ETHICAL ISSUES IN MINISTRY

1. CONFIDENTIALITY

Importance

Confidentiality is highly respected in a pastoral relationship.

Simultaneously, one has to bear in mind certain civil obligations, precisely when there is a danger to a third party from one who may have confided a secret to a pastoral minister.

Therefore, the nature of confidentiality and the pastoral relationship is has to be examined.

Questions: (i) what are the **expectations** on both sides from (a) the one giving and (b) the other receiving pastoral care; (ii) what, if any, are the **limits** to confidentiality; (iii) can confidentiality ever be **absolute**?

Defining the pastoral relationship

Thomas O'Meara: 'Christian ministry is the public activity of the baptised follower of Jesus Christ flowing from the Spirit's charism and an individual personality on behalf of a community to witness to, serve and realize the kingdom of God'. (p.142).

Six Christian characteristics, namely, '1. doing something; 2. for the advent of the kingdom; 3. in public; 4. on behalf of Christian community; 5. which is a gift received in faith, baptism and ordination; which is, 6. an activity with its own limits and identity within a diversity of ministerial actions'. (p. 136)

What constitutes a pastoral relationship is not always clear. Pastoral ministers find themselves in a vague relationship with their people than other professionals are with their clients. For example, teachers, doctors, lawyers and psychiatrists get together with their clients in well-defined settings and for clear reasons. It is a taboo for them to socialize or work side by side with their clients in other institutional or social settings. Consequently, as Gula observes, 'What constitutes a professional relationship with them remain fairly clear' (p. 66).

Gula defines professional pastoral relationship as one in which the minister is:

- Acting as a representative of the Church so that people can draw from his or her special authority and competence to meet a religious need (pastor serving parishioners, spiritual director serving directee, catechist serving students).

Serving in a supervisory role over others (pastor or staff; director or religious education to catechists. (p. 66)

Definitions of confidentiality

A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics, says that confidentiality falls into two major contexts in which verbal communication is thought to be important: (i) the marital relationship, and (ii) the relationship between clients and several of the helping professions such as law, medicine, nursing, social work and ministry.

Peter Helm: 'Confidentiality characterizes one important aspect of a relationship based upon **mutual trust**, enabling one or all parties to disclose to others matters which, if generally revealed, would embarrass or compromise those concerned'. Helm tells us that a confidential relationship is the one in which one or more **secrets** are shared. Willingness to share such secrets to anyone presupposes the existence of a relationship of **mutual respect**, whether personal or professional. (See 'Confidentiality' in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson & David H. Field, Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1995).

Hoover: confidentiality is 'the socially and legally accepted right of any person to the **privacy** of their thoughts, feelings, writings and other personal effects'. (E. A Hoover, 'Confidentiality' *in Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990)

Tom Mason and Elizabeth Whitehead: 'Confidentiality is the most single revered principle in medical ethics that forms the basis of the professional-patient relationship'.[1] In its simplest terms, for them, confidentiality means respecting other peoples' secrets. Complex issues are involved in medical ethics. Mason and Whitehead observe, 'Confidentiality involves the element of **trust** which is required from both parties in both giving honest information and maintaining its **secrecy**'. (Tom Mason & Elizabeth Whitehead, *Thinking Nursing*, Berkshire: McGraw-Hill International, 2003), p. 232)

Hippocrates: 'Whatsoever things I shall see or hear concerning life of men, in my attendance on the sick or even apart there from, which **ought** not to be noised abroad, I will keep silence thereon, counting such things to be as holy secrets'. (in Ralph Slovenko, *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* (Baltmore MD: William & Wilkins, 1980), p. 1988.

Integrated Guidelines for Developing Epidemiologic Profiles: HIV Prevention and Ryan White CARE Act Community Planning: confidentiality is 'the **protection of information** that an individual or institution has disclosed in a relationship of **trust,** with the **expectation** that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the individual's or the institution's understanding of the original disclosure'.

Madelyn L. Isaacs and Carolyn Stone: 'Confidentiality is one of the most critical aspects of any counselling relationship'. (See'Confidentiality with minors: Mental health counsellors' attitudes toward breaching or preserving confidentiality' *Journal of Mental Health Counselling*, 2001, 23, 342-357).

Rich Houser et al: confidentiality in counselling means 'maintaining privacy and not disclosing information to others outside the counselling relationship unless there is approval or consent by the client'. (*Ethical Decision-Making in Counselling*, London: Sage

Publications, 2006, p. 107.

Sissela Bok defines confidentiality as establishing the boundaries protecting shared information which one wants to keep from a third party and the process of guarding those boundaries. (*Secrets*, New York: Vantage Books, 1983, p. 119.

Richard Gula: confidentiality is 'how we exercise good stewardship of the power we have over others who make themselves vulnerable to us by self-disclosure'. *(Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, New York: Paulist Press, 1996, p. 119. Confidentiality is an absolute principle which involves keeping the person's secret at all times, in all situations and forever. The duty of confidentiality is absolute only in matters relating to the sacrament of reconciliation. Gula states that in all other instances confidentiality is binding unless it conflicts with an equal or higher duty. He says:

Before breaking a confidence, we ought to make reasonable efforts to find other ways to disclose the necessary information... If it is not possible and disclosure still has to be made because the well-being of another is seriously at stake, then we ought to explore as many options as possible to making a direct disclosure. But if the disclosure has to be made then, we ought to tell only those who would benefit from the information, and disclose only what they need to know in order to avoid the threat of serious harm. (p. 122)

Special Circumstances: the Seal of Confession

The Catholic Church holds that only information obtained in the sacrament of reconciliation must be treated with absolute confidentiality. The absolute confidentiality of the seal of confession is regulated by canons 983, 984 and 1388. Canon 983.1 states, 'The sacramental seal is inviolable; therefore, it is a crime for a confessor in any way to betray a penitent by word or in any other manner or for any reason. Hence, the seal cannot be broken to save the priest's life, to protect his good name, to refute a false accusation, to save the life of another, to aid the course of justice, or to avert a public calamity'. A priest is not forced by any law to reveal whatever he hears in the confession.

Canon 984 emphasizes this:

1. Even if every danger of revelation is excluded, a confessor is absolutely forbidden to use knowledge acquired from confession when it might harm the penitent.
2. One who is placed in authority can in no way use for external governance knowledge about sins which he has received in confession at any time.

The force of this canon is to forbid the use of any knowledge acquired in the confession to 'establish or to revise administrative policies or procedures, or any way reveal the penitent's identity or sins'. (Gula, p. 124).

(Roman Catholic) Canon law does not say anything about confidentiality in a non-sacramental setting such as spiritual direction, marriage counselling or pastoral counselling.

Some Gaps

Marriage and family counsellors and clinical psychologists have their own set of ethical standards which spell out the professional obligation toward confidential information. Pastoral ministers in these instances have no codified guidance. **Should they?**

However, **legal standards should not be a substitute for ethical standards**. In this situation, a pastoral minister should be morally responsible. Gula asserts, 'Moral considerations also include personal character, lifestyle, virtuous sensibilities, vision and commitments informed by religious beliefs, role obligations and the right use of power' (p. 126). (This will bring us into the importance of self-care in a later session).

Generally, the law realizes a public interest in keeping inviolable the confidentiality of communication between persons in some special relationships, such as lawyer-client, husband-wife or clergy-penitent. Hence, we have a legal aspect of '**privileged communication.**'

In general, the clergy-penitent privilege is called 'religious privilege.' This means that any information given to a pastoral minister by the one looking for sacramental absolution, religious guidance, comfort, or aid cannot be used against these people in court.

However, this privilege caters for clergy only when they serve in a religious capacity and not in some other role, such as a guidance counsellor. Religious women and brothers, religious and lay spiritual directors, catechists and so on are on shaky legal ground when it comes to invoking the religious privilege (see Gula, p. 127).

Canonically, spiritual direction is not acknowledged as an official ministry so civil law does not cover lay spiritual directors under 'religious privilege.

Gula says that many spiritual directors regard 'the confidentiality of spiritual direction as absolutely as the confessional seal, even though these fora are not technically the same. Thus what is ethical and what is legal for spiritual directors can come onto conflict' (p. 128).

Case: *A New Jersey court ruled that a religious woman was a spiritual director for a suspected murderer could not appeal to the protection of religious privilege for she was not authorized by church law with the power to perform such a ministry.* See Ronald P. Stake, 'Professionalism and Confidentiality in the Practice of Spiritual Direction,' in *The Jurist, 43, 1983, 214-232.*

Expectations

Pastoral relationship is regarded as a safe place where one feels secure that his or her privacy is respected. Unlike doctors, lawyers or psychiatrists, pastoral ministers are involved with their parishioners in casual as well as formal ways. Accordingly, pastoral ministers have a wider range of contact with people and thus become privy to more personal information about more people than other professionals do. The information that the pastoral minister possesses, repeatedly creates conflicts for him or her. Gula observes:

> On the one hand, we try to respect the privacy of people. On the other hand, we must

act justly toward the good of the society. If we disclose any confidential information, we risk being tagged a betrayer and damaging the reputation of the ministry as a safe haven for confidential matters. (p. 122)

Pastoral ministers are all asked to keep confidences. Gula adds that 'we should view as confidential information that is communicated to us in private, while we are serving in our professional role as representatives of the church, and when made for the purpose of seeking spiritual or religious advice, aid or comfort'. (p. 120)

In a pastoral relationship, one expects confidentiality to protect one's dignity. Disclosure is made to seek help, and confidentiality 'encourages the full disclosure of all necessary information needed in order to attain professional help without fearing this private information will become public'. (Gula, p. 121).

Questions for discussion

- In what circumstances might confidentiality not be absolute?
- What protective measures might be put in place to aid the (i) the minister, (ii) the one ministered to?
- Is there a need for a Code of Ethics for pastoral ministers? If so, what guidelines might it contain?

CASE STUDIES

You are a pastoral minister. What do you do in the following scenarios?

- Matthew discloses to you that he has been diagnosed recently as being HIV+. He is getting married soon, and has not disclosed this to his fiancée. He doesn't want to tell her until after the wedding.

- Chloe tells you that she is being abused by her father. She pleads with you not to tell her mother as she fears it would break up the family.

- Mark is in hospital and tells you that he is dying of cancer. His wife doesn't know and he doesn't plan to tell her. She asks you to be honest with her about what is wrong with him.

- Lydia's parents are worried about her because she has become withdrawn and depressed. They ask you to speak to her and when you do, she discloses that she had

an abortion last month. The following week her mother asks you how your conversation went and if you have found out what is troubling her.

- Luke comes clean and tells you that he has been stealing from the collection each week as he counts it. He says he won't do it again, promises to return the money, and asks you not to tell anyone. You suggest that he gives up counting the money to avoid the temptation to repeat the offence. Subsequently you find out that he is still on the counting rota.

2. THE USE OF POWER

WHAT IS 'POWER'?

- The ability to do something
- The capacity to affect intended results

HOW DO WE PERCEIVE IT?

'The vision of power as an individual possession dominates our cultural imagination. People either have power or they do not. The athlete, the politician, the police officer has power; most women, the poor and the elderly do not. We tend to see it as a commodity that is held by individuals. As a possession, power is like private property; it is always in short supply. Your increase in power comes at my expense. Competition and defensiveness abound in a world where there is never enough power to go round'. (*The Promise of Partnership: A Model for Collaborative Ministry*, Evelyn E Whitehead and James D Whitehead).

'Power is not always responsible. It is exercised in various ways and with varying degrees of legitimacy. It can take the form of coercion, in which people are forced by extrinsic means to act contrary to their will; authority, in which power is exercised by agencies in some way answerable to those ruled; manipulation, by which people are made to act against their will without realizing it. Only when power is controlled and exercised by legitimate authority can it be called responsible. The sources of power in a community include wealth, property, holding elective or appointive office, reputation, control of information and media, and organizational skill'. (*A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. J. Macquarrie and J. Childress)

SOURCES OF POWER (James and Evelyn Whitehead)

Institutional – being ordained, assigned, commissioned, hired. Our power comes from what the Church ascribes to the particular role we have assumed.

Personal – the significance of competence can clearly be seen in the lack of it. People have to have confidence in their pastoral minister – that s/he is able to meet their religious/spiritual needs. People give more power to those who are good at what they do – incompetence will eventually undermine whatever credibility we have had by virtue of institutional sources of power and authority.

Extra-rational sources – symbolic representation: we bring something more to the ministry than just ourselves. We are representatives of the sacred. We represent a community of faith, a religious tradition, a way of life, even GOD. People talk with us, and may feel accepted/rejected by God. We are perceived to be speaking not just for ourselves. We are deemed to be worthy of trust. The power of representing 'something more' attracts peoples' projections of hope, fear, guilt, joy and anger.

TRUST

The fiduciary responsibility highlights the core ethical demands of the pastoral relationship. There is a need to be sensitive to the inequality of power. To trust and to entrust is to become vulnerable. People give us great power over their lives and risk being exploited. Therefore how we exercise our power is a key moral issue.

We must acknowledge and own the power we have. Professionals are most at risk of unethical behaviour when they minimize or ignore the magnitude of their power. They can violate the boundaries they are morally bound to protect. The greater burden of moral responsibility falls on the one with the greater power.

HOW DO WE USE OUR POWER?

Exploitative and manipulative power	Expressions of domination; disrespectful of the dignity of the person
Competitive power	Presumes relative equality
Nutrient power	Presupposes the inequality of the parties; power enables or empowers

Integrative power	Respects the freedom of others; helps collegial and collaborative ministry

The moral criterion for the right use of power must be one that protects and promotes the dignity of the person made in the image of God. Power is used rightly when it enables the other to become free.

AMBIGUITY OF POWER

Power is ambiguous. It is often a despised or feared reality arousing more suspicion and defensiveness than acceptance. It has many negative images – corruption, coercion, exploitation. This dark side of power is associated with a controlling and dominating style of leadership, wielding the heavy hand of intimidation and oppression. It reduces people for whom and with whom we are to work to people over whom we have control.

Power can also be liberating. It can be the loving influence that releases the goodness in another and allows it to flourish. We need power if we are going to make things happen. Some people give us more power over them than others. Those with more influence due to their role, gender, official appointment, or knowledge have greater power relative to those who do not have such influence.

AUTHORITY – LEGITIMATED POWER

'Authority' is power that is publicly validated and usually institutionally conferred. A person has authority who is acknowledged by the community as its representative. In ministry this comes through ordination, commissioning or credentialing (religious educators, pastoral care ministers, spiritual directors). Having authority gives us the right to be heard, but it also carries the correlative duty to use our power and authority for the good of the community and not for personal gain. We exercise power and authority in a variety of ways. The way we arrange our office; where we place the desk; displaying the trappings of office – books on the shelves, diplomas on the walls. This might reinforce the power gap to enhance superiority and domination.

Questions to consider:

- What is my own understanding of power?
- How do I exercise power in pastoral ministry?
- How is power perceived by the people to whom I minister?
- How is my office arranged, and what might it say about me?(!)

3. SPIRITUAL ABUSE

FILMS

- September Dawn
- The Scarlet Letter

BOOKS

Carolyn Jessop

Type of leadership:

- Absolute authority
- No real accountability of the leadership to the corporate body;
- Hand-picked sub-leaders, based on their demonstration of submissiveness rather than on the basis of their talents and skills;
- May be covetous, materialistic, insecure (even paranoid)

Behaviour towards members:

- Pervasive abuse and misuse of authority in personal dealings with members;
- Abuse, misuse, and inordinate incidence of 'Church discipline'
- Financial exploitation and enslavement of the members;
- Performance-based approval and promotion system of members predicated on 'proven loyalty';
- Members are required to obtain the approval of their leader(s) for decisions regarding personal matters;
- Inducing shame and toxic guilt

Behaviour towards wider world:

- Inordinate attention to maintaining the public "image" of the ministry;
- Isolationism — corporate and individual, especially with respect to exposure to outside ministry sources

Behaviour towards those who leave:

- Members departing without the prior permission and blessing of the leadership leave the group under a cloud of manufactured suspicion, shame, and slander;
- Departing members often suffer from various psychological problems and display the classic symptoms associated with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

4. SEXUALITY AND TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES

Firstly, it is important to distinguish 'sexuality' and 'sex' as related but distinct realities. Sexuality is the more complex reality that includes sex but much more as well. One source suggests the following definition:

> Sexuality refers to a fundamental component of personality in and through which we, as male and female, experience our relatedness to self, others, the world, and even God. Sex refers either to the biological aspects of being male or female (i.e. a synonym for one's gender) or to the expression of sexuality, which have physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, particularly genital actions resulting in sexual intercourse and/or orgasm.[2]

Sexuality in the pastoral relationship can be a promise, in that it can be a resource for ministry, because our sexuality is a relational power supplying energy for creativity, responsiveness, passion and commitment. It is also a means for being present to those who are in pain as well as allowing passionate commitment in setting relationships right. 'God gives us our sexuality to draw us out of ourselves and into relationship with others. In this sense, sexuality is linked to spirituality'.[3]

Sexuality can also be a peril, becoming an instrument of abuse and exploitation. Peter Rutter presents the perils of sexuality as 'sex in the forbidden zone', defined as any sexual contact that occurs within professional relationships of trust.[4] He estimates that 96% of forbidden-zone sex occurs between a man in power and a woman under his care, and that women in power exploiting men (or men and women engaging in homosexual exploitation) is a very small percentage of forbidden-zone sex. There is the practical issue as well: this is not just about what we do, but what we are understood to have done. How does the person ministered to receive our words and understand our actions? For example, an individual may project onto the minister their unmet needs or unresolved conflicts (transference), or the minister may project their own needs onto the one needing help (counter transference). This can cause problems in interpreting what is said and what is heard. What constitutes 'sexual misconduct'? There is a temptation to consider this solely in terms of child abuse. However, it is one of the objectives of this thesis to discuss the issue in its broadest sense, so that a more adequate understanding might emerge.

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[2] National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Human Sexuality: A Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning*, (Washington, USCCB, 1991), p. 9.

[3] R. M. Gula, *Ethics in Pastoral Ministry*, (New York, Paulist Press, 1996), p. 93.

[4] P. Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone* (New York, Ballantine Fawcett, 1989).

Categories of misconduct

Richard Gula provides a useful categorisation under which we might consider the problem of 'misconduct'. Firstly, he defines 'sexual abuse' which 'refers to using persons who lack the ability or will to protect themselves (a child, the elderly, or a physically or emotionally disabled adult) for sexual stimulation by the one responsible for their care'.[5] He gives examples of such abuse – incest, paedophilia, rape, and molestation. It is within this category that there is a group of activities, involving sexual behaviours, activities or events that are both abusive and prohibited by the law of the country. Secondly, he defines 'sexual exploitation' as 'fundamentally a betrayal of trust in the professional relationship by using one's personal, professional, or physical power to develop a romantic relationship with someone under one's care or to use that person for one's own sexual stimulation or satisfaction'.[6] This category includes acts such as touching, fondling, intercourse, dating, or even verbal suggestions for sexual involvement. Gula's third category is that of 'sexual harassment', defined as 'using one's power to coerce another into unwanted sexual relations or to exchange sex for some other favour'.[7] It may also involve creating an intimidating working environment through behaviour such as jokes, sexual innuendo, undesired physical contact, inappropriate comments about clothing or appearance, or unwelcome visual contact. Gula also considers the need to distinguish good, confusing, or bad touch in pastoral ministry, where the perception of the recipient might be more determinative than the intention of the one giving the touch.[8]

Effects of misconduct

Why is sexual misconduct by clergy such an issue? Clergy sexual misconduct is often referred to as a 'scandal' in the Church. Though the canons in Book VI of the Code of Canon Law refer eleven times to 'scandal'[9], it is never actually defined.

The meaning is spelled out in the *Catechism* which says that:

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[5] Gula, 1996, p. 94.

[6] Gula, 1996, p. 95.

[7] Gula, 1996, p. 95.

[8] Len Sperry suggests a further definition between 'sexually abusive', which he defines as 'a more generic term referring to any instance of sexual violation' (an example being the priest-paedophile), where as 'sexually abusing' 'refers to a sexual violation that is perpetrated in the context of the professional relationship in which the violation of a sacred trust occurs' (an example being a vulnerable adolescent parishioner). He also mentions the 'sexually dominating' minister who exhibit 'a recurring pattern of exerting significant control – emotional and mental as well as sexual – over another person, often vulnerable female parishioners. See 'The Sexually Abusing Minister', *Human Development*, 20/4, 1999, 13-19, at 14, 16.

[9] Canons 1318, 1328/2, 1339/2, 1341, 1344/2, 1347/2, 1352/2, 1357/2, 1364/2, 1394/1, and 1395/1. There are many other references in the Code of Canon Law to the need to avoid *scandalum*, both explicitly and implicitly. Clergy, for example, are not to engage in activities 'unbecoming to their state (canon 285/1) and must safeguard their reputation for the sake of their ministry in the Church (canon 274/1).

> Scandal is an attitude or behaviour which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbour's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offence if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offence.[10]

Furthermore, 'it takes on a particular gravity by reason of those who cause it...[it] is grave when given by those who by nature or office are obliged to teach and educate others'.[11] Finally, 'anyone who uses the power at his disposal in such a way that it leads others to do wrong becomes guilty of scandal and responsible for the evil that he has directly or indirectly encouraged'.[12] Thus 'scandal' is something that diverts people from the right path, and it is because of this possibility that canon law emphasises the need to avoid and repair it.

From the time of the earliest (and struggling) Christian communities there was a particular concern about what was seen as the ultimate scandal, that of leaders misrepresenting the gospel[13] and, at the same time, of putting people off the gospel unnecessarily.[14] We can see, therefore that misconduct by a priest is perceived as particularly disturbing in view of his role and obligations outlined in the Code, and what is expected of him.[15]

Karen Lebacqz suggests that 'because clergy represent God, Christ, and the church, to be violated by a member of the cloth is to be violated by God, Christ and church...In short, to be in a representative position means that one's actions have symbolic import far beyond one's personal intentions'.[16] The trust of a vulnerable parishioner can be destroyed by a priest crossing the boundary of pastoral relationship to sexual intimacy because he is in a professional role,[17] and misconduct is an abuse of power over the vulnerability of those seeking pastoral service. It may also be seen as an expression of a defective moral character, in that it is not only the wrong kind of behaviour and behaviour from *the wrong kind of person.* A recent publication sums up the issue succinctly:

> The impact on Catholic victims is unique and, in the opinion of some experts, particularly devastating precisely because the abuser is a priest. Catholic victims, brought up in a church dominated by clerics, believe the teachings that priests take the place of Christ. In the minds and emotions of the victims the priest is much more than

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[10] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), paragraph 2284. (Future references are abbreviated to *CCC.*

[11] *CCC*, paragraph 2285

[12] *CCC*, paragraph 2287

[13] Cf. St Paul who advocated that elders persisting in sin should be publicly rebuked (1 Tim 5:20), and that forgiveness must follow repentance (Luke 17:3).

[14] Cf. 1 Cor 8:9; 1 Cor 10:32; Matt 17:24-27.

[15] Cf. the canons mentioned in chapter 4, but also canon 762 (priest as preacher), canon 768 (as a teacher of Christian doctrine), canon 776 (being responsible for catechetical formation). A priest also has responsibility for the care of souls as a spiritual advisor (cf. canon 324 §2), is a judge and healer of souls (canon 978), and is to provide pastoral care in different ways (cf. canons 843, 1063).

[16] K. Lebacqz and R. G. Barton, *Sex in the Parish* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p.105.

[17] This can be said to be just as true in the very few reported cases of religious sisters abusing minors. See M. L. Hidalgo, *Sexual Abuse and the Culture of Catholicism: How Priests and Nuns Become Perpetrators* (New York, Haworth Press, 2007), chapter 1.

> a pastor or minister. He is a very special father figure and the earthly representative of God himself. Many victims experience a kind of toxic transference, and experience in their sexual abuse a form of spiritual death.[18]

The profound effects of such a violation of trust and 'spiritual' abused should not be under-estimated.[19]

Though there may be children and adults who appear to be able to recover more quickly than others, it is clear that many victims have suffered serious consequences as a result of the abuse of others. Victims of sexual assault or abuse often display a higher incidence of psychological problems and difficulties in social and interpersonal functioning. They can have difficulties in trusting others and have damaged self-esteem, as well as feelings of powerlessness and alienation from themselves and others. The story of one such victim was reported in *The Tablet* in 2002. Peter Saunders had been molested from the age of 8, and went on to suffer depression, a nervous breakdown, and feelings of guilt, shame and a loss of self-worth.[20] Such psychic damage is often reported as a consequence of abuse; victims speak of being robbed of their childhood or their innocence. Speaking of abuse in its widest sense (physical and emotional, rather than overtly sexually), Massie and Szajnberg note that victims sometimes internalise severe maltreatment so that 'it endures in the psyche as an inchoate sadness, a sense of life unfulfilled long after the abuse has ceased'.[21]

Survivors of sexual abuse often face interpersonal difficulties relating to their own children.[22] Noack and Baraitser's experiences of mothers who have been abused in childhood note that mothers fear that their own abuse will somehow contaminate the next generation: 'These comments are, in part, understood as a desperate, albeit unconscious, plea for help in understanding their aggressive, violent and neglectful impulses towards their own children, as well as an expression of their sense of their 'toxicity' to others'.[23] Feelings of despair, anger, rage, and extreme anxiety were common in those who had been abused, together with a fear that the same might happen to their own child. As these therapists note, 'it is now well

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[18] T. P. Doyle, A.W.R, Sipe, and P. J. Wall, *Sex, Priests and Secret Codes: The Catholic Church's 2000-Year Paper Trail of Sexual Abuse* (Los Angeles, Volt Press, 2006), p. 243.

[19] See, for example, some of the stories related in *Broken Trust: Stories of Pain, Hope and Healing from Clerical Abuse Survivors and Abusers*, by P. Fleming, S. Lauber-Fleming and M. T. Matousek (New York, Crossroad, 2007).

[20] E. Curti, 'A victim's story', *The Tablet*, 7 December 2002, 10-11.

[21] H. Massie and N. Szajnberg, 'My life is a longing: Child abuse and its adult sequelae', *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 87/2, 2006, 471-496, at 471.

[22] At this stage it is important to note that not all of those sexually abused as children go on to become abusers themselves. In his study of sex-offending and non-offending Catholic priests, McGlone found that 19% of non-offending priests had reported having been abused in their childhood but did not go on to become offenders themselves – according to their self-report. 'Sexually Offending and Non-Offending Roman Catholic Priests: Characterisation and Analysis', PhD dissertation, (San Diego, California School of Professional Psychology, 2001), p. 118.

[23] A. Noack and L. Baraitser, 'Groupwork with mothers who have been sexually abused in childhood', *British Journal of Psychotherapy*, 20/3, 2004, 345-359, at 350.

established that childhood sexual abuse can lead to depression, suicidality, self-harm, eating disorders, substance abuse and dissociative symptom'.[24]

SOME FURTHER THOUGHTS

What makes sexual abuse wrong in the context of a pastoral relationship?

- It is an expression of a defective moral character. Not the wrong kind of behaviour, but behaviour from the wrong kind of person.
- It violates the trust invested in the pastoral minister's professional role.
- It is an abuse of power over the vulnerability of those seeking pastoral service.

Watch out for....

- Transference – projection of the client's issues on to you
- Counter-transference – where your own unmet needs are projected on to the other
- Dual relationships which blur the boundaries.

Prevention strategies

- Self-knowledge;
- Self-care
- Self-disclosure

SUGGESTED ESSAY TITLES

1. 'Neglect involves a failure to assist or to help someone to thrive spiritually' (Lebacqz). Discuss the view that 'neglect' looms large as an ethical failure for ministers.

2. What are the key themes, principles and concerns that you believe should be included in any professional code of ethics?

3. Discuss the view that regular appraisal of pastoral ministers would ensure 'ministry with integrity'.

4. 'Does the hierarchical nature of the Church encourage the abuse of power in pastoral ministry?

[24] Noack and Bairitser, 345.

5. 'The way in which power is exercised in a pastoral relationship is a serious ethical issue'. Critically evaluate this statement.

6. Discuss the view that pastoral ministers are also vulnerable individuals.

7. What safeguards can be put in place to safeguard vulnerable people (including pastoral ministers)?

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