay the choices all have to choose differently. The fixated ones who were all so abused themselves, may have a much narrower range of choices than others have, but professionals working with them often try to help by seeing if they can assist them with the abuse they themselves suffered. However, they also aim to help them see the damage to others and get them to recognise responsibility and choices so that they may join the other men, who, "in similar situations or even states of despair,"¹¹ choose less harmful responses to their situation. Kevin Wallis, a highly experienced psychologist who worked with convicted offenders for many years, writes, "Although the sexual abuse of a child often occurs in a context of relationship and personal confusion, it is the result of a calculated decision by an offender who knows that what he or she is doing is wrong but does not want to admit it."¹²

Those who undertake to support offenders, need to help them stay clear-sighted and recognise and fight for each small choice that helps keep them clear-eyed and well back from offending. Choices so often have psychological and spiritual consequences. For example, when we choose to not see what we are doing, or the range of people we are harming, evil stalks us and we give it so much more power.

Chapter 9

The blindfolds and defences offenders employ to deceive themselves and others

Those who have been abusing for a while often have similarities to those with addictions and those who engage in domestic violence. All these groups commonly use defences and blindfolds or project blame onto others, as ways to accomplish a purpose. That purpose is to try to prevent themselves and others from really seeing the offences, or the damage, or the choices they keep making that enable their offending to continue. Those with aspirations to appear good may adopt even thicker blindfolds. If you prefer a different analogy, many use fog machines to keep themselves and others in the dark. In some cases, recalling what you know about alcoholism will assist.

- a. In common with domestic violence, those who attend church and yet sexually abuse minors, can choose a blindfold that see themselves only as responders. These choose to view the child as seducing them.
- b. Many abusers evade seeing and facing their own guilt by projecting it all onto the child. The abuser may not end up feeling guilt, shame or worthlessness but often the child does. They often make the child feel responsible. ("You knew what would happen and did not say no, so it is all your fault.")
- c. Another group give themselves permission to re-offend by using a blindfold that minimises the worth of the victim. ("You are just a rent boy, a slut.") A few progressively devalue victims even to the level of seeing them as no more than objects for their use, control and disposal.
- d. Some use alcohol as a blindfold to excuse their offending. ("It doesn't count if I was drunk.")
- e. Some misuse theology as a blindfold. ("I am the head of the home and entitled.") Or an offender may tell himself that, provided he later mouths the words "I am sorry", this will fix all problems.
- f. Nearly all use blindfolds that minimise the level of damage abuse causes. Some had low empathy for victims before offending. Some later cauterise empathy in order to continue offending. Many offenders are very self-absorbed and may make only token and minimal statements about damage to others, before rapidly returning the conversation to themselves. This sort can try to manoeuvre their pastor into adopting his blindfold of narrowing the issue to being only about him and his need for forgiveness. He assumes that once that gets sorted, everything will be fine. He can be so focused on himself, that you could be excused for thinking that his story did not include some real live victim somewhere, who needs help.
- g. Others tell themselves that in order to ensure the child's silence, they are compelled to threaten to kill their mother, pet or sibling, but use a blindfold that says, if they don't actually carry that out, they have done no real harm.

- h. A sense of being a victim of life can blind their awareness of being someone who harms.
- i. Abusers can also blind themselves to seeing all the other people they manipulate or betray.
- j. Many use blindfolds that minimise the wrongness of their actions. "It's only sex and sex is natural", "I am teaching her how great sex is". Some in church settings have moral conflict over their offending, but there are some who have no moral conflict at all. They have convinced themselves that opposition to this is nothing more than "a rigid and puritanical society oppressing and maligning a normal sexual subculture".¹³ To these, the age of consent is an artificial construct by nannies who don't want to recognise that children are sexual beings and capable of meaningful consent. Clearly, this group had not been listening to the pain expressed at the Commission by those caught up in this when a minor.
- k. Some cite historical precedents. The Spartans had sex with boys so this normalises it and makes it okay.
- l. Some who themselves did not offend, put on blindfolds that helped them to not see the clear signs that others from their social or sexual group, or their family or religious group, were sexually abusing children, or putting them at risk of very serious harm. See chapter 18 section 6.
- m. Other offenders are in a fog, reproducing what happened to them. If the one who abused him had been one of those who combined abuse with affection and attention, he in turn can often target a child that he sees himself in (identifies with). He can then reproduce the same seduction techniques, justifications and ways of controlling his victim, as were used on him. He often repeats the same sweeteners of physical affection and attention. Some tell themselves "this is my reward for all the good I do". Other blindfolds may include that "he helps the boy more than he harms him", or "what is so pleasurable for me must be a positive and liberating for others as well". This group also needs help to get rid of fog and see the lasting damage they are doing to the boys they say they care about.
- n. Most use a blindfold that minimises the number of offences they have committed. You can see many parallels in this list with alcoholism and domestic violence.
- o. Just as two alcoholics can reinforce each other's blindfolds and give each other permission to drink to excess without judgement, when groups of men abuse, very powerful permission giving and reinforcing of blindfolds can occur. This is especially powerful if they are from the same club, family or institution. This is multiplied even more if the leader in the organisation, institution or religious group is an abuser.

Even those who admit the offences happened, and were wrong and even apologise can be employing yet another cluster of blindfolds

- a. This blindfold defines the damage the offender causes as "isolated and almost surprising incidents" that "just happened" but that "he promises will never be repeated". You will see the parallels with domestic violence. For example, an abusing father may use this blindfold of incident-based thinking to conveniently keep out of his awareness. First, the "level of damage" (because that is not necessary for him to look at now that he has yet again assured himself he is not going to do it any more). Second,

that this has happened before, and that it is well past the time to recognise there is a pattern of failure and damage or addiction that needs drastic action if children are to be kept safe. This blindfold is another self-soothing con, designed to leave oneself unchallenged, but leave the other party to keep on carrying all the awful consequences. You can see how this is often compounded with a related blindfold.

- b. This one keeps out of his awareness his responsibility for all the small pre-steps and choices that regularly lead to him tipping into that same end-point failure. If he registers any fault at all, it is only the “end-point failure” that “just happened”. Using this mind-set, he may even be sorry for or ask forgiveness for specific incidents (be they drinking the rent money again, hitting his partner again, or abusing a child) but fail to face, or seriously repent of, or wrestle with the underlying beliefs, attitudes, choices and small steps that keep getting him to those same damaging behaviours. For example, he may express remorse that he abused, but fail to acknowledge that he spent so much time planning, rehearsing and fantasising about the abuse before he offended. He may not even try to limit this behaviour.
- c. Some have another blindfold which keeps the focus on pleading with God to take away all temptation in the future, while remaining passive and blind about the hard choices they need to, and indeed could make now, if they were really serious about keeping youngsters safe.
- d. As with alcoholism, many have a blindfold that minimises the grip this has on their lives. They tell themselves they can stop without needing any costly battle that will require them to make substantial changes in their lives, such as to where they hang out, what they watch online, what help they need, how much they drink or what they need to be prepared to face and take responsibility for.

After this list of blindfolds, you can see how relevant 1 John 1 is when it calls us to leave behind darkness and the practice of keeping things hidden even from ourselves. It calls us to stay walking out in the light. This passage speaks of the seductive nature of darkness and choosing not to see. The offender struggles to be willing to see each tiny choice, however small and however much harder it may be for him than for others to exercise that choice to keep well back from offending. Their task is to face the fact that their abuse is a damaging crime and they have an increased responsibility for all their actions. That usually takes a journey and it certainly helps to have assistance from professionals with this expertise, even though they cannot guarantee a cure. If we permit it, an encounter with Jesus can kick-start seeing things more clearly and making choices that show what loving actions really are, including the action of seeking that professional help. In chapter 12 we see how an offender might be encouraged by the way Zacchaeus is transformed by his encounter with Jesus.

Be aware that offenders can consciously or unconsciously try to recruit you to adopt their blindfolds, their limited perspectives and their unsafe conclusions. They can do this both before and after jail time. For example, with these blindfolds in place and an incident mind-set, an offender can manoeuvre you into playing a role in his play. In the play he has written, he says sorry and you are then supposed to reassure him from scripture that he is now totally forgiven for this end-point incident. Then everyone is to agree that, because his sins are now forgiven and he earnestly promises never

to do this again, everyone should just move on with life. Some seasoned offenders have even convinced themselves that they are then entitled to be viewed as trustworthy again. He may use reassuring Bible verses like “as far as the east is from the west” and “a new creation”.

How will you resist his pressure to comply with his script? How will you instead challenge him to a response that is more life-giving for those he might otherwise continue to abuse and more life-giving for himself? See chapter 12.

Chapter 10

How offenders use power, control and manipulation

You need to be alert. Offenders have manipulated and duped so many victims, parents, clergy, counsellors, bishops and psychiatrists. When faced with the fear of exposure for child abuse, once mild and honest men have chosen to deceive on a massive scale. Some are willing to try to control and manipulate a great many people, including their ministers, bishops or moderators. Some can be violent to victims and family members. All of this can be well hidden.

The sexual abuse of a youngster (which often includes manipulating their mind and emotions) is such an abuse of power and control. The power differential is so large. One party is a bigger, stronger person who has knowledge of the world and often has a role of authority, such as a father or a priest who represents God to the youngster.

Someone who already had issues of power and control would have been more likely to have offended in the first place and may be easier to spot. For others, I suspect their power and control issues may have been smaller to begin with, but just escalated as they started to do whatever it took to retain access and control over their victim and then to keep it from being revealed. These can be harder to spot but scratch the surface of repeat offenders and it is common to find very significant power and control issues, even amongst those who appear mild.

True, some do not view themselves as exerting power and control. It is common for some to view themselves as very loving and even powerless or a victim in society at the very same time as they are a perpetrator abusing power and using manipulation and or coercion.¹⁷ Some, particularly those who identify with their victims, prefer to see themselves as caring and loving towards those they abuse, but really this is another self-deception, as their methods of power and control are very strong but just less obvious. Some may use more carrot than stick but, given the power differentials and the developmental needs of the youngsters they are manipulating, these are still very powerful methods of control. Alistair McFadyen writes, "The sexual abuse of children is fundamentally an abuse of trust and power which exploits the age-related differentials between child and abuser as well as enlisting, abusing, distorting and disorientating the child's needs for intimacy, affirmation, security, trust and guidance. Its core dynamic is that of entrapment and isolation."¹⁸

You can imagine that if the abuser is a heavy user of alcohol, issues of control, threat or intimidation usually worsen. Many abusers found it easier to control young boys and gain their compliance if they plied them with alcohol. Other abusers gained control by getting children to sexually touch other children to make them feel complicit and guilty and less likely to reveal.

When the abuser was a parental figure, control in the domestic sphere often took the form of him maintaining a closed family system by keeping the family isolated, in a fog, off balance and walking on eggshells. No family

member was permitted to talk about family business outside the family, especially “this business”. Some used violence or the threat of violence.

When the abuser was a religious figure, he too often used a form of twisted spiritual control that caused terrible lasting damage. Some said, “This is what God intended.” Others even said, “This was your fault and I will now hear your confession, or you will go to hell.”

The higher up in leadership or status the offender is, the bigger the issues of power and control are likely to be, as he has much more to lose. The level a few will go to would shock you.

If you underestimate the degree of power and control offenders exercise, when a child discloses abuse, you might be tempted to believe you have a good chance of getting that parishioner or fellow clergyman to change his ways, without calling in the police or before calling them. While at first sight it might appear to agree with scripture, this approach can be a very damaging.

The situation is different to 1 Corinthians 6. This is not an unresolved dispute between two adults about something that has happened in the past that is preferable not to drag before non-believers to settle. The top issue here is protecting a child into the future, and in our modern culture the police are the only ones with the authority to do that. Remember that we must always think ahead to what might go wrong. First, it is children who will have to bear the long-term harm if your actions are unsuccessful. (as they often can be with this strategy, even if you remain unaware of that harm.) Second, do you really feel qualified to decide that abuse has stopped, and it is safe for example, for that father to remain in the family? Do you feel qualified to be the only one aware of this situation and the only person helping him break free of this, all while children are still at risk and it is still a secret? What makes you so sure the abuser or his victim is giving you an honest answer that abuse has stopped? Have you trapped yourself into hiding a crime that you were mandated to report and have now made it even harder to report and explain to police why you delayed?

Consider these three scenarios.

- a. After hearing a child disclose, a pastor might choose to confront the accused before informing police. There is a risk that an offender will disappear and take their family interstate. This means that the chance to help a child who asked for help can be lost or made much harder. Remember, you can still offer your help after the police have carried out their initial interviews.
- b. Because the offender had sobbed and promised to stop, a priest might believe that they have stopped abusing. Yes, some offenders desperately want to stop but remember that they have probably been giving themselves those same stern lectures for years and tried hard to stop yet still offended. If all you offer is another stern admonition there may be a longer pause before the next offence but it is all too likely that the child and then younger siblings may be abused in the future.
- c. Some offenders respond in a more sinister way. They tighten their power and control. Their private responses range from threats of violence to acts of severe violence in order to prevent any family member from revealing that abuse ever happened or is still continuing. This group can beat the child severely (and sometimes their partner) or threaten to kill the child or their loved mother, baby sibling or pet, to prevent their young victims from speaking out again. Because of the bad consequences that had flowed

from their previous disclosure, that young victim or mother will now nearly always lie to that well-meaning clergyperson when they later follow up by questioning the child or spouse about whether abuse is still continuing. That minister then gains a completely false sense of having “fixed a serious problem” and a completely false sense that he or she is still “keeping an eye on it”. (These priests and pastors have developed a blind spot that can be similar to the one about whether domestic violence is still continuing.)

Knowing what offenders do to control and silence their victims and persist in their abuse should prevent you from ever confronting an offender with an accusation before telling the authorities.

Even if you informed the police after talking to him about it, the damage has often already been done. Letting an accused know before the police, allows him to use violence or threat to silence the child who may then not reveal abuse when authorities do come. You may rightly protest that you know this man so well and he is also kind, gentle and does much good. True, I should call them “men who abuse” rather than “abusers”. They are certainly not all through and through monsters. They can have a great many excellent traits. However, before you convince yourself, like some of your predecessors did, that his good traits will definitely triumph, even when this is the issue, you might ponder some things.

First, you may have concluded it is safe to tell him before informing the police because you judge that he would never harm the child. But if the disclosure is correct, hasn't he already lost a major battle with his conscience and already harmed the child, possibly many times? Second, recall that this man is now facing a high threat that he could lose everything he holds dear within the next few days. If this disclosure is pursued, he could lose his job, his wife, access to his children, his reputation and go to prison. When you remind yourself of those consequences, you might not be so surprised at the lengths even a gentle man might go to or threaten to. They can feel trapped and tell themselves they are compelled to do whatever is necessary to keep this from coming out. Some have conned themselves with a blindfold that if they only threaten something horrific, but don't carry it out, then they are doing no actual harm. (However those who work with survivors will tell you that those threats alone cause terrible long-term damage.) Also, if you pre-warn him, that enables him to clear from his computer perhaps the only corroborating evidence that might have added up to a conviction.

Do you want to be the cause of the police not getting the evidence they need to protect a child?

Never underestimate the level of power, control and manipulation some seasoned offenders can exert. All this can be hidden under a smile, tears, text quoting or a charismatic personality. Some do not just try to control their victims and their partners, but also control you, their pastor or bishop.

Even those with lesser levels of power and control may try to control you by:

- a. lying about what he has done or spreading lies about his victims or you. (This is another reason not to enter confidentiality agreements with them or you will find that you are bound to silence but they often continue to spread lies. They can attempt to discredit or sabotage the careers of those who know bits of their story or any they perceive may have become a threat to them.)

- b. trying to get you to promise confidentiality before he reveals his offences or claiming the confidentiality of the confessional after he has told you. (These are common ways some try to control what you can do with what they reveal.)
- c. presenting as so calm, reasonable and charming that one can be duped into thinking he is now safer than he is. (He can appear to be the spouse most keen to follow Christian principles, but this can be a cover for getting you to pressure the family to forgive him, to drop complaints and remain living with him.)
- d. misusing theology to try to take the focus off what he needs to change and put all the pressure on you or others to change. (For example, he may tell himself and others that you are failing in your Christian duty to better demonstrate forgiveness to him.)
- e. threatening to take legal action against you.
- f. holding things over those who might act against him. For instance, "If you proceed down that path, I will tell the press, your wife or parishioners about X."
- g. recruiting you to keep his critics at bay and provide him with an unchallenging nest, but, at the same time behind the scenes, he can be undermining your authority and influence, and stirring up division.
- h. using flattery. For instance, "That other church expelled me. You alone believe that God can forgive even this. You alone hold the Christ light of forgiveness for me." (This was said with great passion by a man who months later was unmasked as greatly minimising his past offences and manipulating, as he tried to gain the particular support he wanted from this unsuspecting pastor he had approached for help.)
- i. using their connections to influential people. One offending bishop managed to wangle the sympathy of Prince Charles before the true nature of his actions was proven.
- j. trying to manoeuvre you with selected texts into prematurely pronouncing an absolution.
- k. refusing to resign and using every loophole to challenge dismissal.

Try not to enter any agreements with offenders, such as who won't be told what, and never until you have run them past your team, including the lawyers and those who know more about offender behaviour, and the trouble this may lead to down the track.

If you absolutely have to negotiate with him, always send in your toughest negotiators.

Chapter 11

How offenders will deceive you

Deception has so often become another entrenched pattern of behaviour. It overlaps with power and control. Any offender who has religious aspirations and has abused even only a few times is usually conflicted and has usually already begun to lie to himself or others. The lying can increase exponentially. Even those who are not conflicted and believe their behaviour is acceptable, will lie a great deal to protect themselves from the consequences from the rest of society who do not share their belief. Young offenders may lie less, but for the sake of children, always be alert to this possibility whenever you are aware of an offence.

Three reasons why clergy, when dealing with those who abuse children, can be more likely to end up deceived

- a. It can be easy to overlook the fact that in order to continue abusing, seasoned abusers have had to become brilliant at lying, minimising, manipulating and flattering. Practice makes perfect! They have become expert deceivers in order to keep conning and controlling the children, the parents, all other colleagues and superiors, as well as conning themselves.
Because they have deceived so frequently, do not trust in your ability to detect when an offender is lying. Bishops and fellow clergy are ill prepared for how brilliantly priests who are abusing children lie. You will want to believe them.
- b. Abusers can present a mixed picture. Raw honesty and a desperate plea for help might be followed by blatant deception. You need to be alert because they may tell you the truth about one element and lie about the next. Lying not only comes easily but has also become an imperative. Just because you have believed that someone's desperation to stop offending was totally genuine, does not mean that you can put that same faith in their later reassurances when they swear they have not re-offended since. This is because the huge consequences that would flow from their answer can lead many at that point to lie. Just because he has tearfully admitted one thing, does not mean he isn't lying about even worse things.
- c. In fact, one common form of deception is to tearfully tell you a tiny bit of the truth as if it were all of the truth. You can be conned into thinking you are seeing a fully open and repentant man tearfully admitting everything and meeting the power of grace. You need to be more prepared for the minimising that so often accompanies abuse, whether it is from a fellow minister, a parishioner, or someone who wants to join your church after his time in jail. For example, it is not unheard of for an abusing priest to come to a bishop sobbing out a confession that he had so fleetingly fondled just one boy inappropriately while wrestling and is desperate to be told that God forgives him. That bishop may not find out until years later, that the offender had conveniently forgotten to mention, that he had by that time already raped a dozen or more other boys. Presumably the goal of such drastic minimizing like this, is to feel less dirty without having to admit things that would lead to painful consequences.

Applications of this increased risk that he could be deceiving

- a. As similar stories of deceiving superiors in this blatant and minimizing way were not isolated cases, we need to be on red alert when a person admits what might appear to be more minor sexual offences against children, or even having temptations in this area. It is extremely dangerous to presume that because an offender has told you of one offence, he has told you the full list or the most serious.

Not every abuse allegation is true and not everyone who is accused can be presumed to be lying. There can be various reasons as to why completely innocent people have an allegation made against them. These are not lying when they tell you the allegation is completely and utterly untrue. So a careful investigation is needed but once there is a proven offence, or once he has admitted what might appear to be even a more minor type of offence, or once he has himself made admissions that reveal he struggles to resist acting in these ways, we need to keep in our minds the increased risk that deception and minimisation may be involved. For example, this means that if there have been court hearings, rather than take his word for it, check the court transcripts yourself or find other ways to learn those details of any past or current charges.

- b. As a good pastor, you offer precious things like kindness and hope for all, even the most wounded and sinful. You may often choose to believe what people tell you, graciously being prepared to wear it if you are deceived. However, it becomes a different issue if a child abuser lies to you, and you then make decisions, that either by acting or failing to act, affect his future access to children. Then it is the children who will bear the consequences. The solution is not to change you into a cynical detective; it is to ensure that you always report everything connected to this area to those with more expertise. This includes even things that appear minor, or only temptations, or where you are convinced he is being fully truthful or believe that you already have things under control. Report it all.

Report all offences to police. If you have a reasonable suspicion that a child has experienced abuse, report it to Child Protection.

Report it to your head office, and if you need more expertise than they have, perhaps to groups who advise churches on abuse matters.

- c. Some ministers made the mistake of so believing that an offender had admitted everything and that he was repentant, that they paraded him to their congregation as an example of grace at work and even let him give his testimony. Some also encouraged others to step up and provide support on the basis of the minister's endorsement of his changed life. They usually deeply regretted doing this as it was often later revealed that the offender had been manipulating the pastor, lying about the number and severity of his offences and much else. Rather than assuring a congregation that he is repentant and on a new path, the risk of deception makes it much safer not to promote him or make statements that would seem to guarantee his repentance or changed direction. Better to say things like, "It seems as though he has made a good start with God here, but I don't claim to know all he has done, and I cannot guarantee that he will always make good choices around children into the future."

- d. This risk of deception, considered in combination with the awful damage that abuse can cause, together should rule out ever giving second chances to a known offender either before or after jail.

Out of grace and in many other circumstances you may be in the habit of giving second chances. But if you give a child abuser a second chance in any role that carries authority, trust or access you have made yourself, and more importantly the welfare of children, hostage to an offender's word. Let me explain why this is so and why his word is likely to be unreliable.

You may have experienced him in the past as a godly, honourable, gentle person who tries to do good, and whose word you once trusted. However, now that you are aware that he has offended even once, you need to factor some big changes into your thinking. This should now include the input of a multidisciplinary team, plus all the hints including what you have learned about offender behaviour. If you had been following the earlier advice to think ahead about all that might go wrong before you took any steps, you would by this stage be asking yourself questions like the following. "If I gave him a second chance, how would I know if my stern lecture or restrictions or his good intent or professional help had been successful in keeping him away from any offending? What about the scenario that he might continue to abuse? How would I be able to tell in the future if he has offended again?"

Can you ask the victim? You may recall that you can't always trust that someone who has been a victim previously will always tell you the truth as to whether he or she has been abused again, as some victims do not want to bring harm to the offender, or can be intimidated, especially if living with the offender. Even if you chat to a few boys in the youth group and somehow conclude that he hasn't abused those particular boys, given you now know he has already offended at least once, that will certainly not guarantee that he isn't abusing others in the group, or vulnerable boys from outside church settings. Also recall that any new victims may not disclose for a decade or more, all leaving you with a big problem.

As there are so few easy ways to get information as to whether someone has re-offended, one will likely be reduced to just asking him and left trying to assess if he is telling you the truth. This means that giving him any second chance would have made yourself and more importantly, the welfare of children, hostage to his word.

This is an even bigger problem now that you are aware that once you know of even one offence, you need to factor in this higher risk that he will deceive. Third, ask yourself how likely would he be to tell the truth and admit that he has failed this second chance, when the consequences for him will be so big, yet you will probably be unable to check any evidence to the contrary? You have also learned that you probably won't be able to tell that he is lying.

The big concern with this issue more than most others, is that there are so few ways to reliably check, yet the damage can be hidden and adding up for decades.

Whatever scheme you use, can you see that safe guards are far too weak if they are reliant on an offender's good intentions enduring, or reliant on him admitting further offences?

Even assuming you may be good at judging he has good intent when he is with you, remember that can wane and change. Recall the strong grip this can have on offender's lives.

There are many bishops and pastors who trusted the word of an offender who they thought they knew well and believed they had a good and open relationship with, and yet were blatantly deceived. These offenders swore to them there had been no more offending when there had been. These bishops and priests would certainly warn you against trusting the word of anyone who has offended once, or trusting your own judgement that he is now safe or telling you the full truth.

- e. Offenders can also lie to themselves, redefining what they are doing as “not an offence”, and “not causing harm”. Group think can be very powerful in helping offenders lie to themselves. One American priest was naïve enough to reveal on TV the group think he and his fellow abusers had adopted to justify to themselves what they did. He told the interviewer most earnestly that, “Yes, we have made a vow to God of chastity, but that only applies to sex with women, so having sex with boys is okay.” What a staggering act of self-deception that this made abusing boys okay. (Incidentally, this is extremely unlikely to be a group of men wanting to have sex with women but because of their vows, choosing boys instead. The way these things work, is that it is far more likely to be a group who were not attracted to women at all, but very attracted to underage boys, and then manipulated the meaning of codes of conduct, in an attempt to feel that their behaviour was still within bounds.) Paul writes in 2 Timothy 3:

There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... abusive ... without self control ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God ... having a form of godliness but denying its power ... You however know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, love, endurance ... In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

Deceiving and being deceived seems to sum up much of this chapter.

Chapter 12

Beware when an abuser first discloses or seeks forgiveness

It may seem that we give undue space in these next two chapters to responding to offenders, but if we are to achieve our primary goal of better protecting children, a major area that needs more careful thought is what we say to and do with offenders. It may need to be different to how we respond to other broken people. Too often in the past, the ways some priests and pastors tried to offer pastoral care and hope to abusers, resulted in more children being harmed.

I am not aiming in these two chapters to train you into being effective counsellors of offenders. Rather my first aim is to give you tools and awareness that will help you be wiser, safer and more useful when helping this group engage with the Christian message.

My second aim is to help you if you are being a shepherd to an offender, to always keep firmly in your mind your shepherd's role to also care for children, past victims and your congregation, because the decisions you make re an offender, will so often impact the future welfare of those other groups. The needs of these different parties will at times compete. For example you may not be able to juggle all of these safely in the same location.

These next two key practical chapters, will show check lists of pitfalls that have all tripped up well-intentioned ministers in the past. Noting these risks, in combination with the suggestions, may help you better avoid responses that have put children and congregations at risk, distressed victims and made it too easy for offenders to avoid engaging with change.

The offender may be a parishioner, a fellow priest or someone wanting to join your church after time in jail. How should you respond?

1. The danger of failing to inform police or Child Protection and your denomination's head office

(There is more discussion around this in other points.)

The law has recently changed to require all priests and clergy to be mandatory reporters of child sexual abuse. This, in almost all the Australian States, now means that even in the confessional, priests/clergy are required to report discloses of child sexual abuse to police. Even if you are not clergy, for the protection of children I urge you to do all in your power to keep the police informed. If you notify both police and church early, it reduces the risk of cover-ups, malfunctions or the limitations either system may have.

For example, always notifying your church head office means, that, even if the police decide they have insufficient evidence to proceed with a criminal charge, or that they can do nothing until a now adult victim is prepared to talk to them, the church may then conduct its own inquiry using a different standard of proof, in order to remove unsafe people from the ministry.

Notifying head office immediately also means that protocols can be followed, and you can get the advice that can prevent you from unintention-

tionally putting children at higher risk. For example, in the Anglican Church of Australia there is now a requirement to first notify the Director of Professional Standards and to fulfil the requirements of the Safe Ministry to Children Canon.¹⁹

For an example of one denomination's strategy and protocols²⁰ and policy²¹ see the resources offered by the Safer Ministry Commission of the Anglican Church of Australia.

Reporting to the police is vital but it is a myth that doing so will always conclude or solve all the difficult issues that clergy can be confronted with either before or after an offender is jailed.

I now explore more issues that clergy can find themselves having to wrestle with and other common blind spots. In order that readers can later dip into sections there will be some repetition

2. It is extremely dangerous to think you can reliably assess that all risk is now over

No matter how much you might personally become convinced of it, you absolutely cannot afford to make decisions about the future at any point (either before or after any jail time) that are based on your assessment that all risk is now over. Too many clergy, psychiatrists and counsellors underestimated the urge to re-offend and sanctioned returning offenders to roles and contexts that put children at too much risk.

3. It is dangerous to think that a stern lecture can be relied on to stop re-offending

Those who agree with your lecture have probably been trying to control their behaviour by giving themselves that same stern lecture for years. However, when someone has crossed the line and offended (including using child pornography), faces allegations or is really struggling to avoid offending you cannot assume that adding another lecture will be enough to stop them from offending.

Another subgroup of offenders will tune-out and endure your lecture in order to get what he wants: a fresh start, a pastor on his side who won't blow the whistle or an ally who will pressure his family to forgive him and stay with him.

4. It is dangerous to rely on a single theological truth or pastoral approach when dealing with a complex problem

Many pastors and church leaders have seen how important, powerful or liberating a particular doctrine or pastoral approach can be and make the mistake of using this as the first step—or even more dangerous the only step or only priority—in every instance. (This can be a risk either before or after any jail time.) When confronted with sexual abuse, too many waved a single placard or made a single important issue their only concern. Some thought that all they needed to attend to was getting the offender forgiven and right with God and refused to see wider than that. Others thought that all they mainly needed to attend to was making sure everyone else forgave him and refused to see wider than that. Others made sure their church was welcoming to all sinners, or trusted in God's healing or promising an offender confidentiality. (There are parallels when the issue is domestic violence.)

It was not what they included that was the problem. It was what they left out or gave little attention or weight to. The church has got into big trouble when it has tried to deal with this complex issue with just one or two placards or priorities. We need the full range. For example, it is a big theme in scripture to bind up the broken-hearted, but too often the care of victims was given only short-term attention. We are also urged in scripture to protect the vulnerable, but too often this strand about protecting children into the future was either neglected or more commonly, was just idealistically assumed that all would be fine from now on. This proved a recipe for tragedy and more children were abused.

Other ministers got into trouble using a favoured pastoral approach that they had found helpful in other contexts, not realising how often that approach is misused by offenders, or even that it is not suitable at all when the issue is abuse. (For example, mediation is never appropriate for child abuse.)

5. It is dangerous to believe you can handle this by yourself

Dozens of your predecessors believed that they knew enough about the right way to proceed when a priest or parishioner abused or someone wanted to join after his time in jail. Many either acted alone or perhaps consulted a clergy friend but didn't make even a single phone call to an abuse advisor. The temptation to follow this path will be even stronger if you know and like the offender. After all, armed with your usual pastoral approaches and the Bible isn't your responsibility to a repentant sinner and the way forward perfectly obvious? As mentioned in the previous risk, if history repeats itself, some of you will feel so certain that you are following the true path according to a key biblical truth that you will be tempted to not inform police, dismiss advice and ignore the full range of other insights and biblical truths that the church needs if it is to navigate wisely and safely through this issue. If you go it alone, or only ring up a fellow minister, or only consult the local solicitor in your congregation, not only have you broken the law by not informing the police, you also run a far higher risk that some child will suffer more harm.

You need people who have acquired much greater experience in wrestling with abuse issues and the legal issues connected with them, to shed much more light on what can go wrong. Hopefully your head office can provide these, so ring as soon as you hear a disclosure or rumour, or find some way to make every decision under an experienced team. I know that some head offices were involved in cover-ups, and that is why also informing the police provides that double safeguard.

6. Risks when an offender first admits that he has abused

You have no warning a disclosure is coming, so it can be safer to slow things down and mainly listen to him for a bit, or even until you can access more advice and be reminded of risks.

To avoid allowing yourself to be manoeuvred into promising anything or prematurely offering reassurance about forgiveness or absolution, a useful phrase can be, "That's a really good start."

Anglican priests hearing a confession of child sexual abuse are required to notify the police, the Director of Professional Standards and to follow the Safe Ministry to Children Canon on Confessions and in particular the *Guide-*

lines for the Hearing of Confessions and the Granting of Absolution with special reference to Child Sexual Abuse.

www.anglican.org.au/data/Private_Confession_Pastoral_Guidelines_with_Special_Reference_to_Child_Sexual_Abuse_March_2011.pdf

This is because in each Anglican diocese there is only one specially trained priest authorised to grant absolutions in relation to child sexual abuse.

One issue is can we do even more to help the child in a system like this where priests need to inform the police but also tell someone disclosing this, that they are unable to pronounce any absolution but will refer them to an authorised priest? Many of these clergy will be glad of help on how they might do more for the child than simply treat this as a hot potato to be passed on. At a minimum, why not model to clergy in this system, ways to grasp this opportunity and capitalise on this momentum that led him to come and admit this, and use this maybe brief period when he may be being more cooperative, to work harder for this child and all children? Why not demonstrate to them not just how to “shut down a confession and refer on” but how to “shut down a confession and work harder to try to get the information that might help the child”. Most details of the story will not be vital but for example, getting the child’s name can be a big help. Without it, it can be harder to get that child help or for the police to make a case. The offender may well not even go to that appointment with the authorised priest, so while he is willing to talk, why not try to get him beyond an admission that he had abused some anonymous boy or girl and try to get even their first name.

Another goal could be to get his agreement as you inform authorities. This can sometimes make it easier to get help for the child. Some may also make this a goal for pastoral reasons or theological reasons. Getting his agreement may decrease the chance that an offender might break himself and all his family away from the church’s assistance when you later inform the authorities (as you are mandated to do.) You may well not succeed in getting his co-operation, but your best chance will probably be during that first session while he is perhaps facing things more clearly and still trying to get your help, and before he might revert to being more self-protective.

The following hints may be useful for those proceeding further with a person who is seeking to unburden himself and who has probably already asserted how repentant he is. One possible strategy starts with you asking him to restate that, then poses questions that explore that claim that he is repentant and seeing more clearly, but always ask him to agree if that is so. Next pose questions that put repentance into action but right through the process, wait for his agreement about each step on the way. That has the potential to carry him with you to be a little more cooperative when you do inform authorities. It can be best to use language that implies a journey.

You might try this example, but proceed slowly, with long pauses. He may be sobbing and you could say gently, “I can hear that you have had a hard struggle with this. And you have been telling me that you are really repentant? Is that what you have been telling me?” (This is much wiser than agreeing that he is repentant.) “Part of being repentant means giving up conning ourselves and finally being prepared to see things and confess things as they really are. [Pause.] This is more than some private moral failure, isn’t it? Being committed to this repentance journey means facing this is also a crime—where others get really damaged. Have you been seeing that more? What have you been starting to let yourself see of the

terrible damage this can cause? What damage are you already aware this can leave for victims to struggle with for much of their lives?" (You might add others, like many have a lifetime of addictions or despair). "We do know the earlier we can get help for any kids involved, the less their life struggle will be. Anyone who is committed to this repentance journey, would want us to get the very best help and protection for this youngster right now. Isn't that what being sorry means? Part of showing that you are facing this more now, will be agreeing that for this youngster's sake, you need to tell me their full names so they can get the best help as soon as possible. So their name is ...? Well done. Were there others?"

(You can talk about repentance, but it is wise not to take any steps towards assuring of forgiveness until he has demonstrated enough repentance to have already admitted it all to the police.)

Pastors and priests hoping to get his agreement before they notify authorities, one could say, "The fact that you have come today suggests to me that deep down you want kids protected from harm. Is that right? Am I right thinking that you have even tried to stop this before? Yes, it is now the law that I must report this to the authorities but I would rather take that step with your agreement. Yes, I will be reporting to Child Protection and other authorities anyway, and yes that will be tough but I think that in the longer term, you will feel better if you take a decisive step at this point of adding your agreement to authorities being notified and your agreement to kids getting immediate help. It will certainly look better to others that you agreed to this."

If he says yes, some might then choose to immediately send a brief text to Child Protection or police that just gives all names plus the briefest summary but promises a later phone call. This makes it easier for you to act for the child during his perhaps brief period of co-operation, but doesn't bring to a complete halt your care of him at a time when it is not uncommon for him to be a suicide risk. (You may need to arrange for someone to be with him quite a bit for some days.)

Even if he did not give agreement, you can add gently but firmly, "Well I had hoped to get your agreement, but you know I need to act to protect children, so I will be informing the authorities. Yes, I will do my best to get you help, but you are not the only one in this sad story are you? I need to report so that children can be helped and protected."

Arrange to meet him again quite soon to check up on him and capitalise on his momentum to make lasting changes. Write up the interview in detail immediately after. Inform others as described in chapter 12 section 1.

He should be stood down from any leadership positions when he admits abusing or any allegation becomes known to you, even before proven in court, but different denominations will have different mechanisms for accomplishing that. (The Royal Commission recommendations do permit one exception when an accused could be permitted to stay in work during investigations.²²)

7. The danger of making promises during an interviews

Promises that can get you into trouble include "of course you can attend this church", or that you "won't tell anyone" or that you "won't tell the police" or "parishioners" or "that you will assure his wife that he is now repentant and safe to come home", or that "in return for a resignation you won't tell others". Remember that you don't know enough to see all the long-term implica-

tions so it is better to slow things down and defer any promises until you get advice from both the legal and abuse sectors.

8. The risk to children if we are not careful with our wording

If we say things in a form that sounds too much as if being forgiven means that all problems are over, there is the risk that offenders will quote that to others and misuse it to gain credibility with them, thus putting children at more risk.

A variation on this is when he tells you only a fraction of what he has done but says to his wife or other parishioners that “I have admitted everything to the bishop/pastor and it’s all sorted. He and I are okay about it all now. He has assured me from the bible that I am forgiven and a new creation. Old things have passed away. There is no need for any of you to be concerned anymore”.

9. The danger of thinking that an abuser who is “sorry” is repentant

The offender may want to recruit you to this view, but it can lead you to feel obliged to assure him of God’s forgiveness even when you are still extremely uneasy. You may not always spell this out to him at this stage, but always keep in your own mind that the repentance and confession package in scripture has three interrelated strands of “seeing”, “sorry” and “a new direction”. An expanded version is “being willing to see our faults more clearly”, which actually leads to “being more sorry”. This in turn leads to “being more determined to change direction” so that, fuelled by God’s mercy and help, we can face and fight future temptations and make choices that better love and serve others.

It can be easy for priests to have gotten into the habit of just trying to assess that second strand of “sorry” (which is very tricky in itself) and perhaps unwisely just assumed that that first strand about “seeing clearly” would automatically be there. That vital strand about “seeing” involves “finally being prepared to see the issue straight for what it is, free from our self-excusing and blindfolds”. Jesus told many parables revealing his solution of radical grace, but he also spent a lot of time and used many parables to challenge groups and individuals who were wearing blindfolds and “not seeing”.

That first strand about “seeing clearly” is the strand that child abusers are very weak in and often have a vested interest in not changing. Others of us can have a similar problem. You will recognise that those who struggle with addictions or domestic violence are also weak in this “seeing clearly” strand. Others of us can be in the group who Jesus often challenged: we can perhaps be trusting that our own righteousness is sufficient, and so also be failing to see it as it is. All can have a vested interest in not wanting that challenged or changed. The trouble for us all is that the first strand of “seeing it for what it is” has such a strong influence on the other two strands.

Let me try to illustrate how our willingness to “see an issue clearly without self-serving excuses or blindfolds” has such an influence on the quality of our “sorry”. An alcoholic’s “sorry” to his wife when he drinks the rent money yet again, can often be shallow and self-serving, barely concealing his anger and contempt for her. He is impatient to push on to get past this and off the hook as quickly as possible. He can almost despise her for being on the receiving end of his bad behaviour, and for currently being an obstruction

to him just sweeping this under the carpet and out of his awareness. He doesn't deny that he did it, and may even mouth a "sorry", but he still has so many blindfolds. Indeed, he has a vested interest in not letting this latest incident disturb his choices. He may say, "I wouldn't drink if you weren't such a nag. I said sorry. I thought you Christians were meant to be forgiving!" His mission in saying sorry is all about himself, and he keeps well out of his awareness what it has been like for her or the children. The original offence might have felt like a wound, but a self-serving "sorry" like this does not soothe that wound but is itself a second wound.

Now contrast that with the "sorry" given by the same alcoholic, who maybe years later has finally gone through the AA steps. He has step by step, dropped his blindfolds, finally letting himself see the damage he caused others, what it was like for them and how he had conned himself. He is probably by now not living with his family, but this time, after seeing things so much more clearly, when he reaches that step of saying sorry to others, this is no longer about excusing himself, getting off the hook or even expecting forgiveness. This time, his sorry is massively different. This "all-seeing repentance" may be too late for his family but God tells us it is never too late with him.

That first shallow, self-serving and still blindfolded "sorry" of the alcoholic reminds me of a report of one man who had abused his daughter. He fought his victim in court but once in jail, said a brief "sorry" before the prison chaplain and then felt entitled to sit back, expecting his daughter to do her Christian duty to come to the prison to tell him that she had forgiven him. His staggering self-absorption and all his blindfolds were still in place. However, he clearly felt that his admission and brief "sorry," had accomplished all the necessary repentance and that the next step was up to the priest to do his job and his daughter to do hers. Again, an apology like this does not soothe a wound but is itself a further wound.

Other abusers are cleverer and have got the tears, the remorse and noble intent down pat, but the reality can be just the same: they can still be totally self-serving. Some can be so convincing because by this time they genuinely wish they had not done this, just like the alcoholic wishes he hadn't drunk the rent money. They can weep and use religious language and want to feel clean or leave the past behind them but repentance is more than all these. Remember Zacchaeus and the three strands of seeing, sorry and a new direction. (See chapter 12 section 12 for why this does not mean it is in every case productive to challenge out loud the quality of an offender's repentance.)

10. The danger of being manoeuvred into a premature reassurance that an offender is forgiven

The rest of this chapter provides hints on avoiding this risk and its related twin below.

11. The risk that the ways we commonly talk about grace, and the scriptures we commonly select, are too often misused by abusers to retain their blindfolds and avoid engaging realistically with change

This leaves children at higher risk. So, what might you do after a "sorry" that may be tearful but is still self-absorbed, wearing blindfolds, not engaging

realistically with any journey to change and often only admitting a fraction of the offences? I offer a summary which I will then expand on.

I offer a suggestion that you retain the part that points to the staggering gift of grace that Jesus offers him through his death, but perhaps shake things up and challenge his self-serving conclusions. To do this, you might use different scriptures (1 John 1 instead of “As far as the east is from the west”) use different language (such as the language of journey) and tell different stories.

In this section you will find some alternatives that still present a high view of grace and are still scriptural but are that bit harder for offenders to misuse. You will also find some ways to evade his pressure to perform the role he assigns you of immediately assuring him that he is now washed. This won't please those looking for a rapid absolution, followed by being allowed to remain unchallenged and passive. Some may then find some way to blame you and disengage but remember that Jesus often shook up people who were wearing blindfolds, and sometimes they also chose no. Like alcoholics, many are not prepared to go on a journey to dismantle their blindfolds.

You see if we always make it the first step, or worse, the only step after they have wept and said “sorry”, of assuring them that they are now washed and forgiven, we ignore how often that is misused by offenders to retain their blindfolds and to avoid having a more real, transparent and ongoing encounter with God and his grace that they so desperately need. This leaves children at higher risk. Of course grace is a massive truth to keep in the picture, and you might take a different tack with someone coming to God for the first time, but the group well used to the theology of grace can often be misusing scripture in the same way they can misuse your kind heart and so many other things, in their push to stay in the dark, unchallenged and with no painful consequences. For some offenders, the moment you provide them with some reassurance from outside about their being forgiven, they switch off working on or taking responsibility for managing their behaviour. It's as if they think that, once they have convinced you that they are sorry and won't do it again, they have done all that is required, and they can sit back, keep their eyes firmly shut again and all will be well. You can see that if he still has all his blindfolds in place, he will be more likely to re-offend.

Instead of taking the role of pronouncing quick absolutions or assuring him he has met God's conditions and is now washed, you could consider the option of using 1 John 1 as a way of keeping on inviting him on a journey out into the light with God. This ongoing journey (walking in the light) will probably involve over time a lot more seeing and therefore a lot more repenting. Some offenders may try to manoeuvre you with favourite scriptures, such as the “whiter than snow” passage, into assuring them that everything is done and dusted.

I recommend you firmly keep returning him to the 1 John 1 passage about learning to walk in the light. This is a passage that emphasises that first strand of repentance of being willing to see it for what it is. There is plenty of generous grace in 1 John 1 but it is not an “incident-based” passage. It is not about rushing in, asking for a quick wash before rushing back to the dark again. 1 John 1 is also about the ever-present seduction of darkness, the seduction of choosing not to see. It raises the relevant issue of us keeping things hidden even from ourselves.

It also gives scope for lots more follow-up discussions, such as how he is getting on with practising walking in the light this week and was he being more open with God about his thoughts this week? Importantly, I think you will have less chance of being duped, controlled or misquoted if you firmly redirect to 1 John 1.

Please do not conclude that if you use any of these approaches, that you do not need to call in the police. These can be complementary to informing the authorities but are not a substitute for that, as some won't stop until the harsh consequences of jail time and some not even then.

One way of talking about grace to an offender that makes it harder for him to misuse

That's a really good start. Now let's read 1 John 1:5–10 together. How good does "being cleansed from all unrighteousness" sound to you? That means that you can be cleansed even from this, if you follow God's rescue plan and not your own scheme. God's rescue plan was for Jesus to die so that, even though we have sinned, we can join God in fellowship out in the light. God is light so there can't ever be fellowship with him that is not out in the light, can there? Perhaps you had better read verse 5 again to be sure. Now read it all again and let's look for what God's two intertwined conditions are if we are to gain this cleansing. [Confession and walking in the light.] Does being "out in the light with God" mean that we need to have reached the stage of being perfect and sinless? Does that fit with what these verses are saying? No! In fact, here in verses 8 to 10, it tells us we are conning ourselves if we tell ourselves we haven't sinned.

So, if it is not "being sinless", what is this "walking in the light" that we have to do before we can get this promised "cleansing from all unrighteousness?" It is the opposite of darkness. It is stopping our old habits of "choosing not to see", of choosing the dark, of choosing to con ourselves, of choosing to wear blindfolds and excuses and cover-ups in order to keep out of our awareness the mess we have done and do, and the scale of the damage it causes.

When someone abuses a child, or uses child pornography, they have usually tried to fog themselves. So it is very likely that you have been doing your own fogging, your own minimising and your own excusing or wearing blindfolds to make sure (just like an alcoholic does) that you don't get a clear look at what you do. All with the aim of making sure that you don't get a clear look at all the damage it causes and how you end up doing it again.

You have also probably tried to fog or con and control others to make sure others don't get a clear look as well. However, these verses are challenging you to leave behind darkness and any habits of keeping things hidden and instead be prepared to live with the light on all the time. God is calling you to learn to walk out in the light with Him.

I know you will have been tempted to fog yourself and others from seeing all the truth, but God does not work in fog. He never works in darkness or fog. 1 John shows us he only works in light and love.

1 John 1 states that confessing is vital (which after all is admitting it all in full light). Then it adds the obvious point of needing to stay out in that light, walking with Jesus even though we are sinners. We have to be prepared to come out into the zone God works in. There, as we learn to walk out in the light, he offers the gifts of His righteousness, His cleansing, His love, His help, Himself. And there, because of what was won through Jesus' death and resurrection, He welcomes us messy sinful people and calls us His children. But "many love darkness rather than light" and choose to stay in the dark. Some think maybe they could come into the light just long enough to make some minimal confession, and then hope to take the benefits of Jesus' death, before dashing back into the dark. There they prefer to keep seeing as little as possible and be passive and unchallenged just like an alcoholic prefers things. That might be our plan, but it isn't God's plan and it won't help.

Alcoholics struggle with a tough temptation just as you. What are some of the things they often con themselves about? Are they good at seeing the messes they make and the people they hurt? No, they also choose to wear blindfolds to keep themselves from seeing the real damage and keep themselves in the dark. Does that approach help them get on top of their temptation?

What is their best hope? What goes on in these AA meetings? They are full of people who know they desperately need to do what these verses in 1 John 1 recommend. They have failed so badly in the past so they know their only hope now is to live with the light on every minute of the day. Before this, they have lived their lives minimising their drinking, excusing it, blaming others, or choosing not to see what they were doing and choosing not to see the full damage. They might have poked their head above the sand occasionally to say a brief apology but then quickly put their heads back under. Now they have finally faced they have to do the opposite and walk each day in full light. You see nothing is going to change for an alcoholic, or for you, or for those you might otherwise go on to abuse, unless you also are prepared to stay out in full light all the time.

Jesus knows you have a huge battle on your hands and that you're going to need to stay very clear sighted, discarding all your blindfolds and excuses. That won't be easy and you will still be hit with periods of very strong temptation. The good thing is this passage doesn't just wag a finger at us and say "go and walk in the light". It invites us to come and join Jesus, who is already walking in the light. We are invited to walk with the one who loves us and died for us. Jesus' support and help is much more than AA meetings but we have to keep on choosing to remain out in full light.

Why do AA people keep going each week? Surely facing things once would be enough? They do this because they know (and you will need to grasp this as well) that facing things is a journey, and it is so easy to slide back into darkness and con oneself again. They now know their best hope is to learn to abandon their blindfolds and live in the light, and not trust that their own vague good intentions will be enough. They now know their best hope is to go on a journey to see much more of what they chose not to see before and face up in the light to every small choice that might

otherwise get them closer to drinking. As they go on this journey to let themselves see more, and trust their higher power, they get much better at defeating temptation. In part this happens because they are now prepared to see much more clearly the other people they hurt. This is a journey that is not accomplished in one leap, but they do all this because it finally gives them a route to a life worth living, where they stop harming others and themselves. What parallels do you see with your journey?

You too will need to be walking out in the full light, being open with Jesus about every thought, well before you get close to offending. So walking in the light with Jesus lets us see His love and provision more clearly. Second, it shows us ourselves and our sinfulness more clearly. Third, (just as it does in AA steps) it helps us see much more clearly all the other people we hurt, the damage we did, and the immense value Jesus places on all the people we hurt or manipulated. Once we are prepared to see those we hurt more clearly, with God's help we can learn to bless them and act for their wellbeing, just as Zacchaeus did. Can you see you might be in for a bit of a journey? What did you try hard not to see before that you are prepared to start facing more today?

A second example that continues using the story of Zacchaeus

Let's look at an example from the gospels. Zacchaeus let his encounter with Jesus kick-start some radical changes. If we let it, an encounter with Jesus can kick-start us into recognising even more that we are loved and died for. It can also help us see our sin more clearly. It can also help us see those we harm more clearly. Zacchaeus let his encounter with Jesus change everything. Tell me all the details you can remember about that story. Yes, the first bit to note is that the crowd would not have wanted Jesus to associate with the shunned and despised Zacchaeus. But Jesus, who knows exactly what we are like, still invited himself to dinner. Does that encourage you as you wrestle with something that others despise? Zacchaeus experienced Jesus valuing him enough to seek him out.

Not everyone who met Jesus changed. How do we know from the story that Zacchaeus chose to let the love and light of Jesus into his life, even if doing that revealed his sinfulness? How do we know from the story that Zacchaeus' idea of repentance was more than just about himself and his journey and more than "I have been a naughty boy, please wash me?" How do we know from the story that his repentance involved him really seeing, out in the light, the damage he did to others? When we are game to walk out in the light with Jesus, we see others more clearly and see their huge value more clearly. Then our "sorry" is deeper, just like the people who go to AA meetings. Their sorrow for how they hurt others grows much deeper when they allow themselves bit by bit to see more clearly and out in the light, things that they had not wanted to let themselves see before.

Zacchaeus, looked into the face of Jesus, and saw that he was fully known, fully forgiven and fully welcome and then he chose a new direction. He chose to live in light! He chose to fully face the darkness he had chosen before and all the damage it did to others. Then fuelled by God's love and mercy, he chose to bless others. He was prepared to let this bite into his daily choices even though the cost was huge. He was especially prepared to do this for those he had harmed.

How will I know your repentance is getting more out in the light, and broader than just a concern about your journey and your need to feel washed? I will know when I see you growing in awareness of the damage done to others. I will know when I see you growing in awareness of the massive value each other person in your story has to Jesus. I will know when I see you stop harming them, and instead doing whatever it takes to act for their safety and help, no matter what that costs you. I will know when I see you being prepared to pay much more of the price needed to reduce risks for all children into the future, (including complying with the restrictions that will come with that).

Can you see this repentance is more than about "me" and "just asking to have a blot wiped from my personal piety record so that I can feel more comfortable?" It is life-changing deep repentance that is increasingly prepared to see everything out in the light, including all the damage to others. It chooses to bless others and sacrifice for them, even if it costs us. All of this gains its fuel from being loved and valued by Jesus.

When Jesus saw all this in Zacchaeus, he said, "This day salvation has come to this house."

An abuser may protest about this tougher line and at some stage will probably say that he finds the verses "as far as the east is from the west" and "whiter than snow" instantly helpful and freeing. If he asks, "Are you saying these verses aren't true?" you could reply,

Of course they are true. It is not the verses that are the problem. Let me tell you a parable. A wonderful person gave a drug addict \$40,000 to fund his rehabilitation. This was a huge gift designed to help the addict move away from the way he currently keeps himself in the dark and stops himself from owning his choices or seeing the size of the mess he keeps making that hurts himself and others. The generous gift was designed to help him choose instead to go on a journey into the light where he could have his eyes wide open, engage with his battle and get support for that battle. Instead he used the gift to buy more drugs. He misused the good gift for the opposite purpose, the purpose of staying in the dark.

The "how far the east is from the west" and the "whiter than snow" verses both speak of the staggering gift of forgiveness, a gift that cost far more than \$40,000. This costly gift of forgiveness is designed by God to free us up for the purpose of making it possible for us to walk out in the light in fellowship with Him and where we can be strengthened and equipped to fight our battles. But I have noticed that people who have an addiction or are struggling with a pattern of behaviour that causes deep

pain to others—as you do—are often tempted to try to misuse those particular verses for the opposite purpose just like the drug addict did. The verses speak of the offer of cleansing so that we can continue in the light but some try to use the gift as some self-serving broom designed to just quickly sweep their failures out of their awareness so that they can continue in the dark. Just like a drug addict often does. You are someone who will be tempted to do this, so I recommend that whenever you come to repent about anything, you always get in the habit of using the picture of grace that is shown in the 1 John 1 passage instead of those other verses. Perhaps if you are a person who thinks in pictures you might visualise the picture this passage paints of the gift of grace God is offering you. Visualize this massive stream of light heading our way, where the grace and warm welcome and love of God is beaming towards us, via the cross. Then we have a choice. Perhaps we have mostly chosen in the past to not come out to live and walk in that light. We have perhaps chosen not to be willing to be really seen, or challenged, or feel the weight of our sin. Perhaps we have chosen instead to wear blindfolds or dash back under dirty old blankets, trying not to really face everything and trying not to let much out of the dark into that light. Perhaps we have chosen to scapegoat others and refused to tolerate the pain of self-awareness. Perhaps we have gone on hoping all the past will just disappear, and that we can just go on minimizing and pretending we don't have a big problem or cause a big problem. Sure, we might sometimes have had a quick horrified glance at what we have done but mainly keep ourselves in the dark and living in denial. We sometimes prefer to hide what we feed our minds on, how we con ourselves and how we hurt people.

[John 3:19–21]

But for those who choose a different path and respond to God's call to go on a journey to walk with Him in the light, there is a different ending.

[John 12:36, 46] If you want to join this journey, imagine yourself over the weeks and months ahead starting to abandon your blindfolds and fog and starting to be much more open to God ... then starting to stand up ... next starting to reach up your arms to God's love ... starting to expose all of yourself to the warmth of His love and light and welcome. That means exposing all our messy thoughts, motives and actions, exposing our brokenness and our powerlessness and our sinfulness ... your internet use ... all of the different ways we hurt or control others ... but gradually learning to live and walk each hour fully seen ... living all the time with the light on. Alcoholics often have to go on a journey like this. These verses will help you concentrate on that, even if it takes a journey. Perhaps you are ready to take some first steps. Can you think of one way you coned yourself? What did you tell yourself that made it seem okay to do this? And now do you want to be more open with yourself and with God about that? What did you "not let yourself see" that you are now ready to start seeing?

Check Rachael Denhollander's victim-impact statement on YouTube²³ and decide if it will be appropriate and helpful to watch it together.

Expect the offender at some point to tell you that he already sees everything and has confessed it all

Recalling some of the common blindfolds and how these can get in the way of repentance and make it less likely for the offender to successfully change their behaviour, you might say mildly:

If that is so, you will have faced enough to do this task for me. It involves taking 20 minutes to sit here and write down the full list of all the things you did, or said, or threatened Tim with, to try to ensure he would not tell his family or teachers or anyone what you were doing.

If he gets stuck, suggest that he leads in prayer and asks God to bring any other memories of this to his mind. Later ask what affect those words or acts might have had on Tim both at the time and long term.

or

If you have already faced everything out in the light, then you will be able to tell me what it was like for your daughter through all this. During this week I want you to pretend you are your daughter and write a letter as if from her to you, telling you what all this has been like for her. Bring it next week. "Dear Dad, I want to tell you what all this has been like for me ..." [His first version will be abysmally minimal.]

or

If that is so, then you will be able to write down for me this week who all the others were, who may not have been a child victim, but were others who you deceived, betrayed or damaged by the choices you made as you abused and then tried to keep this from coming out. Are you ready yet to lead in prayer and ask God to help you take off any bits of this blindfold, so that you may see this section of damage more clearly this week. We will talk through your list next time.

If you are really uneasy you could decline to take any role in ...

- a. assessing if the abuser has reached any standard of repentance, or
- b. assuring him that he is now forgiven or cleansed but just keep putting on the table (i) God's promises and the forgiveness he has on offer and (ii) God's conditions for getting that cleansing ("confessing" and "walking in the light").

For example,

My job is to tell you what God promises and what he requires and to encourage you to keep taking big steps on this journey. God will know better than me when you have fulfilled his conditions and have confessed it all, acted for the welfare of others and gained that habit of walking out in the light. What I do know is we can't con God about this repentance journey you have started.

I am willing to kneel with you and weep with you each time you let yourself face another layer of how you hurt or betrayed and each bit that you let out of the dark into that light. I will partner you in that because I know that the more you face with the love and light of God around you and with my support, the stronger you will fight this.

Instead of the role he assigned you of pronouncing him forgiven, your new role could be getting him professional help and being a supporter for a journey that expects there will be more layers of hurt and betrayal to be faced and repented of as he risks learning to walk out in the light with God. It might include giving an offender hope. It can be being a supporter of ongoing vigilance, however, your role must always include and be shown to include, one who acts to protect children and does not put your reliance on his good intentions.

Your new role may include showing that repentance is not just about the past but includes increased and active responsibility to steer well clear of offending in the future. Your new role could include helping him understand that his past offenses mean that you must impose tight restrictions on roles and contexts as part of your mutual responsibility for protecting children into the future.

If I recall correctly, research in the US some years ago showed that offenders who attended churches that imposed restrictions and engaged in ongoing conversations and vigilance, re-offended much less than those in churches where an absolution was pronounced and then no one ever mentioned the offences again. Showing that attending your church will involve ongoing conversations and expectations, can weed out and deter those who knock on your door after their time in jail, seeking only a soft nest in your church where they want to remain passive and in the dark.

12. The risk of becoming mired in non-productive debates about whether the offender is still minimizing, manipulating or not yet fully repentant

You may well be aware that an offender is not yet anywhere near a repentance that is life changing but is still only giving a brief glance of "wishing he hadn't done it" towards "a minimized version of the damage". You know that is unlikely to be enough to prevent future relapse. However, if you voice out aloud to him doubts about the level of his repentance, sometimes all you have handed him is a perfect excuse to take his attention away from his own bad choices. Instead he can be outraged for weeks or months about how wicked you were to doubt his "oh so sincere repentance." There are times to challenge and times not to challenge. Perhaps tell a modern parable that fleshes out the different choices two men with this temptation make over a period of six months, one really engaging with dropping his blindfolds and out in the light growing in the three strands and paying any cost to ensure his victims are safe and helped, the other staying passive, blind and self-absorbed. Rather than you judge him, tell him the parable and invite him to make the assessment as to which is showing repentance. This can give him less excuse to divert himself by being outraged at your verdict. (It is not uncommon after it has become public, for an offender to only briefly acknowledge his own failings to himself or others but spend fifty times more hours expounding on the topic of how badly his bishop is treating

him or how others are failing to demonstrate God's command to forgive him.)

13. The danger of assuming that you have been told the whole story and being pressured to say that you believe their version

As we have seen in chapter 11, it is common for the abuse to be much worse than the offender is currently admitting to you or even to himself. Factor into all your decisions (especially when planning for safety of children) that you probably only know a part of what he has done, but that does not mean it is on every occasion the best strategy to argumentatively challenge him, nor trap yourself by assuring him that you believe his current version. Yes, many will set out to deceive you by drastic minimizing, but a few others may have intended to tell you more but got cold feet on the way. Both groups can later feel locked in by the version they initially gave you.

Some offenders, perhaps because at some level they know they are fogging or admitting only a fraction of the story, want you to provide that outside validation that they are believed or forgiven. It can go like this. An abuser familiar with the grace story wants to feel clean and have a fresh start, and he wants it now. This can begin with sobbing: "I feel so filthy. I am so sorry. I am beyond forgiveness. How can you be sure that God can forgive even this? Oh, yes, I am so, so sorry. I only did it once. Do you believe me? You have to believe me. Do you believe me? Will you read that east to west verse out aloud to me? Is this verse true?"

For abusers like this, you may sense that all his focus and pressure is on getting you to believe him or make a pronouncement. In other words, he thinks the way out of his problem is to convince you to believe his version of the past or believe his promise not do it again or quote some reassurance of forgiveness. The pressure for action is firmly aimed at you rather than him, and its aim is to make it okay for him rather than for "this child" or "all other children".

Option 1 is to bring it back to the child.

So, Simon, if you are truly sorry about harming this boy, that means that you will be in full agreement with me as I now tell the authorities who will act to get him help. So, before we go any further, tell me his full name and how you know him."

Option 2. Assuming that you have not allowed yourself to be talked out of reporting to the police, you might try this option that is modelled on Ray Wyre's approach.²⁴ You could say mildly,

Let me tell you why I am not even going to engage with your question about whether I believe this the full list of harm you have ever done through this issue. From my experience your question can box us in too much [which of course may well have been his goal] and will not help you grapple with this.

If you need to add more you could say,

If I did say that I believed that this was the total, it might give you a warm feeling for a moment, but it would neither be the best for you in the long term nor the best for children. While I am not assuming this is the case for you, I do know it so often happens

that men who have this temptation, as they gradually over the weeks begin to stop fogging themselves, realise they need to admit and repent that there were even more ways people have been harmed. If I had said that I had believed this was the total, it would sort of lock you in. I would be making it harder for you for example to come back tomorrow and tell me that there had been even more. I want to make it as easy as I can for you to keep facing more layers in this, because I know that the men who are game enough to face up to and explore more of the layers of bad choices they made in the past, are the ones who are better equipped in the future to make better choices that keep children safer. You are on an important journey here. Let's look at what else needs facing and repenting of today?

Option 3. Or you might like to slide yourself out of his spotlight.

Let's slow it down. When you think about it, your biggest need now is not for me or anyone else you could rush or even con. Your biggest need now is for someone who knows far more about every last bit of what you have ever done throughout all this. God is the one you need to deal with. He is calling you to be game enough to come out into the light with Him. He is calling you to have a good, long, honest look at all that has happened recently and in the past. He is calling you to stay out in the light with Him. I am going to pray quietly while you take this opportunity to accept his invitation and take some big steps into that light. What came to your mind? What do you see? What else have you done that harmed? Keep looking around in that light. Who else can you see? Who else now needs help? Who else in this story does Jesus hugely value?

Be aware many offenders are not willing to go on a journey to dismantle their blindfolds and learn to walk in the light, but a few are. That journey is seldom accomplished in one rush of tears but often takes time and a willingness to, bit by bit, face what they may have been unwilling to face before. Only a few professionals have expertise in this area, and you should definitely try hard to connect them, but even taking a shepherd's role with an offender is not for the naïve, the impatient or the faint hearted.

14. The danger of allowing your pastoral interaction with an offender get in the way of your duty to victims

Your primary duties are to ensure that:

- a. victims are safe;
- b. the appropriate secular authorities have been informed, especially if the victim is still a minor;
- c. victims with whom you have contact and who are now adults, have been offered support to take it to the police;
- d. church protocols are being implemented.

15. The danger of thinking that jailing offenders is the end of the problem

The reality is offenders are being released in considerable numbers after serving their time. Some were in churches before offending and some come to churches seeking grace or connection after their lives fell apart after they were convicted. Some start well but end up seeking more victims. This current chapter has mainly focused on help around your early private conversations with an offender. It has offered ways to call him to engage more authentically with God and engage more authentically with change. However, these will not be sufficient. He may or may not respond to that call and if you just optimistically include him in all your church services and activities, more children may get hurt. You will need to stay alert to many more risks and difficult issue.

We may be as gentle as doves when helping an offender deal with how he was abused as a child, but for the sake of all children, past victims, your congregation, your other ministries and the wider church, it is essential that we always remain vigilant and as wise as serpents over the long term. The next chapter will give you check lists of some of the many risks in longer term arrangements.

Chapter 13

Offenders represent an ongoing risk

1. It is dangerous to assume that in every case it is your priestly duty to welcome all comers to your services or assume that all contexts are suitable for an offender to have a fresh start

I recall one prison psychologist who was very keen to assist a church's effort to include one offender in a wise fashion after his time in jail but warned about some others. He was in effect saying that there were other offenders that were so extremely dangerous, that if you were trying to help them, it should never be on site at the church or in a congregational setting. Yet some pastors think it is their duty to welcome into their services any offender: even if the offender was compulsive or a sociopath, even if their church had 30 children, even if their buildings were a rabbit warren that make supervision a nightmare and even if they had no one in their congregation with any expertise in this area. Such clergy often have as their key placard, that their churches should be welcoming of all sorts of sinners and supporting these to new beginnings. (Perhaps like the bishop in *Les Misérables* who was so willing to sacrifice precious things to give a not-yet-repentant sinner a second chance.) There is encouragement in the Bible for a radical life like that but we need to consider more than one placard and test for blind spots.

These pastors can be forgetting that when we as adults give anyone a second chance we are usually saying we are willing to take on the risk and willing to absorb the consequences or cost should that person fail. However, it is a different situation when we give a child abuser a second chance in a context that is high risk and with insufficient safe guards. In this case the adult appears generous, welcoming and full of grace but it is not the adult but the children who will carry the risks and pay the high price should a lapse occur. (See chapter 11.)

Unconditional welcome, unrestricted access to the congregation and accommodation of his preferences is not the only loving path we can offer. Parents know that love can come various shapes. Insisting an offender be given full access to church events has led pastors to ignore alternative ways he could get spiritual help and led priests to feel justified in ignoring potential damage to children.

But wait a minute! Isn't this the very worst thing you could model to a child abuser? Wasn't this the pattern that caused all this, his being willing to ignore the damage to children provided he got his needs met? Don't child abusers desperately need to grow in being willing to act in ways that take into account potential damage to others, even if that costs them?

I urge you to seek solutions where it is not the children but the offender or other adults who bear the risks and the costs. If a minister is so passionate and committed to being so welcoming of any abuser then wouldn't it be safer for children (and more help for the offender), if that minister sacrificed several hours of his own time each week to spend with the offender, rather than just including him in normal services or activities where children may be the ones to pay the price? Wouldn't it be safer for children and far more

support to help an offender deal honestly with his temptations, if he were to get his Sunday service in a church with no children, or via the internet at home, but get his personal fellowship time and support in an informed, small, all-adult, midweek bible study or fellowship group?

This discussion is relevant in view of recommendation 16.57 from the Royal Commission which may ask even more. If you know someone attending your services has offended, it recommended that you assess the level of risk and take appropriate steps to manage that risk. (Is that code for “be successful in managing this risk or be liable even if the offender is not a church worker?”) It is always vital to include the placard of a careful assessment of the risks involved in each context. (The Anglican Church has developed resources and protocols around this issue.²⁵)

The following example illustrates a few of the points we have covered. Some years back a senior clergyman went to parents of students at a church school to severely admonish them for not being forgiving enough of a priest who had abused. The priest had just come out of jail and was to be housed in a presbytery next door to, and overlooking, a primary school yard. The parents of students objected. If someone protested or disagreed, this senior clergyperson seemed to conclude that this indicated they must have failed to forgive him, and so he should put them straight about that. One has to wonder if this church leader had made “making sure everyone should forgive him” his only placard. Was the reason he judged and misinterpreted those who objected, because he was seeing the situation through this single lens? Did he think that forgiving someone could only have one shape? As is so often the case, the laity saw things much more clearly. They recognised that there were more issues to consider than whether the offender was now right with God, or even if they forgave him or not. They argued they also needed to consider the safety of children. No one is claiming that we can change the world to totally rid children of all risk, but a placement in that location, combined with the credibility he gained from wearing the clothing of a priest, greatly multiplied the risks for children.

It was also bad for an offender. It is astounding that someone could think it would help an abuser to keep away from offending if he was housed overlooking a school yard all day. It seems this church leader had failed to consider that placard as well?

Remember you do not know enough about this issue to make safe decisions by yourself. You can too easily reach an idealistic conclusion that he is far safer than he is. It is always safer to handle matters about contexts and where he attends by working with a team who have much more experience wrestling with these issues. Hopefully your head office can gather a multi-disciplinary team to assess, plan, consider all placards, options and locations and then provide some supervision.

After consultation with that team, the conclusion could be that the best path is not to have him attend your particular congregation after all, so be prepared to think wider than locally. The team might advise you to tell the offender something like the following. (It is a useful example of how to close one door yet open another.)

You have told me that you are serious about keeping children safe. Is that right? You have told me that you are serious about this new life with God. Is that right? You have told me that you are serious about keeping well away from temptations and not hanging around groups of kids such as in playgrounds. Is that right? I have

been carefully considering these commitments. First, there are more children here than are sometimes in many playgrounds. That means it will be too tempting here when my sermons get boring, for you to spend too much time watching the children during church or at play afterwards. So, attending here would not be good for you as you try to keep away from temptation. It would also not be good for the children, and we agree that this is vital. However, the diocese has found that the next parish has a night service that would be suitable. If you are interested, they will support both you and that congregation in that step, but there will be conditions.

2. Some roles are not suitable for offenders presumed to be on a path to resisting re-offending

It is true that forgiving others is God's command, yet also his gift to both the wounded person and to the one who wounded. Thus, our journey's aim must be to forgive the past, but the question about the future is not always as automatic as some presume. Many mistakes were made by senior clergy who thought that if an offender was repentant and forgiven, a necessary expression of forgiveness is to reinstate them to their former roles, even to roles that carried authority, power, access or low supervision. However, when the offence is one of having abused power and authority to severely damage someone over whom he had power, being forgiven does not bring with it an automatic right to be reinstated into that same or any other position of power and authority over others. This is especially so where those without power would be at high risk of severe and lasting damage. One can forgive the past but also make decisions about the future that aim to protect the vulnerable and those without power into the future. Protecting the vulnerable is also a priority in the Bible. We saw in the Royal Commission what happened to the extremely vulnerable; those who were in orphanages and homes for the disabled.

Protecting the vulnerable is why we must never reinstate offenders to any position of leadership or authority even though they may have been forgiven. This should also preclude the offender from other things that might imply credibility or authority to a child or parents; things such as wearing choir robes or clerical collars or reading the scriptures in church or any up-front roles.

3. The risk that those genuinely seeking help find only condemnation and no way forward or an unhelpful promise that confession always leads to a cure

I know good professional help is hard to find but try hard, even if it means using Skype. It is common sense "that for those offenders who were damaged by abuse in childhood, there is a tremendous amount of work to be done to create self-awareness and changes to attitudes and behaviours".²⁶ This work also does not guarantee a cure but certainly increases the chance they will not reoffend. In Victoria, people can self-refer to Forensicare for assessment and treatment. It is called the Problematic Sexualised Behaviour Program. Bookings can be made on 03 9947 2500.

For your contribution, the "learning to walk in the light" approach provides one way forward, however, confessing and repenting don't always lead to the absence of temptations in the future. We wouldn't promise that

to each other, or to someone who lies or steals. Yet, when questioned later in prison, many abusers believed they had been promised by Christians, that if they confessed and repented, God would always provide a cure. I am sure that sometimes God heals (and by all means pray for that) but to promise that temptations would cease in every case seems to me to be cruel. We need to explain better that God's help is not always in the form of an end of temptation.

4. The danger of growing lax about protecting children because you believe an offender is healed, reformed or well-intentioned

I am not saying that offenders can't be helped to greatly reduce their offending, or that God can't heal them, or that spiritual warfare can't shift bondages, but in all these circumstances we still need to always remain on alert to protect children, and to encourage offenders to keep steering well clear of risky situations. Given that the potential damage is so terrible, clergy should forever be vigilant to keep risks as low as possible. They should never give roles to offenders that children or their parents have grown to trust and should stay alert to prevent relationships developing between offenders and children. Yes, you may be able to judge that at one point he has good intent, but that can then wane.

Never set up arrangements for including offenders without consulting those who have far more understanding of offender behaviour and who can see the risks that you may not see.

For example, I recall when the ABC interviewed a couple after a far-reaching tragedy that could have and should have been avoided. This man certainly seemed to be someone who was committed to following God and very genuinely wanting to stop abusing (very possibly he had been a victim himself.) Sometime after he came out of jail, some charismatic friends stepped out in faith to pray for him and I have no reason to doubt, that as he reported, he stopped even getting the urges to offend for quite a few years. He married someone who knew his story and all went well for a while. Then his wife volunteered to be a teacher in an outback aboriginal community and her husband accompanied her. Perhaps they did what many Christians can be tempted to do in such a situation. It can be tempting when there are clear grounds for optimism, to ignore that advice to think ahead and carefully consider what might go wrong and what therefore might be the wisest and safest path.

Someone definitely should have considered that this move would involve increased access to children, greater power differentials, more likelihood that relationships could develop, all combined with less oversight. Anyone with experience in abuse would have advised that putting him in that location, under that arrangement, would have increased greatly the risk of re-offending. Things went well for a bit, but unsurprisingly ended in his re-offending.

You don't put a healed alcoholic behind the bar.

The result was catastrophic for the children. It was also devastating for the man and his wife who both looked absolutely shell shocked at where things had ended up. It was so bad for the reputation of the gospel. Doesn't this event demonstrate, that when we place wise restrictions on offender's access to children, we are ultimately acting in their own best interests as well as those of the children.

Missions in particular should never employ people with this problem as the risks and damage just multiply in that context.

5. Which members of your congregation can or should be told that someone is accused of an offence or admits his offence or is charged by the police or has joined the congregation after his time in jail?

Apart from informing the police and your head office, do you tell no one else, or do you inform just the elders, or parents, or all the congregation? You can understand that since the Royal Commission, many will no longer trust your judgement or that your preferred approach will be enough to keep their children safe. This will be especially true in the case of an arrangement goes longer than a pre-trial period. Many options have risks and you will need multidisciplinary advice. See chapters 8 and 13 and Appendix A. Offenders may need help to accepting that they have a responsibility to carry more of the costs of keeping children safe in the future, including complying with restrictions, and agreeing that certain others will be informed, so that relationships with children don't get a chance to develop. He might be offered a way to limit that cost, by choosing to attend a smaller group. For example, his attendance at a particular congregation or small group might be conditional on certain members being informed. You will find further help in Appendix B.

6. Do not wait until an offender is about to leave jail before the pastor and advisors come together to deliberate, prepare and equip their congregation

This team needs to include a range of expertise but especially those who know much more about offenders and how his presence might impact all victims and congregational life.

Don't delay because it can take months to consider where he would prefer to attend, which congregation is suitable or willing, what alternative congregation or small group might work best and whether his victim still attends and what they want. It takes time to train up parishioners, procure supervisors or reach behavioural agreements. It takes the heat out of the situation if these decisions can be reached slowly well before he leaves prison and before well-meaning others can be recruited to campaign on either side.

Do factor into your timetable that he may be released early on parole. Also, first do your homework and try to access court transcripts or alternative ways of knowing the details of all past offences and how he operated. While he is still in jail, try to gain his permission for the prison chaplain and the prison psychologist to share with you, enabling you to access more insight and expertise.

You may be able to ask prison authorities for a series of private sessions under the umbrella of "transition to community" or ask the prison chaplain to facilitate more private conversations. Of course, it is likely that there will be times when he will lie and tell you what he thinks you want to hear, but nothing much shifts if you can't at least start talking about offending. Sometimes talking to him will warn you that he is too dangerous to include the way that you had planned.

7. If the offender and victim are both in the same congregation you cannot care for both personally

If you do, it will probably end in tears with both parties and their supporters all angry with you, the minister. Certainly never concentrate your time on the offender while giving little time to the victim, and never let yourself be manoeuvred by the offender to put pressure on the victim to forgive him. These sorts of triangulations can get very messy. Better to take an oversight role, step back and find separate support persons and preferably professional help for each party. However, always maintain careful oversight to make sure that meeting an offender's needs in a particular way is not going to create problems for past or potential victims.

8. It is a blind spot to include an offender without wise preparation of the whole group

When discussing with a small group or a congregation that does not have children, whether they are willing to include an offender in their usual small group, or willing to take on a more active support ministry, prevention is far easier than repair. This is another time when you need to anticipate risks (not only to children and church unity but also to the offender himself). Use the list in Appendix B to inform a discussion that educates and mitigates risks that have caused problems elsewhere. This includes staying alert to those specific situations where meeting an offender's needs in a particular way, might make things even harder for his past victims or more risky for any other potential victims. You might explain to him that he certainly matters and will be welcome to participate in some things, but one result of his past choice to offend is, that in those situations where his needs and the needs of these vulnerable persons clash, his needs will now need to come second.

9. Only assist a child abuser in ways that won't conflict with the needs of past victims or potential victims

Three warnings that were not given enough consideration in the past.

- a. Example 1. While an offender may have wanted to be housed right next to a school, given that this created an unacceptable risk for children the children's needs should have trumped his.
- b. Example 2. The problem with supporting an accused offender in court. It can be a valuable ministry to support in court persons who are up on charges but not when the charge is child abuse by church personnel. Sometimes priests could not be dissuaded from supporting an accused church leader or parishioner in court, even when it was explained to them, that for the special case when the charges relate to child abuse, supporting him in that context can make the whole court experience far harder for the alleged victim. You see victims often have a desperate horror of their voice not being believed, especially by the church where their abuser was a leader or member. Victims will nearly always interpret priests or pastors supporting the accused in court as meaning that "the church already believes him and not me", even if that was not the message you intended. They can then get very distressed. Yes, it might help the accused, but in that context, the needs of both parties will compete. Given there is even a chance that he has done the damaging things that the police have accused him of (which after all

have already got as far as court) the needs of the alleged victim must be given priority and we must not add to their trauma at this difficult time.

- c. Example 3. Other ministers had a blind spot that thought that an abuser had an automatic right to return to his church after his time in jail, even when his victim still attended there and said that was against their wishes. You can support him to a better life in other contexts but not where needs compete.

Some pastors responded, "After all he has done his time and we should forgive him." Such a pastor has some truth as forgiving is a prime value that we should be aiming for. However, they can then pressure victims who are struggling to forgive this huge offence, and struggling to stay on an even keel, by in effect telling them that forgiving automatically has to include having him back right in their congregation, as well as for them to have already accomplished their full forgiveness journey by this date. A victim (or a parent) often needs the support of their familiar church if to continue to heal but it is usually too hard for them if he is also in the congregation, especially if he has hidden issues of power, control and manipulation, as more than a few do. You are asking a lot and many victims will simply leave. Surely this clergy person is putting pressure on the wrong person. The pressure should be put on the offender to demonstrate that he has grown in an awareness of the harm and long-term damage he caused, to the point where he can give priority to the needs of someone he harmed so much and agree to be assisted to find another church (where the minister will be informed).

10. Risks to the health of your congregation

- a. There are risks to unity when a revelation about abuse first impacts a congregation. See chapter 3.
- b. There are certainly increased risks to all children if he is permitted to attend without forewarning parents. Informing parents and grandparents prevents relationships from developing. See chapter 8 section 6.
- c. If one includes an offender and warns all parents about his convictions, there is the risk that families may leave or evangelism might suffer, as newcomers would also need to be informed. That is a high price that should motivate you to consider alternative options for his spiritual support. His presence could also impact or restrict other programs such as mission events or ministries to families.
- d. If after jail an offender returns to the same church as his victim there are risks that his victim may be too stressed to stay or that the congregation may divide supporting different parties.
- e. It is not unheard of for a congregation to shift over time and put pressure on the wrong party (onto the survivor to be more forgiving) while leaving the now presumed repentant offender to coast along.
- f. There are big risks to the health of your congregation if an offender had previously been a leader in your church before his time in jail. If you later permit him to return to the same congregation, the following and influence he once had there, have the potential to cause major divisions.

Many aspects of this issue can pose serious risks to unity and need weighing up. Just lecturing everyone that they should have more grace is unlikely to be the solution.

Chapter 14

When someone admits to having temptations involving children

How might you take into account the risk of deception in this situation?

An abuser may come to you to admit that he struggles with sexual temptations involving minors but protests that he has never done anything and has just come seeking help. That may be true but, unfortunately, you cannot afford to proceed as if that is the full truth and neglect to treat this as an important alarm bell that activates other checks, additional safeguards and calls in more expertise. The trouble is you do not know where this man sits on the spectrum of risk.

For quite a few, their admission that they are tempted is really code for “I have already offended and desperately want help to stop”. For others, their own admission that reveals a very strong struggle to resist this sexual attraction to minors might be the only glimpse you get for decades to come that serious damage might be occurring. Yet at another point on this spectrum can be a largish group who sometimes experience sexual attraction for an underage teenager but keep very strong boundaries between attraction and action. These are much less likely to offend and much less likely to come to talk to you. At another point may be a man who is consumed by guilt because of his attractions, but who may keep just as strong boundaries as the group above. The risk of him offending may be higher than the average man but maybe not by a big margin.

Those with more experience in the abuse area may be better than you at picking up clues from what he says and does that could indicate if he is nearer that end of the spectrum where strong preventive action is more clearly the wisest path, even when there is no knowledge of any offences. However, it is you he has chosen to talk to and that first conversation will be the best chance anyone has to gain valuable information and clues.

In this section, I am not aiming to give you all the guidance you need but hopefully enough to steer you away from responding too simplistically.

For example, you cannot afford to decide something like the following. “The strength of his sexual temptations will be similar to mine. He is a good man and I know him so well, so I absolutely put my full trust in his word when he says he has never offended, and that what he has told me is the total truth. Like many men I sometimes find a 15-year-old sexually attractive so there would never be a case where I would take away anyone’s accreditation to work with children, simply on the basis of their temptations. After all temptation is not action. I can help him with temptations. I can handle this on my own.”

Trusting assumptions like these is not wise.

1. Things you can do in that first encounter

While you do not know enough to draw a conclusion that he is of low risk, you can use the fact that he may be more open when he first admits these temptations to you, to give priority in that first interview to looking for any clues that might indicate to you (and to those who you will later report to)

whether he might be at the higher risk end of that spectrum. For the sake of children, that would be extremely valuable information to gain, especially as to whether he has already offended as that would change everything. Discovering that would activate things such as informing police and if he is a priest or pastor, removing him from the ministry in a permanent way.

So why not start with this simple option. After he reveals this struggle to you, give him your full attention for a bit, but then give him another chance to reconsider if he is willing to admit more. You could say gently,

I am very glad that you have taken this hard step to come. We often find that when people tell us that they struggle with this temptation but have never offended what they really mean (but have trouble getting the words out) is that they have already offended and it has woken them up to how much they need help or how much they want to stop harming a youngster. [Pause.] If the truth is that you have already involved a youngster in this way I urge you to tell me now. Or even just nod. [Long pause.]

If there is no indication, ask directly ...

Since becoming an adult, have you involved a minor in any sexual contact at all? [Long pause.] Have you possessed or watched child pornography?

If he still says “no”, some might think that is all that can be done to protect children in this situation, as there is no knowledge of any offences. Others might have the view that anyone who has ever felt an attraction to anyone under the age of consent should be automatically excluded. Yet others would have a view that it is unfair to remove someone simply on the grounds of their temptations. Besides, if we removed everyone who at some time had found a 15-year-old sexually attractive there might be very few remaining. Others might take no further action because doing anything more would further victimise those, who, as a result of abuse, had been left some legacy of sexual attraction that has an increased focus on minors, but had resisted offending. It would be assuming that because someone had an attraction, they would abuse. Each of these has some truth but not enough on their own. You can see that the path is not simple if we are to better protect children while trying not to ruin the lives of innocent men.

As you lead them to talk, you may discover that these are finding it a big struggle to resist acting on these attractions but want help not to. So even some who desperately do not want to offend can be at too high a risk to leave in any positions of trust or leadership or permitted the increased access to children that these positions bring.

Further below are some examples of how one might take a few more steps to try to better protect children from those, who with judicious questions in that first interview, might reveal themselves as being nearer the top of that risk spectrum. Before that let’s discuss that some seem to have a more intense struggle to resist offending than others, and some don’t even try to resist. Quite a large number and range of men in our society might at times be sexually attracted to a slightly underage teen, but I question that these are all at equal risk of harming them. When you think about it, many of these have very strong boundaries that stop them ever acting on that attraction or breaching that important boundary. Thus, the youngster is at quite low risk from that large group who find that boundary no great struggle to maintain. Another group have no compunction about breaching

that boundary. These are extremely dangerous but far less likely to come to admit things to you. However, youngsters can also be at considerable risk from some of those who do come and admit to you they have these temptations. Some may really want not to offend, but for these, resisting offending is a more intense struggle. Not all those who might admit these temptations to you, or even come for additional help, will have such a degree of struggle to resist offending and maintain that boundary between attraction and action, but many will.

Some of these men have been affected by abuse (which for some may include having to struggle with a higher level of compulsion). My view is that those contending with this more intense level of temptation to act on their sexual attractions to minors, should not choose a career, a ministry or any volunteering that gives them positions of trust around children or involves them in front line work with children, regardless of whether they have offended or not. It exposes children to much higher risk of very serious harm. In my view, they should have their accreditation to work with children removed. They need to contribute in other ways that are safer for children and safer for themselves.

So given that knowledge of temptations does not of itself always tell us the full story about level of risk, one thing that hearing about temptation should do, is make us try harder to uncover if there are also additional features present. This is because temptation in combination with any of the following can ramp up the risk level to where strong action and removal is more clearly the wisest path. So these additional features to look for include if he has already offended or if he is someone for whom resisting actual offending is an intense struggle or if grooming and near offending are already involved. We should also look if there are any very high-risk contexts or roles, or if he has been behaving in ways that are very unwise for someone who has these temptations and has therefore been exposing children to higher risk. The risk is also higher if he is involved with any children with additional vulnerability such as being very young or having disabilities.

He may of course not reveal anything to you, but the best chance is during the encounter when he first admits this.

What might indicate this stronger struggle? You might witness an example of this more intense struggle when a man comes to you in a state of crisis and extremely distressed, to admit to you that he really struggles with this temptation to have sexual contact with children but asserts he has not offended and wants help. With that presentation, one would be concerned if that was the full truth. I would need a very good alternative explanation for why he was so extremely upset. Otherwise I would be concerned that this indicated that he had either already offended and was devastated or was desperately struggling and in great danger of offending.

What strategies might help you find out more to report to those who know more about abuse as to whether offending or near offending might be involved? How might you seek his confirmation as to the level of his struggle?

To begin with listen to his story, as the details will help those you report to. Then you can start to reflect back to him for his confirmation if you see desperation, or very strong struggle. While this helps him feel understood, you are also looking for his confirmation about the degree of struggle and desperation. He might want to talk about his feelings of guilt, but I would defer conversation on that topic, as long discussions about this won't always

give you a clear clue, as one man can feel guilty for having the attraction and another can feel guilty because he has already offended. At this first interview, when time is limited, feelings of guilt warrant a direct question as to whether he has offended but if get no admission, defer that and move on to questions that might reveal more.

You will be looking for ways that might uncover if this man has moved beyond thinking about it, and is either already building grooming relationships, or at the point of finding it very hard to fight off the urge to involve some child in his sexual fantasies. Either of these would put him at the very high-risk end. So when he moves away from specifics of his story to more general topics like how you might provide help, that can be a good time to reassure him that you will get back to those important topics in time, but start to direct the conversation with more of your own questions that might uncover more.

To do this, you could try to ground some questions around individuals or events when he found it hard to resist this temptation to build that relationship or make some physical contact that is designed to give him sexual gratification.

These might reveal if he was grooming and how intense the struggle was for him, and how close he gets to offending. This group are at a more dangerous place on the spectrum than those who feel desperate because of the thoughts that come that make them feel guilty, dirty and distressed, but who have been keeping well back from offending, and have not been fostering a relationship nor creating any opportunities designed to indulge him in some sexual way.

Sometimes it will lead to more revelations if you assume a little, but express things in a way that still gives him permission to refute.

Example 1. You could just say conversationally,

You have told me you have these temptations. So, cast your mind back over the last few months and tell me about the time when you came closest to giving in and touching a kid in some way that was designed to gratify those sexual thoughts? Can you talk me through that scene? Where were you? What did you do? What did he or she do?

If your questions become a problem for him you can say mildly,

You asked for my help, so surely I have to have a clearer picture of what we are up against here?

Or you could begin with or add this,

This kid you are so keen on ... now what was his name again? Yes, Peter. I assume you already have a special closeness with Peter. Tell me about him. What do you like to do together? How do you like to help him feel special and valuable?

The men who fight this temptation both in their mind and with behavioural choices to keep well back from offending, will not be building those relationships with any kids and will emphatically tell you that they had never got close to touching a child in that way. Unfortunately, someone who has already offended might respond with similar outrage. So while this question might not give you watertight information about the ones who don't engage with it, it can reveal a lot about the ones who do.

He may not provide it, but before you conclude, always ask for the child's full name and then their age.

Not all offenders groom but in church settings many do. Those who target a family member are in a position to corrupt a relationship anyway, so the grooming questions are less helpful there. While the grooming can be part of the sexual pleasure, because he may not consider the relationship he builds as a problem he may be more likely to reveal it to you.

Example 2. If you detect feelings of desperation but still don't know if this is caused by intrusive thoughts or grooming and near offending, ask questions about actions.

So do I take it that you are feeling this desperate because you are finding it such a hard battle to stop yourself hanging out with this kid a lot or involving them in doing stuff or touching them in these ways that give you these sexual feelings? On a scale from one to ten, how hard are you finding this battle to resist doing any of this? Did it in fact go further than you meant? Is that why you feel so desperate?

Example 3. He may want to keep the talk more general about temptations and getting help, but especially if he came to you in this highly upset crisis state, you could try this option to try to uncover what precipitated the crisis and if offending or near offending is involved. Yes, some of his stress may come from revealing such temptations but it can be more than this. You would have to wonder if something had happened that has pushed him beyond the barrier of embarrassment to get help.

This example puts more pressure on, and so could be particularly useful if he is in leadership and you need to push a bit harder for clues as to his risk.

I can see that you are extremely upset and feeling desperate. I am sorry that you have this tough temptation to deal with. I will do my best to get you help but first I have to ask what has caused this particular crisis. [Wait] Given that we can assume you have had similar temptations for some time, what has happened recently that precipitated your coming here today so upset? [Long wait] Something has clearly happened recently? [Long wait] Can I guess that you are devastated because you have broken your code and already involved a kid in some way? [Wait] No? Are you sure? Was it using child pornography? No? Then that only leaves that you are wrestling with a strong temptation about a specific youngster. Is that the case? Then you had better tell me who it is and how old. No?

The punch line you have up your sleeve in case it is needed at this point or later is,

Then you leave me no choice. I will get you help but I will need to consider removing you from leadership as I consider it a strong possibility that some youngster somewhere is currently at serious risk.

You may also need a strong statement like this if someone is angry with you and on the verge of storming out. Someone who has already offended can be among those who can get angry that you have not followed the script they wanted.

2. Failure to report abuse or act to protect minors is a criminal offence

For example in response to the Betrayal of Trust report the Victorian Government has strengthened laws to protect children from sexual abuse and exposure to sexual offenders. This is in recognition of the shared community responsibility to protect children from abuse and to provide a safe environment for children to develop, learn and play.

A new criminal offence for failing to protect a child under the age of 16 from a risk of sexual abuse commenced on 1 July 2015. "The offence applies where there is a substantial risk that a child under the age of 16 under the care, supervision or authority of a relevant organisation will become a victim of a sexual offence committed by an adult associated with that organisation. A person in a position of authority in the organisation will commit the offence if they know of the risk of abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so."²⁷

This offence encourages organisations to actively manage the risks of sexual offences being committed against children in their care to protect them from harm.

More laws are in the pipeline.

3. You and your advisors will need to decide if a person admitting to sexual temptation involving minors should have access to children

I offer just a few illustrations of what might inform that pondering process.

- a. If he admitted he had such a struggle to resist acting in these ways, I would be concerned enough to take very strong action to remove him, but even more so if his struggle was about children under twelve.
- b. Not everyone admitting temptations are at very high risk of offending. For example a tiny number terrify and torture themselves that they might offend against a child, but theirs is more of a psychological condition more related to an obsessive thought rather than a greatly elevated risk of offending, but that should be for a psychiatrist to decide. I am not sure but suspect it is still not in anyone's interest for these to remain in employment or voluntary work that involves children, but let the person know that you understand his situation and that declining his accreditation is not a judgement, but it will protect him from misunderstandings and for now is best for all parties.
- c. Another group can be those who maybe as a result of abuse have a legacy of a sexual attraction more focused on minors but have taken responsibility and succeeded in being wise and self-disciplined. These have not adopted twisted justifications and have made sure they kept well back from offending or grooming. One may perhaps come to you hoping there is now more help available. Any who have maintained such disciplined choices deserve our gratitude, but given the risk of deception, we must still always treat this as an alarm bell that activates checks, safeguard and more expertise, as well as taking a very careful look for those features mentioned in chapter 14.
- d. It would be of great concern if someone admitting these temptations let slip any of the twisted justifications that offenders often tell themselves or sometimes uses alcohol to the degree of losing adequate control or if he always holidays in SE Asia even for worthy causes.

- e. It is not a strong marker but someone from the lesser risk group might come to you tearful, but not at the level of crisis that someone might if precipitated by some recent event. However, the fact that he has come at all, tells you that his struggle with this temptation is at least a couple of levels harder for him than that for the average man. An important question is if the behavioural choices in his life matches up with a picture of someone who has been for a long time wisely managing this temptation and for many years previously has been keeping well back from high risk situations such as camps, children's choirs, scouts, junior sport, child minding, youth groups, altar boys or confirmation classes.
- f. I would be much more worried in cases where you have knowledge of temptations plus knowledge of unwise behaviour that exposes youngsters to risk. At the beginning of this chapter I mentioned being on the look-out for offending, near offending or high-risk roles or contexts. So if for example someone came to you to admit his struggle with this temptation, but had thought it was okay to up till now to stay in high risk roles such as being a child care worker (if attracted to that age group) or supervising teenage boys sleeping arrangements or involved with their over-night camping (if attracted to that group), I would be removing any accreditation immediately.

A recent show of good intent would not be enough to assure you that he had joined the band who have learned to wisely manage their temptations. Remember that just because someone is showing good intent at this point in time does not make him safe. You need to look at how wise he has been generally because someone who had up to recently been putting children and themselves in high risk situations is still too high a risk. He will need more than short term good intent and short term reaching out for help to turn this around. This one will need to learn a costly new way to live that puts the welfare of youngsters first. Thinking it was OK to stay in those roles was evidence he has barely begun that journey of seeing this clearly and putting the welfare of children first. There is a high likelihood that he was in those jobs to get some gratification at least from watching. Either way he was flirting with danger that could have (and may have) caused children much harm. You could say to him,

John you have told me about your struggle with this sexual attraction for kids. You have told me that you are determined never to offend. Congratulations on this first step. This is a brave step but it is only a first step. We both know this temptation did not appear yesterday. The fact that you have all this time had a level of struggle that is strong enough to bring you to me today, yet you have thought it was fair to kids for you to stay in roles that carried such high risk for them, tells me that, while you have made an important first step towards child safety, it is still only a first step. It tells me there is much you still need to learn and practice about how to keep well back from offending. I can get you professional help to go on this journey, but I will be removing your accreditation because I judge that you are only at the first step of learning how to manage this temptation in a way that is safer for youngsters. Let me help you write a resignation letter for work /scouts because you know if you mean it about being determined never to offend, you have to get out of that job right now don't you?

- g. It would be more worrying if there weren't more senior leaders in his location, who were aware of his temptations and restrictions, and could pull the plug if he or she saw any unwise behaviour.
- h. The accreditation system in church settings is useful because it is not limited to proof of offences, but it can include whether the candidate has reached a bar in relation to several issues of safety. You can use phrases that are not about proven guilt but probabilities, "no longer has the confidence of the church that he would in all circumstances be able to act in the best interest of child safety".

So in conclusion, given that most of those with strong boundaries and who find they can easily resist offending will not come to see you, the majority of those who do come to you admitting these temptations, are more likely to be in the category of too high a risk to be left with leadership or accreditation or easy access. As I have shown, there can be exceptions, but these will likely be few.

4. Additional steps you can take after an initial interview when someone discloses having temptations

These can be fallible if used singly, but if used in combination may enable you to improve child safety.

- a. Always report to your head office abuse team or outside abuse advisors, even if it seems to you to be a minor issue, or repented of, or completely under control. Never reduce this to merely issues of private morality or struggles with temptation.
- b. After any admission about temptations, it is vital that someone should always look more carefully at the past and previous locations within which they have worked. Probably head office has more expertise and resources to do that discreetly and to check if there have been other complaints in the past, expressions of concern or if he is on any sex offenders list. You also need to reflect back on your own experience of his past behaviour around children.
- c. You could also try the following,

**Can you understand that we need to do more checks and it would be another level of reassurance if I could drive you back to your house right now, and you open up your computer in front of me?
... Or would I be likely to find that you need help to break free from child pornography?**

- d. He had come asking for help, so you could also request that he speak to a specialist in this area and the first two sessions could be paid for by the church, reporting back to you. This could be helpful but again not infallible.
- e. Always try to ensure the safety of any child he has named as being attracted to.
- f. Try to help him look at and make tough decisions about his current life.

You have been telling me that you struggle but are determined never to offend. How determined are you really? The next obvious step will be for us to talk about all the youngsters currently in your life. Let's list them, from the relatives, to those you have contact

with through work, or volunteering, to individuals that you find yourself particularly attracted to. Is there one gender or age group that is most attractive to you? Now we have done that, what strong action is necessary to protect each of these better and give legs to your plan to never offend?

For example, resign from scouts, never child mind nieces.

g. Offer help.

You say you are desperate not to offend. It is hard to find but we will try to locate professional and spiritual help to strengthen your resolve. Many who struggle with this were abused themselves and need additional help dealing with that. Could you do with some of that sort of help? Some who struggle with this also need help to break free from child pornography? Most need to access some programs to help them see things more clearly and learn how to make choices that keep them further back from offending. Are you up for this?

Some may only be interested in help that arrives instantly and changes them supernaturally while they remain passive.

- h. Hope can be in short supply, so even before formal appointments can be found, it might help him to access www.stopitnow.org. Select "Help & Guidance" and then "Worried About Your Own Thoughts And Behaviors". He can email them. The Australian version of this web site currently provides help for victims but not yet for offenders although that may change. This by itself will not be sufficient help.
- i. You can ask him to suggest an accountability partner, one whom you would also need to approve of. Again this is not fool proof but accountability can be a help, more so if he is a computer whizz and is given on line access to his computer.
- j. Later work out with him additional behavioural restrictions around church life that help protect all other youngsters but recognise that while they help, they also cannot be fully relied upon. See chapter 15.

5. None of the above strategies can be relied upon in the highest risk situation: if he has come to admit he struggles with these temptations and yet he is living with children

Here you certainly cannot afford to put your full trust in his assertion that he has not offended, especially if he arrived in a very agitated state. Remember the fact that he has come suggests that his struggle is probably at least a few levels harder than for the average man, but the context greatly increases that risk. I won't list suggestions here but there is no perfect plan that will not cause awful difficulties for members of this family, and you and your advisors will recognise there are many risks. One is that you do not want to end up knowing of this, but his partner remains unaware of the risks or even that offences may have already happened, and a child may be in need of help.

Remember the confidentiality you offered was qualified by whether you judged anyone was at risk of harm. Perhaps speak to someone at supervisor level at Child Protection as to what the best path might be and what their options for action include before deciding on the best path.

6. Words that may be useful when all you have is knowledge of temptations but you conclude that it is best to remove someone from their church roles

You need to use a different approach because in this case you have no knowledge of any offence to pass to police nor any victim complaint or grounds to launch a full church inquiry. This option includes a useful way to avoid locking yourself into whatever version he has given you. You could say this gently and with empathy but speak with the assurance and authority that says this path is obvious and will happen. You might need that because there are some situations where without his cooperation, you may find difficulties in enforcing this.

I am sorry you have to contend with this tough temptation. You are in the middle of a tough battle and feeling desperate. That is so, isn't it? David, even if you have done no more than you have admitted today, what you have told me, your obvious distress and the urge to act on these temptations is strong enough to tell me that in the interest of child safety I need to remove your accreditation for working with children. I will do my best to get you help, but we both know that children are at risk. We now both need to play our part to keep kids as safe as we possibly can into the future, don't we? That is partly why you came isn't it? Deep down you want kids to be protected from harm, don't you? And the reason we need to act strongly here is because the damage that failing to control this temptation can cause to young victims, can be so massive. Second, this temptation, as you well know, can be stronger than many other temptations. Given the potential damage to kids, it is right that no parent is going to want someone struggling in this way to have positions of trust around their children. So removing your accreditation keeps kids safer but it also keeps you safer and at less risk of ending up in prison and having this damaging crime on your conscience. This action can help you by reducing the temptations you will be exposed to. You will be able to contribute in other ways.

If his role was more senior such as a pastor, you could consider using the following way to continue this safety theme rather than a morality theme as you have no complaint from a victim nor proof of guilt.

A big part of appointing senior leadership in church settings is assessing how likely is it that the person under consideration, will in every case, be a safe pastoral sanctuary for all who come, however needy, love starved, vulnerable or attractive to them they may be. Those making senior appointments have to ask themselves "how reliably will this person be able to always put their own needs (including sexual desires) aside, in order to provide this safety of a pastoral sanctuary for others? We have to set this bar for safety even higher in the special case where children or young people could be the victims, because of their added vulnerability and unequal power. I know this is tough but I will be relieving you of all leadership responsibilities. In this case it is not because of proven guilt of anything. This is not about guilt. It is

about how high we need to set that bar in our quest to provide safe pastoral sanctuaries for all God puts in our care, especially the most vulnerable.

Guidelines for decision makers

Chapters 15 to 17 will help bishops, moderators, leaders of organizations or pastors ensure that church processes are effective in delivering improved safety for children. This section is designed to help church leaders stay alert to the strengths and limitations of our practices and procedures, and make adjustments where more vigilance might be needed. For example, do your current church discipline procedures look sound but in practice make it too hard to remove those who represent a risk to children?

Chapter 15

Behavioural agreements with offenders

These have both significant limitations as well as uses. The risk of deception makes me concerned about some of the modern agreements that churches make with offenders about constraints under which they agree to operate. I can't always see what makes these any more reliable than promises and agreements that offenders made in the past with their pastors or bishops.

Agreements are not a substitute for informing the police. No agreement with an offender makes it safe to leave him in any leadership position at all, either before or after his time in jail.

Some bishops thought they would make the situation safe by prohibiting priests who had offended from engaging with the youth side of ministry but letting them remain as priests. Too often this restriction and agreement was just ignored over time, or he found boys from outside the parish. Those we know have offended must be removed from any positions of leadership or influence.

Used very carefully, I can see there could be some role for these agreements, especially in the short term (such as when waiting for a trial), provided that the accused is permitted no leadership, and other safety precautions are used. First, they can create agreements and conditions such that any lack of compliance on his part will give you a valuable indication that he still has mindsets and behaviours that would increase risk thus leading you to terminate any agreement that permitted him to attend any of your activities or services where children attend. Second, an agreement can maintain pressure on an offender to keep doing all he can to stay on the wise path. Third, an agreement can educate all parties about wise practicalities that are much better agreed to ahead of time. However, you can never rely on him complying with them on every occasion, and he may still offend in contexts within and without your parish, over which you do not have 24/7 oversight.

Agreements can be specific. For example, in the period before his trial, he may be asked to agree that he will never enter a toilet at church by himself but always ask one of a specified group of men to accompany him. He will not be on church property any time mid-week around the time a children's activity is scheduled. He will not enter the Sunday school or crèche area or leave a service midway on his own. It might include agreeing that he will not provide any child care for church members or non-church members.

Before he joins your church, as a demonstration of an offender's commitment to keeping on a wiser path, an agreement could be that he will first resign from all other child-related activities, (even ones not under the umbrella of your church such as scouts or assisting at junior choirs or sport). Should he protest about this, I would take that as an invaluable warning that he is not yet committed to, or taking responsibility for keeping well back from offending, and would certainly restrict him to church meetings that did not include children. Also, asking for this at the beginning can assist you with the dilemmas you might otherwise feel around warning these other groups.

Some wisely make it a condition that he can only attend their church if showing his commitment to maintain this new path by regularly attending sessions with someone with more specialist expertise in this area. These

all help an offender who has good intent to give practical shape to his intentions.

This overlaps with the important issue about who else should be informed in your congregation. The larger number of wise locals who are informed about the nature and content of the agreement, and who are around him a lot, the safer agreements will be, at least in those times when others are present. Pastors who think they can by themselves, provide enough oversight to keep an eye on an offender are kidding themselves. They overlook for example what could happen when they are on holidays or sick, or when other parishioners need their private attention.

The bigger problem is that neither the pastor watching on his or her own nor a group rotating to watch over him all Sunday morning will cover the risk that he may offend mid-week. He may have already used the credibility he gains by being a fellow worshipper to have ingratiated himself with some un-warned church family and be already abusing.

At the very least, consider if there are children or young people among those you know he has contact with mid-week.

Even if you place an offender in contexts that do not include children, thinking ahead and designing agreements on practicalities can be helpful for all parties. For example, after his time in jail, an offender may have been invited to join a regular small group of adults all of whom have been informed. A kindly older couple from this group might frequently offer him hospitality and invaluable support. A supervisor could assist that offender and that couple who have local grandchildren who drop by, to work out ahead of time, an agreement about what will happen if the children happen to arrive while he is visiting. You can remind the offender that he has learned that allowing any relationships with children to develop is a big danger for him and you are helping him practice how to extricate himself when children arrive somewhere. (No need to inform him but you are also trying to avoid a child getting some idea that he is safe to go with because he seems a close friend of grandma and they sometimes chat with him there.) Thus, this agreement consists of a rehearsal of what to do when the children arrive. It prepares him to make a quick exit in a casual relaxed way that does not include introductions. He may just smile and, depending on the configuration of the house, work his way around to the back or front door, giving the grandparents a casual wave, while they are keeping the children occupied with greeting and chatting. The agreement might include that the grandparents will ring him later to arrange an alternative time. Having discussed this before-hand enables everyone to relax, and the offender to feel less rejected, as all know ahead of time what will happen.

You cannot rely on the fact that someone may like and appreciate the parents or grandparents will be a sufficient brake on offending. You cannot assume "that he appreciates me so would never hurt me or mine in that way". We know of offenders who have abused the children of their best friend or fellow clergy. Try to prevent the possibility of children learning to trust him or the development of relationships.

Chapter 16

The value and limitations of safe ministry programs

Training and accreditation in safe ministry is valuable if the accreditation involves the following.²⁸

- a. training in basic rules that, for example, set staff ratios and limit leaders heading off with a child out of sight of others
- b. a requirement that everyone from the leaders to the cooks must gain this accreditation before being involved with programs for young people
- c. training this group to be alert to what might indicate inappropriate behaviour or abuse. (This creates an army of observers who are informed about this issue. This will be even more helpful if their training has included empowering and encouraging them to report any concerns they might have about someone's behaviour directly to a senior person who is not enmeshed in the local scene but who has skills in the abuse area)
- d. training in how to respond if a child discloses abuse (including reporting this to civil authorities)
- e. teaching leaders how to behave in ways that better protect them from false allegations
- f. has very strong processes at the entry point to help screen out past offenders or deter them when they realise that screening and constant, informed oversight by others is involved.

Together, these six strategies have made church-run clubs and youth activities much safer than they used to be. However, we should not be lulled into some false sense of security that safe ministry accreditations will solve all the church's problems with clergy who abuse. This is because many of their boy victims, were not attending church run youth programs. For example, some priests abused needy and vulnerable boys who were not part of any church youth programs and were kept well out of sight of bishops, or other parishioners who would have acted to report and protect. So a prevention strategy that believes that the only way to improve the safety figures is to keep notching up demands for yet more general safety regulations, and yet more paper work around church-run youth ministries, may do little to further improve those figures but may make youth ministry beyond the grasp of many average congregations. This seems a high price to pay if it may not improve the abuse figures beyond what is already accomplished by the six key issues mentioned above. So the stories and statistics from the Commission mean churches need to include a wider range of strategies for prevention than just relying on safe ministry accreditations. At the very least there has to be better selection of staff and easier removal of those who could be categorised as "having lost the confidence of the church that they could be relied upon to in all circumstances provide that safe pastoral sanctuary for all, especially the young, the needy, the vulnerable and powerless".

It also helps to think proactively about the dilemmas abused children can find themselves in. For example, whenever we are encouraging youngsters in our programs to learn about forgiving, it can be wise to include, "Yes, Jesus wants us to learn to forgive those who hurt us but if the way someone hurts you is worrying you, you really don't have to keep that secret. It is important to tell some of the safe adults in your life, so you can get help. Can you list some safe adults you could tell if you were worried about what someone was doing?"

Chapter 17

Protocols, legal advice and staffing

Protocols are an excellent aid to ensure that you cover a lot of issues and risks that you might not otherwise recall at the time. They can be so useful because someone else has thought up many of the things that could go wrong and following the steps will help prevent these. They also help your denomination protect itself from cowboy clergy. If your organisation does not have procedures for responding wisely to complaints about sexual abuse, get them immediately. I am not saying that all protocols are gold. You can tell very quickly if they haven't been written by people who deeply understand abuse victims and can see the way these processes will impact them. You can also tell if the writers didn't know enough about the risks these offenders can pose. However, given that too many church leaders in the past just ignored the parts of protocols that they had decided were wrong, with disastrous results, it is vital to never vary any protocols or written advice, without first discussing with those at head office who had more expertise and wrote it, what problems that wording was designed to avoid. This is because what may well seem to you to be trivial, obstructive or wrong, could well be there to cover risks that you have not even thought of. However, some balance is needed. Victims often rail against processes that they see as so locked in they do not take note of their individual needs, situations or pains. Also you will not keep the really good abuse advisors very long, if, whenever they suggest a response to a specific risky situation or victim's need, they are always shut down and trumped by "No, our process says... and even the detail has been locked in by a vote." When the trump card is always in the hand of the process implementer, it can neutralise the contributions of abuse advisors and others, and lead to not enough voices or expertise combining at the point of management. Maybe the local team needs to be able to ask the national team of experts for permission to vary for pastoral or other reasons.

Staffing. When appointing Directors of Professional Standards (whose job covers more than abuse) you may need to insist that the applicant must have enough experience in helping abuse victims over the long term, to have developed that antennae that I referred to. They will also need to have skills in assisting all levels of the church through these issues. These super-individuals will also need to be good at administration and keeping processes moving. Do not be content with good legal knowledge alone or the church will be on that old path it tends to gravitate back to: the path where a combination of mostly clergy, lawyers and administrators end up making the decisions.

Be aware that some of your staff may have had a role in decisions that were made in the past that are now disapproved of. Their defensiveness may be a factor in current difficulties.

A small step like this one below can save later stress, outrage, or even the results of your investigations being later called into question. Before you appoint any Directors of Professional Standards, assessors, external reviewers or members of panels deciding issues connected to child abuse, always alert them before they consider this role. Before they have a chance

to agree, write to them saying that “yes” you would involve them signing a statutory declaration similar to this: “To preserve the integrity of this role, I declare that I have never as an adult engaged in any unlawful sexual behaviour in relation to a minor.” This allows them to find easy excuses if they can’t comply.

Legal advice. It is a blind spot to view the church and the law as overlapping institutions. Mistakes were made when churches took no action because they had been advised there was insufficient evidence to reach the level of beyond reasonable doubt that a court of law requires. The church can conduct its own inquiries and act on a lower standard of proof (for example, on the balance of probabilities) and unlike the courts, can include the knowledge of other allegations.

Also, church law and procedures for dismissal were often not written with child abuse in mind. New clauses may need to be added to spell out the special regulations that need to apply when this is the allegation. The wording needs to enable strong and wise action that is victim-friendly and cannot be challenged. For example, when the allegation is child abuse, any assessing panel should not be too large and must include at least one person who has long experience caring for victims and at least one of the same gender as the alleged victim. Most importantly, when the issue is child abuse, you don’t want to be trapped into being unable to dismiss someone because of some requirement that they are entitled to two warnings about unacceptable behaviour before being dismissed. Good legal advice will help you draft those special clauses and help you avoid handing an offender grounds for challenging dismissals, disputing verdicts or suing you. I was certainly grateful that we had access to excellent legal advice and I made sure I kept checking in for that advice, thankful that it was made readily available and with such commitment to try to solve the inevitable problems.

Legal advice is vital but it is dangerous to use legal advice as the only advice, the trump card or the final filter.

Instead it is best used as part of round the table sharing of expertise and light in tackling such a tricky multidisciplinary issue and where we all need to learn from each other. You will need the strengths of all and there will likely be strong debate as solutions are forged. However, using lawyers as the only advice, the trump card that always outweighs all other advice or giving them the final say in shaping wording after everyone else has left the table has led to less than optimal outcomes and problems that were avoidable.

I do not believe that getting advice in a serial fashion delivers the best outcomes in this fraught issue. It is preferable to find ways to keep the abuse advisor with the legal advisor together in the discussions right until wording or decisions take their final shape. Otherwise, if the lawyer later adds bits that may to him or her be common legal terminology, there will be no chance for the abuse advisor to question if there might be simpler alternatives that victims would find far less intimidating and threatening but are still legally sound. Similarly, the lawyer would otherwise not have sufficient chance to modify or strengthen the others’ plans.

Another even more risky way churches have used this vital legal resource, was to give material to outside lawyers to have the final say in shaping processes and wording even though they had little experience in the abuse area, nor even been part of the round the table discussions, nor

learned about other priorities when dealing with abuse survivors. The result of giving the final say about wording to uninformed lawyers can be the production of documents of such complexity and legalese, that survivors have been known to literally shake when confronted with the paper work they can produce.

Chapter 18

How offenders pass their blindfolds to others

1. Offenders can pass their blindfolds to their church leaders

I have already explained how offenders pass their blindfolds onto their pastors or bishops.

2. Offenders can pass their blindfolds to victims

Unfortunately, one group who often start to believe the deceptions, the twisted justifications, the projected blame and shame that were regularly dumped on them by offenders, are the victims. Some have been told over and over by authoritative adults and can grow to believe that “it is all your fault that this happened”, “no one will ever believe you” or “you are garbage”. Survivors often need help from a skilled counsellor to shed the load of guilt, sabotaging self-talk and shame that the offender has instilled. Sadly, another group of victims also end up with the offender’s blindfolds in a different way. If a boy had been abused by a group of priests in a religious institution, telling him this was okay with God, and if the only way to gain power in that institution was to join the abusers, you can see where this might end. It is clear from the stories of men who were once victims and later offended, that it was not uncommon that they found themselves using the exact same words, justifications or ways of putting the blame on their victims as had been used on them.

3. Offenders can pass blindfolds to their supporters and congregation

If clergy and congregations are taking on a known offender, they need to prepare wisely, seek advice and supervision from those with much more expertise, because it is not uncommon for offenders to pass on their blindfolds to supporters within the congregation. This can be like the way alcoholics sometimes train their family members to believe and parrot their own self-justifications. Some supporters can then become enmeshed and entangled for many years. Supporters with blindfolds can cause considerable and long term disunity within a parish.

Be aware that just because someone may be a counsellor, does not mean they will always be able to supervise an offender. Indeed some, because of their kind hearts, can become hooked in to become enmeshed supporters themselves. In this state they can be recruited to become the defender of the abuser in the congregation rather than a vigilant facilitator assisting him to keep free of blindfolds. He will certainly welcome this less challenging change of focus.

A variation of an enmeshed supporter adopting his blindfolds can sometimes begin when a female supporter from the congregation decides to demonstrate grace by visiting him in prison. In this case it goes much further, ending with her dedicating her life to supporting, visiting and even

giving him much of her savings to mount legal appeals etc. In this case, the good relationships she once had with her pastor, church and family can often be quickly eroded. One could hypothesise that this is a controlling offender trying to establish a key supporter by isolating and undermining the influence and closeness of others in their life. Appendix B and the talk to a congregation in chapter 3 may help decrease this risk.

4. Offenders can pass blindfolds to spouses or partners

So many mothers of abused children were genuinely not aware of what had been happening, but some were recruited by the offender to believe his denials, his minimisations or his twisted transfer of blame. A few then took on his projections and joined to blame the child as being seductive, wicked and promiscuous. A few mothers took on the blindfold of total denial. Some were so beaten and abused themselves that they lost a sense of self and reality. Partners can have a very complicated journey when the full truth finally comes out.

5. Offenders can influence their institutions or groups

Let me illustrate the special dynamic that can occur when a serial abuser is the leader of a group. He may have been a leader due to his role such as headmaster, coach or priest, or simply by the charismatic force of his personality and skills. That institution, be it orphanage, church or a sporting club, can then become a secondary victim and all the innocent staff may later be horrified and traumatised to discover what had really been happening under the radar.

Unfortunately, what often later comes out, is that while no innocent staff may have had any direct knowledge of abuse, quite a few were aware of a piece of the jigsaw puzzle. Several had seen behaviour that while not actual abuse, was still very concerning. Sometimes when these had tried to raise their concerns to the abusing leader, he had publicly mocked them for being so rigid, rule bound, uptight and anti-fun. This is just one way an abuser manipulates culture to hide his offences.

You can see why training ordinary people to be alert to abuse and empowering them all to report concerning behaviour directly to a person who is skilled in this area but is outside and above the local situation, is such a vital ingredient in modern church safe ministry training. (In some denominations this is a role of the Director of Professional Standards.) Too often in the past, complaints had to wend their way progressively through some clerical hierarchy, and were too often dismissed at some level by someone who really liked the offender and could not believe this of him, and did not know enough to recognise the danger signals.

If the offender was the leader, it was easier for him to control the environment and manipulate not only his victims but also the culture of the group. Sometimes he corrupted a larger proportion of that institution or group. He could use his influence to provide the spin that made abuse seem acceptable, fun or freedom. As leader, he could also bury complaints, get rid of people who challenged him and invite others in who he knew would be on the same wavelength sexually and could be relied upon not to blow the whistle. (It is worth noting that the Royal Commission concluded that 40% of the St John of God staff in one location were paedophiles during the period 1950 to 2010.)

Abusing leaders can certainly influence culture. For example, some churches thought that the best way to keep an abusing priest away from children was to give him a lecturing role in a college that trained future priests. Unsurprisingly, this allowed some to use the influence of that position to multiply the problem. You can imagine if a non-fixated child abuser, then turned his attention to young trainee priests, loyalties could build up and create a wider culture that was more reluctant to report and when that is affected, you have a much bigger problem.

6. Offenders can pass their blindfolds to others who share their social or sexual life

Some male survivors reported that they had been sexually abused by priests when they were in their early teens. Their stories indicate that these particular priests were not the fixated offenders as they also had sex with other homosexual adults. Their abusers hustled the boys out of the way before a bishop or parishioners could see them, but paraded them openly at homosexual parties or functions where they were plied with alcohol and referred to as X's boy or Y's boy.

Several things concern me about stories like this. First, the others attending these functions, who were not abusing boys themselves, were the group who had the most chance to witness very concerning behaviour and could have acted to protect the vulnerable. Second, the blatant actions of the abusers suggest that they were extremely confident that no one would report them. Third, that confidence was seemingly well placed as no one attending those functions seems to have reported this to either the police or the church.

One has to ask why the onlookers, especially any involved with a church, did not report what the rest of the community would have judged as a very high-risk situation for these underage boys. Did they not consider it wrong? Did they not consider it harmful? (So many at the Royal Commission, speaking of the harm they experienced, should end that presumption). Were they too worried they themselves would be exposed, especially in the early days when homosexuality was still illegal? (Yet they did not even report anonymously.) Did they have no loyalties higher than to their own sexual subgroup? Or did some have the view that end-of-season football clubs sometimes had, that "whatever our mob does is okay and must never be dobbed on?" Had some come to a theological viewpoint that the views Christians had in the past about sexual expression were repressive? Had they concluded that the better expression of Christian freedom was to get rid of any and all labels of wrongness around sexual expression? Would that explain why some who were in a position to report, not only failed to do so when others crossed the important boundary of having sex with minors, but also failed to report when some did not respect the boundary of consent, or the boundary where sex would be exploitative of vulnerability, or the boundary of sex with those with whom one had a pastoral role? Was it all meant to be introducing everyone to so much freedom and fun that there would be no problems and no one was meant to be get hurt? Unfortunately, many victims at the Royal Commission on the receiving end of other's freedom, felt that they had been handed a life sentence. Many boys who had been underage felt like this, but also young men who had been above the age of consent but speak of the long-term damage after priests

had involved them sexually when they had been vulnerable or coming to them with pastoral concerns.

I suspect a factor that could have been operating, especially if an offender had been a charismatic leader, was that others from his social or sexual group who were not themselves abusing youngsters, became seduced by the hidden culture that that leader created: a culture of sexual freedom, tolerance, mocking the rules and good times (especially if fuelled by alcohol). They were then more willing to overlook the excesses and the risks to youngsters that they witnessed, and which most other people would have recognised as high risk indeed and immediately reported. In other words, these others also took on his blindfolds about the danger and the damage.

If those who had not themselves abused but had been part of an offender's social or sexual group, and have now come to realise that the culture he created helped disguise or sugar-coat abuse, and regret that they did not act to protect, should not these now be taking a strong lead in building a new culture in their social and sexual groups? Should they not now be taking a strong lead in building a culture in their groups that encourages reporting, teaches and enforces better boundaries and draws attention to behaviours and attitudes that led to harm in the past? For example, there have always been wise guidelines for how heterosexual males in ministry should behave around women and girls, including what high risk situations to avoid that might otherwise put the woman and girls at special risk, or themselves at risk from allegations. In the light of the stories and statistics from the Commission, I hope there are now more groups of gay men taking responsibility to better generate, promote and enforce guidelines for what is wise to do or not do, in order to preserve the safety of men and boys in their care and ensure their own safety from allegations. Devising and encouraging more specific guidelines could be wise for other groups as well.

All groups have some shame to carry after the failures of the past, but even more important than sorting out the old questions are the current ones. Are there pockets where views or loyalties would still prevent reporting?

It is important to keep considering what factors might hinder or aid reporting.

Appendix A

Assisting wounded people to make progress towards forgiveness

The list of practical suggestions to support survivors on their forgiveness journey follows the survivor's story. However, we need to remain vigilant that the call to forgive is never used as a weapon to silence, shun or shame survivors or manoeuvre them to drop complaints. Too many churches shunned survivors who spoke out about their abuse and judged them as being unforgiving or as a difficult person who was harming their church. Stay alert because responsibility for the painful consequences can be easily and quickly assigned to the wrong person. The reason the church is harmed is not the victim speaking out. It is the offender who has damaged both the victim as well as the church.

It can also be unwise if the offender had been clergy, for other clergy to urge that survivor to forgive, unless it has already been through the courts. Otherwise it can easily slide into or be misinterpreted as self-interest or spiritual manipulation to get them to drop complaints.

Ensure survivors understand that forgiving doesn't require them to excuse an offender from legal or other consequences which help protect other vulnerable parties. Rachael Denhollander's victim-impact statement shows her willingness to forgive as well as her passion for justice and the protection of others.²⁹

You can assist survivors to get more ready to forgive, if you have already taken the time—perhaps many hours—to really hear their story. Remember loving listening is an active process and not a passive one. This can be like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established by the new South African government in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about a reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that had occurred during the period of apartheid.³⁰ Its emphasis was on gathering evidence and uncovering information—from both victims and perpetrators. Hearing and believing stories that had been hidden and not given a voice for so long can be a key component in being able to take a step forward. (I am aware that listening is often not enough as sometimes people have been trapped in trauma responses for decades and other strands, such as professional help, will be needed.)

I have asked a survivor to write of her struggles with forgiveness. Her story illustrates some of these points. This woman's father was a paedophile who sexually abused her from a very young age. He was extremely violent. He would also at intervals hand her, and later her younger sister, over to paedophile groups. Some of these were so sadistic that they were only gratified if the children were screaming in pain or terror. As occasional weekends of being at the whim of these men occurred at intervals over many years, she endured so many episodes of trauma. She understandably sometimes disassociated or repressed the memories of many of the episodes but had to endure their full terrifying impact when the memories returned in later life. She is one example of those victims that offenders deliberately piled guilt, shame, worthlessness and terror on to, in order to ensure their silence. She is not the only survivor to have a horror of being found "in the

wrong”, and who struggle with guilt and failure over so much, including the command to forgive.

Her story illustrates that for some survivors, “ought”, “guilt” and “failure” are the least helpful tools to encourage forgiving, and can lead to more misery than freedom.

A survivor’s story

I am now 65. I was molested, raped and tortured over and over again as a child and through my teenage years. In my late teens I was also pack raped. My mind pushed most of the awful memories so deep down in my mind that by the time I married at 21 I only remembered the pack rape. Memories of the early childhood abuse came to light during my early 40s, as flashbacks and nightmares. The odd nightmare had surfaced from time to time in earlier years, but that’s all I thought it was, a nightmare. I am a Christian, so I turned to the church for help. I have to say that I was believed, and I will always feel an enormous sense of gratitude for that. I have witnessed firsthand the damage that has been done when people are not believed. However, my frustration at the time was that after two or three appointments and prayer with the then minister, there was the expectation that I was healed. I felt such a failure, because the talks and the prayer did not stop the flashbacks or the nightmares, and they did not help me forgive. I felt guilty that as a Christian I could not forgive, and I knew that God would not forgive me until I forgave.

When I went back for more help, I was told the memories had been dealt with. Yes, God had wonderfully taken the terror out of some memories but not all and there were more coming, and I still could not forgive. The minister told me that I knew how to forgive, that I should apply the principles of Christian forgiveness I had been taught and that it was a choice of my will to forgive. I have never told that minister that he made me feel so bad, a failure, even though he and his wife were good friends. For many years I not only continued receiving flashbacks and nightmares, and new memories, but I had to deal with the guilt and feelings of failure as a Christian. The guilt that I could not forgive was at times overwhelming. This was guilt that I should not have been made to feel. It was a terrible time for me and I fell into a depression. This guilt and the depression affected my relationship with the Lord and my ability to receive the sacraments. For years I struggled with this issue and many times I chose not to go to church because I did not want to explain why I hadn’t gone forward for communion. When flashbacks come, it is like the abuse happened yesterday. They are so real, so terrifying and so overwhelming. It takes days to process the new memories, especially when you must deal with everything else going on in your day to day life as well. Imagine you were raped, or tortured or molested in some way yesterday and you are told today to forgive the perpetrator? I believe there is no greater violation than sexual violation, because it happens inside us. It’s hard to forgive the people who get inside us with the intent of hurt or harm, to possess, to punish. Really, really hard.

Sadly, abuse feels even more horrendous when it is the adults we most trust who abuse us. The sad thing is that if we are Christians and find it hard to forgive, the entire process feels far worse. We are dealing with both unforgiveness and the guilt for feeling that way and not being able to let it go. It gets very complicated. At times, the “uneducated church”—a minister with limited training in dealing with sexual abuse—only makes a tough situation, worse. It is like being abused in a different way. For me, forgiveness came slowly and it is still happening within me. After my retirement, a move interstate and some time under a psychologist, a trained Christian counsellor from within my church was appointed to assist me. Now after many years of counselling—both secular and through the church—I do feel like I am free of most hidden memories. I can look back without the rage, anger and hurt. However, I still feel grief and sadness keenly at times. There are times when grief and sadness take me so powerfully, all I can do is sob. Although this is painful, I also see this ability to name and express my grief as progress. What am I grieving about? I grieve because I never experienced a real childhood. I became a woman too soon. I grieve because the abuse shaped my behaviour and harmed my body and mind. The abuse caused, and still causes, me to react abnormally with my fellow man and towards God. During the abuse the words spoken over me were horrible and soul destroying. They were uttered with the intent of controlling me, so that I would not speak out. It worked. For years I believed that if I said anything my father would kill the rest of my family. Later in life, both my sister (who suffered similarly) and I became overachievers. We were determined to break the power of the words “you are nothing, you will amount to nothing, you are only born to please men” and much, much, worse. The words spoken over us were powerful and as a result neither of us dealt with failure very well. At the other end of the spectrum, my brother, younger by ten years, became a substance abuser and succeeded at very little. Sadly, he was always a victim. The eldest of the three, I have survived them both. Both of their deaths can be directly attributed to the abuse they suffered as children. I grieve for my brother and sister and for what might have been.

Most of all I feel grief and sadness because the damage my body suffered led me, to miscarry six babies including twins at 20 weeks. Yes, I ultimately I gave birth to two beautiful children but even during their pregnancies I suffered several threatened miscarriages and extreme anxiety that I would miscarry them also. I grieve because I remember miscarrying my first baby in my early teens after a severe beating. How do you forgive a man who is forcing you to flush a tiny fetus down the toilet when you do not even quite understand what has just happened? I struggled with forgiveness when these memories surfaced. All I can see in my mind is blood everywhere. Forgiveness really began when the Lord cried with me and told me it was hard for Him to forgive these men too. He told me that my father and the other men who had violated me would have to answer to the Father. The Lord gave me a vision of my children in heaven—all seven of them. This gives me constant and great comfort.

Another step in my forgiveness journey came more powerfully when I was watching the film *The Mission*. Rodrigo Mendoza (played by Robert De Nero) had killed his brother and as an act of penance he carried a large net of heavy armour on his back up a mountain escarpment and huge waterfall. In the film Rodrigo struggles with the weight on his back and at times nearly falls backwards to his death. Towards the top of the waterfall, Rodrigo is exhausted, injured and struggling yet refuses help from an accompanying priest, Father Gabriel (played by Jeremy Irons). However, a native comes forward with a large knife and despite Rodrigo's protests, cuts the load from Rodrigo's back. The Lord said to me that my unforgiveness was weighing me down like the weight on Rodrigo's back. I knew then that I needed to ask Jesus to cut me free. The load was killing me and I had the right to live free of this weight. I finally realised what true forgiveness was. I forgave, not because my father or the other men deserved it but because I deserved it! After the years of hearing this from counselors it finally got through to me—it finally made sense.

"In case this encourages others, let me divert to tell you about one of the strands that helped when new memories got so bad. Sometimes when I had difficulty getting out of some awful memory and was trapped in the past and paralysed in terror, a trusted female supporter helped me find a way to move through that memory by adding a new ending with the possibility of escape. (My friend had learned that the impossibility of escape was part of the reason I had disassociated.) When I was stuck, petrified and barely able to breathe she would tell me that she was picking me up gently and carrying my young, terrified self away out from that location. Well away. To begin with she would tell me that she was taking me home to my bedroom and shutting the door but in my childhood not even my bedroom was safe. So, she changed tack and then began to tell me that she was carrying me to the cross. (She didn't explain the cross is after all that place of torture and victory that spans all history.) There, after a simple prayer to please grant me everything that Jesus' death and especially his resurrection has won for me, she would tell me she was carrying me beyond the cross (where so often as an adult my habit had been to stay stuck and grovelling). It was then that God provided something special. I could see a beautiful pool. I could see Jesus there waiting for me. Not once did he touch me. (He seemed to know that I could not have borne another male touching me at those times.) I knew it was His pool and His provision. It did not happen this way for every memory but many times when I was in torment over a new memory it was in that pool that I received a miracle and felt like I was washed afresh. In that pool the rage, terror and pain subsided. There, the taint of that horrible episode leaves me, and I feel clean again and much calmer.

"There are times when I still find myself getting weighed down again with sin, mostly unforgiveness, especially when I think of what happened to me and I go back to the cross to repent.

"I believe for many of us, forgiveness is a process. It must go from the head to the heart. Yes, it is an act of my will, at least it starts there. However, I know the Lord meets us where we are

at and takes over the process. I just needed to be willing to let God do the work within me, to trust Him that it could be done. I couldn't do it on my own. Once I accepted it was a process I stopped feeling guilty about things. I now genuinely choose to forgive as best I can before communion and I like to keep short accounts with God. Now I don't beat myself up if unforgiveness comes up, or any other sin. I ask the Lord to forgive me and I choose to forgive whoever, whatever has come up.

"I am deeply grateful to the counsellor who has been on this walk with me for nearly six years. Her patience and commitment to my healing has helped the healing process. The difference for me is that she was trained and knew what not to do, unlike that minister twenty years ago. With people as kind and loving as she was and is, you learn to trust and to see the world through a different window. Now, God has become a God of love and healing to me, and the cross is no longer a fearfully judgmental place, but a place of liberty. Praise God.

"Has every last step of healing happened? No. Has every last drop of unforgiveness gone? No. Do I sometimes still sob with grief? Yes. Is every last one of those so many memories at absolute full peace? No and I suspect there may be some very deep ones still. But so much has changed. The past no longer dominates my life, my time, my thinking or emotions. After all the rage I have felt at the perpetrators and at God for letting all this happen, this peace and closeness to Him now is so special. I feel a bit like Lazarus. Those men had killed something in me. Something had definitely died in me and was rotten. Some people helped by rolling away the stone, so I could hear my Lord's voice calling me to life again. But I was still so bound up by many grave clothes. I was still bound by such horrible things that I also needed the help of others to, bit by bit, be cut free from their stench and restriction. This journey can be much slower than we want, but the peace is worth it.

Is the pool in this story a special gift for someone overwhelmed by so many terrible memories, or could it also be a provision for others? This woman's story can encourage you that God is at work but think carefully before you share every part of her story with every survivor. It is common for abuse victims to feel that compared to pain like this, their pain should be considered insignificant and that they should downplay their own abuse and pain and do not need or deserve help to process their own trauma. I assure you that it can still be hell to walk through the aftermath of what outsiders might rate as much milder abuse and every survivor needs and deserves every kindness and assistance with their trauma. As Tim Hein writes, "Down playing our abuse almost always adds to our trauma."³¹

Second, you can see from her story that, where survivors have been worked over by abusers intending to leave them paralysed by guilt and powerlessness, we can collude with those same destructive forces if all we do is wave the guilt and failure stick or the ought or shame stick. So, in our responses to survivors it can often be more helpful to live things rather than preach them. When we do speak of forgiveness it can be wise to use the language of journey and include the possibility that forgiveness is some-

times a process and pause to consider before we recommend it being the very first step.

You can see that sometimes when either the pastor or the person themselves lay very heavy burdens of guilt about not having yet completed their journey to forgive, it can be crushing and lead to more misery rather than freedom. I am not advocating the other extreme of concluding that it would therefore be kindest and best if a pastor never ever raised this hard issue of forgiveness. That would fail to grasp that receiving grace and passing it on, is the currency of His Kingdom. That would also ignore that forgiving is a heaven backed survival tool that will, in time, help survivors to more freedom. I know you long for them to be in a better place, but let's be more patient and more creative about finding other ways to help survivors take steps on their forgiveness journey.

For the majority of us, an "ought" can help us to just bite the bullet and get on and do the forgiving we need to do, but with some abuse survivors, we need to be much more gentle, if we are not to collude with those forces from their past. We need to have far more patience, and encourage them to be more patient with themselves, as together you look to and trust in God.

It also doesn't help if we have become so disturbed by their pain that we view forgiveness as some way to cram the lid back on the abuse in order to lessen either their pain or ours. Acknowledging the pain and integrating it, is often part of the forgiveness journey. The first step of the forgiveness journey is often to acknowledge that "this happened", "this mattered", "this hurt" and "this left damage".

I know I have written some options for you below, but in practice I have found it is best to err on the side of saying too little. Too often the more we say, the more we shame. It can help to offer them more choices and fewer lectures.

The following collection of different ways to use words, diagrams and video clips might stimulate you to think of even better ideas of your own. This batch is mainly for Christians and not every example will be suitable for every survivor.

- a. If a survivor is one who was crushed with "guilt" and "oughts", why not ask them if they would like to read, ponder or rewrite the following prayer to better express their experience. Then they might read it out loud as a prayer and take it home to use again.

Jesus, I often feel like a very small boat in monstrous mountainous seas. You have told me about this harbour of forgiving others where the waves are much smaller. I want to tell you again that I am also committed to getting to that harbour. That is my aim, and I am prepared to contribute my puny paddling to at least keep this boat aiming in that direction, even if it seems a long way off. I can trust you because you also struggled with really hard stuff and got to the calmer waters of forgiving others. Help me not to beat myself up when another wave of unforgiveness or rage crashes over me. Then I feel so helpless and guilty. It is as if for a while I am sucked back into those old days where everything is terrible and all my fault again. Remind me that you are the strong deep current underneath this tossed about boat and underneath these temporary waves. Remind me that You are, with love and under-

standing, steadily taking me closer to my goal. As once again I bring this boat around to face towards that harbour, remind me that it is your goodness that will bring me home.

- b. Watch Rachael Denhollander's victim-impact statement (*Nassar victim Rachael Denhollander speaks out*) on YouTube to check if it is applicable for the survivor you are helping. If appropriate, together watch this inspiring and profound speech by this courageous Christian survivor. She delivered this statement at the sentencing hearing of Larry Nassar, the man who had abused her and over a hundred other young gymnasts. Choose the full 35-minute version. One of her themes is "What is a little girl worth?"
- c. Decide if letting them read parts of the survivor's story might help.
- d. After praying about whether it is the right time to raise the issue of forgiveness with a Christian survivor, you might try the following.

Rather than just launching into your own speech on why we should forgive, you could first invite the survivor to tell you about their own thinking and struggles with forgiveness. Give permission for them to be authentic by giving them a few examples and include one option that asks for help to forgive.

You could say tentatively and gently and with pauses,

Given you have spent a lot of time in churches, I am guessing that the issue of forgiveness has crossed your mind at some point. I would be interested in some of the things you have thought or felt when this issue has come to your mind in the past? I mean, for some people it is, "No way! I will never forgive him and that is final." For others it is, "I have tried and it was just too hard." For others it was "I refuse to take any steps down the forgiving path because that would just say that what he did wasn't a big deal" or "It would mean he was getting off scot free". Or you might be one of those who want to say that "I would like to forgive if someone would do more than just tell me that I should and give me some tools to help me to get there!"

After giving space for their often strong emotional responses you might build your responses around the specific answer they gave you. That might include gently adding questions that cause them to reflect if their current option is still working for them and gaining them increased freedom.

- e. If a survivor says, "I am not going to forgive because that lets him off scot-free", you could reply,

I get that, and justice seems to demand more than that doesn't it? Does it feel like you can't move on with your life until he pays big time?

After letting the survivor talk for a while you could ask,

Is your strategy still working? I mean, is this strategy causing him much additional pain now or by this time is it mainly you who this strategy is hurting? Is this approach just keeping you in "struggle land" and keeping you tied to him, and less free to get on with your life?

Talking about forgiveness and justice will be simpler if, well prior to this conversation, you have already offered to assist them to take it to police."

- f. If a survivor says, “I am not going to take any step down the forgiving road because that would mean that what he has done was no big deal”, you could reply,

Yes, in our modern world, sometimes when people ask us to forgive them we are expected to shrug it off and answer them, “That’s fine. It was nothing. No problem. No big deal.” That view of forgiving requires us to minimize the hurt and pretend it was no big deal. But the forgiving the bible encourages us to do is light years away from saying that what happened was okay or was no big deal. Did Jesus say to those at his trial and crucifixion, who were accusing him of blaspheming God, and were then torturing him and crucifying him ... did he say that what they were doing “was okay and didn’t matter much?” No. When he said those words of forgiveness from the cross he was in effect saying what you are doing matters massively—on levels that you will never ever grasp—but I am choosing to cancel the debt that you could never ever pay.”

Do you think Joe really grasps the damage he’s done you? I strongly doubt that he has. Could Joe, if he lived the good life for the rest of his days, ever make up for the damage he has done you? He couldn’t, could he? What happened to Jesus was also too big for anyone “to make up for”. It was too big for anything other than the big guns of radical forgiveness. The actions of the leaders, soldiers and mob around the cross was a very big deal. The choices your abuser made were also very big deal. He deliberately chose behaviour that was anathema to God’s way about how we should treat each other, especially kids. Jesus takes what happened to you very seriously indeed. He views it as very big deal. Acknowledging that this mattered is actually the very first step of biblical forgiveness.

Another time you might say,

Given it was such a big deal, just letting time pass may not be enough to free you up to move forward. If in the weeks ahead you are ready to try taking another step on this forgiveness journey, I am here to help. Let’s always remember that forgiving is not trying to pretend it didn’t hurt much. Forgiving is saying “it is big deal. It mattered back then and it matters now. It hurt back then and it hurts now, but God is helping me on a journey to learn to use the same tools Jesus did and that this journey with his help, will in time bring me more freedom.

Later you might say,

I am certainly not saying that forgiving will be the only help you might need, and I am certainly not saying that you should beat yourself up if forgiving isn’t all done and dusted quickly. It can sometimes be a messy and slow journey but it will ultimately bring greater freedom which in my opinion is a blessing you deserve.

- g. If survivor says, “God has no idea how impossible what he is asking is”, you could reply,

Does it feel like no one else seems to get how overwhelming and difficult this is for you? There are not going to many people who understand this level of struggle. Perhaps soldiers coming out of some of the prisoner of war camps do. But I think you also have a Saviour who understands this level of struggle. Even his disciples didn't get how big his struggle was in Gethsemane, as he contemplated what lay ahead of him. They fell asleep and left him to struggle alone, even sweating drops of blood. Because he won through to that calmer place where he could later forgive the crowds crucifying him, Jesus is someone who does understand your struggle. You are not alone. You are backed. You are backed by someone who has also walked through trauma, struggle, powerlessness, betrayal, pain and shame. You are known. You are understood. You are backed. It is a pierced hand that is stretched out to help you with this forgiveness journey.

- h. When helping Christians, their questions might sometimes sound as if they are posing a theological dilemma and wanting you to unravel it. Often these questions are an expression of pain, anger or powerlessness. Their immediate need might be for us to provide a place where it is safe to be hurting or angry or yell hard questions at the universe. Initially, it can be better to reflect back to them on that emotional level. However, if it is time to respond to a theological dilemma consider the following example.

Are you saying that you are struggling with two big important issues: your understandable deep need for justice and yet you know that Jesus also talks about forgiveness and mercy and that seems almost offensive to you in this circumstance? Sometimes we make the mistake of thinking Jesus is only on about mercy but he is clearly also passionate about justice and right behaviour. Listen to what he says in Luke 17:10: "Things that cause people to sin are bound to come, but woe to that person through whom they come. It would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a millstone tied round his neck than for him to cause one of these little ones to stumble." That is Jesus talking about justice and condemning appalling behaviour such as was done to you. What was done to you stands under the judgement of God. Yet out of his love, Jesus died. Justice is very important and you know I backed you to take this to the police but the result in your case didn't taste much like justice did it? I am in no way denying that justice is important, but for all of us to be able to keep going, or have any life worth living, Jesus knows we all need even more than justice. None of us would survive if there was only justice. None of us could go on relating to any other people in our lives if there was only justice. None of us could live with ourselves if there was only justice. Somehow Jesus is also passionate that there is mercy available—costly mercy. I don't have neat words to respond to your turmoil over this. But when you pause and think about it, does it seem that this Jesus knows a lot about and is really committed to justice? [Pause.] That he knows a lot about and is really committed to mercy? [Pause.] And that he is really committed to finding ways to help the broken hearted, the oppressed and wounded? Given all that do you think you could

trust this Jesus who is passionate about all these, to be the one you would let manage these complicated and distressing issues of justice and mercy in your situation?

Rather than keep hanging on to your abuser until this important issue of justice is settled to your satisfaction, would you feel able to hand this to Jesus, to sort out these issues, given He is the one who knows even more than we do about both justice and mercy, and paid a high price for his commitment to both.

You already carry so many consequences of his appalling behaviour, so why not hand over one of those burdens. You have already wrestled with this long and hard. Is it time to hand this one over?

If you were trying to just let go your need for justice into thin air, it would be too hard. But what about deliberately handing your need for justice to Jesus and trusting him to best manage these important issues in relation to this guy, and to you. We usually find that taking a step like this also releases us a fair bit too. But don't be horrified if sometimes issues flood to the surface and a wave of the old feelings knocks us off our feet again. Don't be fussed. When we get back on our feet, we may need to hand the issue of managing justice over to Jesus again, but it does get easier.

Make sure this is not interpreted as suggesting they don't involve the police.

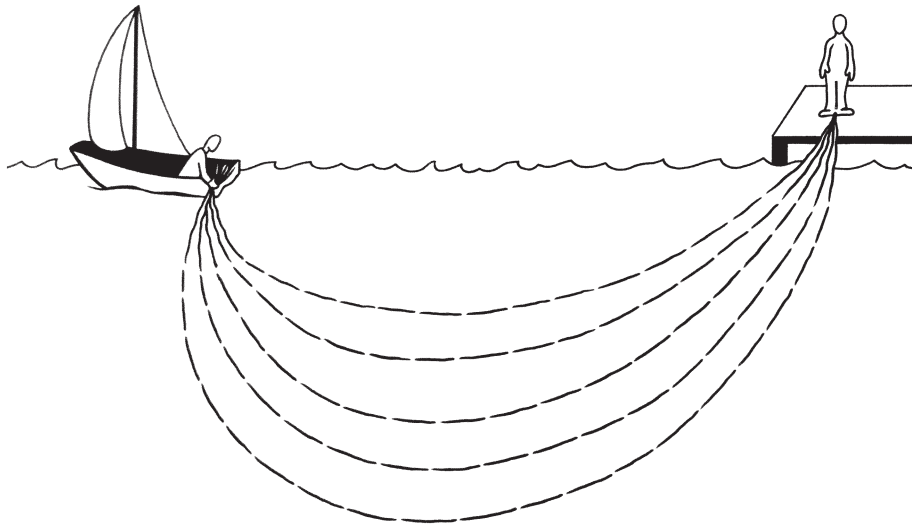
- i. A survivor may say "I tried to forgive but nothing shifted" or "will someone please give me some tools to help me get there?"

First option is to untangle if they still feel responsible for their own abuse, due to the way the offender projected his guilt. They can have trouble forgiving if in their gut they still feel partially responsible. They can need help and time for it to become clearer that the perpetrator was to blame, and that what he did was worthy of condemnation. What he did was so very wrong. This was more than a private matter between two individuals, because he as the adult violated God's laws plus the community's laws, about the way to treat kids. Also forgiving is often too hard while new memories are still surfacing and when the survivor is regularly having to deal with yet another new memory with another new trauma.

But perhaps if the person was abused quite some years ago and there are no fresh memories that are complicating the present, but they remain stuck, this diagram may be of use, although its more common use has been outside the abuse area. It has however helped many people make big strides with forgiving a range of offences and hurts.

Looking at this picture, you can see that some people have got to the point where they do want to sail on with their life even though some terrible thing has happened but can feel stuck and as if nothing is moving. They may even have got to the point of wanting to forgive the person on the wharf but can't manage even a step. It is worth checking if this is because there might be some ropes that are half under the water and almost out of our awareness: ropes that we are hanging on to, and that in a strange way keep us tied to the one who hurt us. Hanging on to some rope

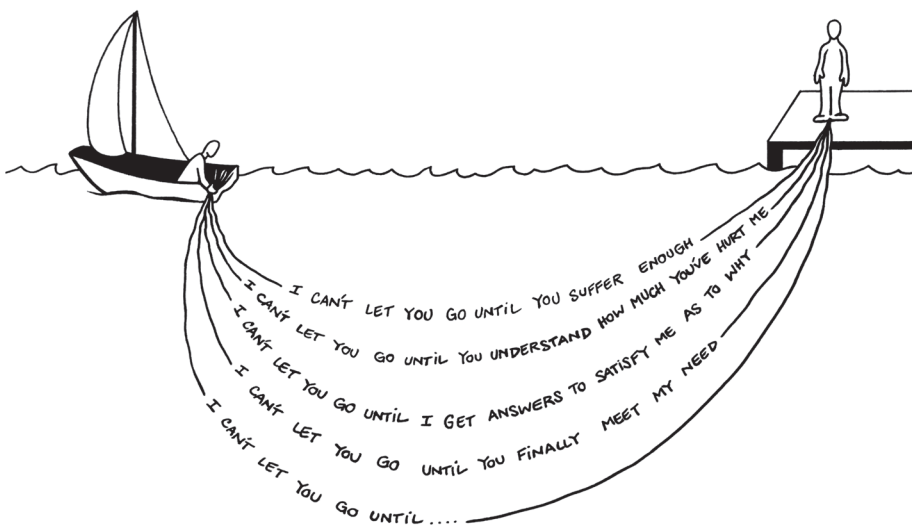
can prevent us from sailing on with our life. It is sometimes almost as if we are waiting for some demand to be met before we can forgive, or let them go, or move on.



The ropes we are mostly unaware of can range from the totally understandable to the illogical, unchristian, petty or impossible. Never-the-less, they can all be strong.

It can help us to discover these ropes if we ask ourselves questions like, "I can't let you go until ...," or "How exactly have I been waiting for him to pay?" or "What demand am I still waiting to be met?"

They can vary from "I can't let you go until you grow camel warts on your nose and every aspect of your life is a mess" to "I can't let you go until you rewind history and undo what has happened" to "I can't let you go until I am vindicated." So often the one who is kept a prisoner by these ropes is not the person who hurt us but ourselves.



Common restrains include

I can't let you go until you suffer enough.

I can't let you go until you pay by ...

I can't let you go until you really grasp how much you have hurt me.
 I can't let you go until you admit you were so wrong.
 I can't let you go until you rewind history and undo what has happened.
 I can't let you go until I get answers that satisfy me as to why.
 I can't let you go until you finally give me the parenting that I so deeply needed.

Take your time. Do any of these ropes in this picture ring any bells? Yours might be different. How would you finish the sentences? "I can't let you go until ..." Or "I can't move on until you pay by ..." Once we identify the rope we are still hanging on to or the demand we are still waiting to be met, we are more able to let it go. It is as if once we know what we have in our hand it becomes easier to open our hand and choose to deliberately let it go. A release is not agreeing that we should never have some good thing we might want or would not still welcome it if it came. Rather it is an agreement to sail forward even if our demand (good or bad) is never met. After all, we have already lived a long time without it being met so giving up the demand is not really a brand new mountain to climb. Hanging on to some demand, however worthy and understandable, has often got to the point of greatly restricting our life, our happiness and our freedom to sail. For example, a heartfelt apology might help, but putting one's life on hold until that happens, seldom makes for good sailing.

A release is saying, "Yes I wanted this, but I am going to drop this rope and release both myself and the other, even if that form of "partial fixing" I craved is not to be in my earthly future."

Write down for the person what a release could look like, building it around what they have said. Use strong language, as this is a spiritual transaction. Invite them to read it over a few times and amend it. When they are ready and want to declare this, pause while you pray quietly for God's work and victory, and then invite them to read it out loud. Examples include "In the name of Jesus I am releasing both you and me. I am dropping this rope and am prepared to sail on and embrace my future even if that future never includes you understanding how much you hurt me or even if you never say sorry. I am not going to put my life on hold waiting for those two things any more." Or "In the powerful name of Jesus, I let you go even if you never admit what you did." Or "In the powerful name of Jesus I let you go, even if I never get my questions answered, because after all I have lived this long without that anyway. I am giving up demanding that. This demand has kept me tied up too long." Releasing is a big component of forgiving. Give them a copy to take home.

Never ever suggest to a survivor that their rope could be the one about "undoing history," or they could become deeply hurt and furious that you are minimizing their struggle or just suggesting it is time they should now put all this behind them. However, if this rope is just written down as one of several options that a person might self-select from, I have seen people instantly hone in on this one, ask more and self-identify that this is the rope that is hindering their sailing / living /forgiving. If asked, I explain that it can be a bit like "because something was an horrific thing that should never have happened, this rope can be a desperate belief that if I protest long enough or demand answers long enough, I can prevent this bomb from having landed in my life. This one is putting our life on hold, waiting for

our demand to be fulfilled that the perpetrator or someone else, somehow undoes history and makes it never have happened. (As this rope that had been pretty well out of their awareness, becomes clearer, let them draw their own conclusions that while the present and future can be changed, they are accepting (possibly with grief) that the past can no longer be changed. This is their all too real history for them to now build a life on.

- j. **You might choose to let them read what another young woman recognised were her ropes.** (She was abused but not sexually.) “I really wanted them to pay and suffer. I wanted more justice. I wanted vindication that I didn’t deserve this, but in time I realised I wanted other things even more. I wanted healthy things more. I wanted more life-giving things more and better relationships with all the people in my life, and less poison in my life, so I let go the other demands. I dropped those ropes that I was using to hang on to my parents in an unhelpful way. They had hurt me so much. So, after my counsellor prayed, the next step for me was, in the presence of Jesus, to bring each incident to mind, name its big impact on me and then specifically dropping my demands about each issue. This wasn’t over in just one or two sessions. A big rope for me was wanting them to pay. However, when I asked myself the question ‘I can’t let you go until ...?’ I also discovered another weird rope. I had apparently felt I wasn’t free to move on until I had rescued my younger sister from my abusive mother (even though by this time my mother had already killed her years before when I was still a child). I needed to release my little sister to Jesus’ care and not mine. Releasing and forgiving for me also meant being prepared to move on without accomplishing these important things or having things work out the way I had so desperately wanted.”
- k. **Forgiving is the option you pull out when something is too big to excuse or heal.** When we cannot wait for healing we need the big guns of radical forgiveness. Forgiving is saying “this mattered hugely but I am not going to call in the debt against you. Partly because I am not powerful enough to call in the debt and partly because there has been enough paying. I have paid a high price and Jesus has paid a high price. I am prepared to accept that is enough paying.”
- l. **Forgiving others is special survival tool that God backs with the power of heaven,** and that he urges us to use to help us better navigate the awful stuff life can throw at us. You won’t need this survival tool in heaven. It is a survival tool for this era. You can tell God any time that you are ready to risk taking some more steps in this journey. (Invite the survivor to come and share with you if there is any progress at all and tell them you will celebrate the tiniest steps together. (In this area, celebration over tiny steps or periods when forgiving and other things felt a bit easier, is far more help than implied condemnation for failure.)
- m. **Use inspirational examples such as Nelson Mandela who chose to forgive after 27 years in prison.** Why do you think he chose that path and what did it leave him free to do? It seemed to leave him more free to live life according to his own values and less stuck just living his life in reaction to the appalling behaviour of others. Forgiving can be a way out of the trap of living our lives only in reaction to the appalling behaviour of others. His quotes include the following gems.³² “Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies.” “When a deep injury is done to us, we never heal until we forgive.” “Forgiveness is not an easy thing to give, but

when you do, you remove a big burden from your shoulders. You free yourself from the yoke of hatred and begin to love.” “As I walked out of the door towards my freedom, I knew that if I did not leave all the anger, hatred and bitterness behind, I would still be in prison.” “When I walked out of prison, that was my mission. To liberate the oppressed and the oppressor both.” Nelson forgave to model a way forward that would not leave the country he loved awash with blood.

- n. **Is this offence deserving of anger and condemnation?** Absolutely. However, it is the victim who does not deserve a life trapped in the treadmill that unforgiveness can be. The victims have already suffered enough and do not deserve this. Hence God’s two way solution, which offers more hope of a future to the wounded and also more hope of a future to the one who did the wounding.
- o. **Many survivors and clergy supporters have found the book *Child Arise* by Jane Dowling very helpful.**³³
- p. **Do you feel your ability to forgive is strong?** Or does it feel more like a tiny flickering candle? Fortunately, the ultimate power to forgive does not come from our flickering candle. It comes as we fall into agreement with God that we are committed to his path of forgiving the other. It comes as we take our little candle and in agreement with God, step into and join His massive light beam of grace streaming via the cross, and which is offering grace to ourselves and others. The power does not come from the flickering candle. It comes from the massive light beam we choose to agree with and step into. In fact don’t be alarmed if we fall “off beam” quite a bit in the early days and need to pick ourselves up and re-join this bigger massive light. Forgiving can be a process, and God sometimes takes us on a journey as his power works within us.

Appendix B

Reduce risks by preparing the whole group before including an offender

When discussing with a small group or congregation (that does not have children) whether they are willing to take on some support role with an offender, or even just let him join their usual group, prevention is far better than repair.

You need to anticipate risks not just to children and the church but also to the offender. You could use a list like this to inform a discussion that educates and mitigates risks that have happened elsewhere. (This is an example and not a definitive list.)

I have brought along [Name of advisor] because this will work better if we have an advisor who knows much more than we do to increase our understanding. If we decide to take on this ministry she has agreed to be available later for any of us to phone when we have concerns and to help us review our progress.

Don't use definitive language and don't promise that the offender is repentant or cured.

It would appear that [Name of abuser] has made a good start and there are many helpful things he can grow in but what I can't offer you is any guarantee that in the future he will always make the right choices around children. I cannot even guarantee that what he has revealed so far is the total of his offences. That is why we need to weigh it up carefully and never stop being wise about child safety. A considerable percentage of abusers were themselves seriously harmed by abuse when they were children. For many the journey has been tough from a very young age. After weighing up and praying, we might decide that we are part of God's opportunity for this man to grow in faith and make better choices that protect children, but you can see that we will always need to continue to be wise, alert and vigilant.

Supporting an abuser to a better relationship with God and away from offending is a worthwhile ministry, but we need to learn from mistakes that other churches have made.

Some churches made mistakes when they only focused on the offender and his journey. If we take this on, we must always remain alert to child safety and the ongoing needs of his victims (and other victims), all of whom have been so deeply harmed. It is especially important that we maintain this broader awareness, as offenders themselves are too often inclined to let these matters drop from their own awareness.

Other churches made the mistake of not recognising that this issue will require more than simply looking backwards at what might help each party deal with their past. These churches did not pay enough attention to the present or the future. That led them to being too easily satisfied once an offender had expressed

remorse for the past, and they then left him to coast along, with too little challenge or assistance to address the huge changes that were still required in his life. They did not monitor child safety enough or help him keep engaging with his new direction. Child safety on into the future will require him to do more than just repent of his past and then just remain passive.

This will all work better if we don't expect all the rest of us to respond in the same way or play exactly the same roles around him. Neither should we expect everyone to be able to walk towards an offender with warmth and easy fellowship. We should be grateful for those who can contribute that role, because they will speak to him of mercy and hope and vital human connection, but he needs to be growing in awareness of other truths as well. These include being more aware of how others have been hurt and their value. So, I am very comfortable that a proportion of you will possibly always be wary and vigilant around an offender. That is fine. In fact, we need those of you who will in this way be more alert to situations that might lead to more risk for children. However, if for any reason, his presence would make you feel devastated in an ongoing way, please let me know privately before decisions get made. Also, if you would have real trouble being around this without sliding into thinking and acting as if your role was to be his perpetual punisher week after week, then perhaps let me know that privately as well, and before decisions get made.

For another group of you, your focus may be elsewhere such as the ongoing care of victims or completely unrelated ministries. That will be reminding him that he is not the centre of the world as well as other important truths. As we have seen it is not enough for him to remain passive, thus, while he will need support, he will also need challenge. So one or perhaps two of us can need to focus on helping him drop more blindfolds and see more clearly what he has not wanted to see before. A helpful path will certainly be to encourage him to choose more wisely and walk more out in the light with God each day.

Given we may have different roles, it will be especially important that we do not act as lone rangers in opposition to each other, but that we appreciate the contribution of each other, and under the leadership of the minister and supervisor, keep checking how we mesh together.

We have asked [Name of abuser] that if it works out that he attends here, to be willing to allow all of us just in this group, to be informed that he has this conviction. We have asked this, and he has agreed because it makes it safer for children. It does this by warning any who might get to know him as a fellow worshiper, and who might therefore be more in danger than others in the community of thinking that he therefore has the credibility to be considered safe enough to permit to build a relationship with their grandchildren or take them out on a boating trip. However, asking him to let us all know of his conviction is asking him to take a big risk. Should we pass to others his name or where he lives, that could so easily be passed around and soon put him in more danger of vigilantism. I suggest that in response to his allowing us

all to know, we make two choices. We choose to speak up quickly and loudly to Child Protection and the church if ever we see him build any relationships with any children anywhere or any other behaviour that is of concern. However, in the absence of that, we choose to honour how he will make himself vulnerable here and agree not to gossip to any others who do not attend this small group that has been chosen because it does not have any children and can play a small role in assisting him in his journey to be safer in relation to all children.

It reduces that risk of vigilantism, and you will feel under less pressure to warn others where he lives, if all we tell you is that he lives in another suburb but a couple of us will occasionally visit him and check that he is not next to schools or playgrounds etc. Are you okay with that attempt at balance? We can tell you the offence, but to protect him, we will not tell you his name until this group is well along the path to deciding whether to include him in your small group, or take this on as a ministry.

We will also be asking him to keep making his own contribution to his new path on into the future. We will do this by making it a condition of his attending with us that he continues to see a professional who specializes in this area.

If together we conclude this is where he should attend, he will be able to and indeed be encouraged to contribute and serve in a range of safe ways but he will never be given leadership or up front roles. This is because while it may not be apparent in the short term, giving an offender leadership roles, always in the long term, raises risks for children.

Letting him and his supporters know ahead of time, especially if he had been a priest, that this will be the case and part of our role to protect children, can prevent later pressure for him to be permitted to do some leading.

There are few places in current society where he may come and find kindness, vital human connection and support for better choices into the future. We can play an important role, and warmly include him in a range of things, but we will certainly not be dedicating ourselves to meeting his every need. There are several reasons for that. The first is we will need to be alert to those specific situations where meeting his needs in a particular way, might make things even harder for his past victims or potential victims (that is all other children). A consequence of his choice to offend, is that in any situation now, where his needs compete with those of past or potential victims, his needs will now always need to come second. We will now need to think through each potential activity with child safety in mind. One example is that he may want to go on the church picnic but we will decide that is a higher risk to children, so his needs must come second in that situation. Another example is we must never invite him to a function in a home where children are sleeping as that is also high risk.

The second reason we won't be aiming to meet his every need is that part of what led to this problem in the first place was his choosing to meet his own needs regardless of the awful consequences for others. Part of the growth he needs to make is less absorption in himself and more willingness to see and give more

weight to the needs of others, even if that costs him. He needs to be “walking out in the light more” and therefore “seeing more clearly” the cost to others that he had previously become so good at blocking out.

You could also read the warning at the end of chapter 15.

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- ²⁷ providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/criminal-offences-improve-responses-child-sex-abuse
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- ²⁹ Rachael Denhollander, *ibid.*
- ³⁰ www.britannica.com/topic/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Commission-South-Africa
- ³¹ Tim Hein, *ibid.*, page 6
- ³² everydaypowerblog.com/nelson-mandela-quotes/
- ³³ Jane Dowling, *Child Arise: The Courage to Stand. A Spiritual Handbook for Survivors of Sexual Abuse*, David Lovell Publishing, 2015