

Breaking the Wall of Silence
*Part 3; Protestant pastors drop the ball
in handling of clergy sexual abuse*

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In the past fifteen years more than \$1,000,000,000 (1 billion) has been paid out in court and attorney fees and victim/survivor awards by United States Bishops to deal with the clergy sexual abuse convictions (<http://biblia.com/christianity/clergy.htm#Cover>) and this weekend the Sydney Morning Herald reported that lawyers for more than 500 people who say they were sexually abused by members of the Catholic clergy have settled their claims against the Los Angeles Diocese for \$760 million. It is said to be the largest payout to date since the scandals broke in early 2002. Many California dioceses have been particularly affected by suits from victims of clergy sexual abuse because of a 2002 California law which paved the way for victims to file suit against the church, with a one year window, regardless of the statute of limitations. The Los Angeles Times reported that some of those cases date back as far as the 1940s.

But real figures for clergy sexual abuse in the Protestant church have been a bit more difficult to come by and are sketchier because Protestant churches, as opposed to their Catholic counterpart, tend to be less centralized and more independent, making reporting of sexual abuse by members of the clergy more difficult (Associated Press June 15). The AP further reported that the three companies that insure the majority of Protestant churches in America (Church Mutual Insurance Co., Guide One Insurance Co., and Brotherhood Mutual Insurance Co.) say they typically receive upward of 260 reports each year of young people under 18 being sexually abused by clergy, church staff, volunteers or congregation members (According to the aforementioned AP report, each company submitted statistics quantifying the number of credible accusations against clergy but did not supply supporting documents). In total, the three insurance companies insure 165,495 centers of worship for liability against child sex abuse and other sexual misconduct.

According to the Associations of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, there are about 224,000 Protestant churches in the United States. But these numbers do not include most historically black denominations and some other religious groups which make up several thousand more denominations, making the number of victims in the black church even more difficult to quantify.

In 2005, 52 year old Ruben Thankful Thompson of Waverly, Florida was arrested for five counts of incest. The charges stem from revelations made by Thompson's 32 year old daughter who told police that she had been molested by her father since she was age 17. According to lake Wales police detective Lynette Townsel, the then thirty two year old said she kept the secret of the abuse for 15 years because she was fearful, ashamed and

did not believe that anyone would take her word over that of her father. Thompson, founder and pastor of Real People Church of God In Christ, was charged with five counts of incest for allegedly fathering his own grandchildren with his daughter.

Stephanie Marshall, church member, was quoted in the report as saying “It was rumored” “But I always said I knew it wasn’t my pastor. My pastor could never do this”. Marshall said when she found out all she could do was tears because “... this hurt me to my heart”. Marshall described the 52 year old black minister as a father figure to both she and her family which is the reason she explained why she defended him when he was accused in the past of molesting his daughter.

(http://jasmynecannick.typepad.com/jasmynecannickcom/2005/12black_minister_.html)

In May, Ft Worth pastor Sherman C. Gee Allen of the Shiloh Institutional Church of God in Christ was suspended by the national body of the Church of God in Christ. Allen was originally indicted on sexual assault charges in 1983 after a 21 year old woman accused him of drugging, then sodomizing and raping her with a club. According to the Dallas Morning News, additional allegations have been made against Allen. These allegations include those made by Davina Kelly, a former member of Shiloh.

Kelly said Allen used Scripture such as “spare the rod, spoil the child” and “touch not my anointing and do my prophet no harm” to control and punish her. Kelly told the Dallas Morning News that Allen explained to her that the paddling was to teach her obedience. Kelly first became acquainted with the charismatic Allen after seeing the changed life of a friend but soon found that Allen was very different from the character he displayed to the rest of the world. Kelly said that by their third meeting in 2001 he was asking her to grab her ankles and take a paddling and by 2005 her punishments escalated from paddling to the use of sex and physical threats of violence to both she and her minor child in an effort to manipulate and control her.

Allen was also a protégé of Rev. Terry Hornbuckle, who was sentenced last September for drugging and raping two women who were members of his Ft. Worth mega church. Hornbuckle had many supporters despite his very public displays of reckless and lawless behavior which included not only adultery and sexual assault but also illicit methamphetamine drug use. The Dallas Observer reported that the Rev.’s armor bearers were also present at the trial along with Hornbuckle’s wife and girlfriend who was reported to sit in the back row of the courtroom in support of the embattled Hornbuckle. He also received support from former Dallas Cowboys Dione Sanders and Emmitt Smith and from his mentor T. D. Jakes of the famed Potter’s House in Dallas and while these very public trials highlight the tragedy of clergy sexual abuse. The fact is that clergy sexual abuse, as is sexual abuse/assault outside of the church, is very rarely reported leaving countless victims and the potential for countless more without help, hope, healing or justice.

According to the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence in Seattle, Washington, there are two categories of clergy sexual abusers (predators and wanderers) and these abusers tend to have little sense of the damage their behavior causes, have little

impulse control, are often charismatic and secretive, confusing sex with affection. And yet, the black church, despite the severity of this modern day plague on its people remains silent with respect to a definitive plan toward working to end clergy sexual abuse.

This was confirmed in a recent conversation with Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, Director of Faith Trust Institute. Fortune pointed out that much work has been done with various denominations toward empowering survivors and strengthening the faith response to the all too prevalent problem of clergy sexual abuse. Faith Trust Institute's National Declaration of Religious and Spiritual Leaders shows that more than 40 national religious leaders have signed a pledge indicating their acknowledgment of the severity of the problem of sexual abuse and their commitment to eradicate it. But, Fortune acknowledged, little has been accomplished across the religious isle when it comes to the response of the black church toward taking an active role in the eradication of clergy sexual abuse.

The Boston Herald also reports that allegations of clergy sexual abuse are vastly underreported in the black community. The report indicated that black victims of clergy sexual abuse are too terrified to come forward because they fear being blamed and banned from their church which is often more like a close-knit family.

In his interview with Boston Herald, National Director of the Chicago-based Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, David Clohessy said "If you're a young African-American kid brought up in a family or neighborhood that has a considerable fear and skepticism toward the police-you're not apt to speak up" Clohessy went on to discuss the practical implications for some families such as those who may be dependent on the church to help them with every day needs such as food and recalled a case where a black sexual abuse victim shared that he thought if he told his family might literally go hungry.

Clohessy said another reason minorities come forward with allegations less is that it is harder for them to grasp the concept that they will be not only believed but supported and not blamed. Clohessy told Boston Herald "While it's very tough for anyone to speak up, if you are African American or Hispanic or Vietnamese, ministers are often held in minority cultures in even higher esteem". The report by Boston Herald further points out that less than 10 percent of sexual abuse victims in black, non-Catholic churches nationwide have gone to the authorities.

What can churches do to stop clergy sexual abuse?

- **A ministerial code of ethics.** Doctors, lawyers and counselors have it. And so do most ministers, but not most Baptists, although the Baptist General Convention of Texas Christian Life Commission worked with a clergy ethics committee to develop a "covenant of trust" into which ministers and congregations could enter. Without the ability to withdraw ordination, participation is voluntary and enforcement impossible. But it's a start.

- **Seminary training.** Condition Baptist ministers early to avoid moral compromise.
- **Church-approved policies.** What to do with an accusation? Who does an investigation? What about a leave of absence for the accused? How do you treat an accuser? Unless it's in writing, a congregation will resort to self-protection—and have little legal protection. The Faith Trust Institute of Seattle, founded by abuse pioneer Marie Fortune, has resources.
- **Outside help.** Churches need an independent review panel to receive accusations and oversee investigations—or at least an outside consultant to lend objectivity. This is not
- **Reporting abuse.** It's the law. Church leaders have to tell law-enforcement officials when they learn of sex abuse. But they don't have to tell fellow church members—and often they don't. Usually the reason cited is a need for confidentiality. But that only benefits the accused and forces the victim to shoulder the burden alone, advocates and counselors say.

Congregations must encourage victims to talk, counselors say, whether to expose abusers or simply to heal. “Far too often, we see exactly the opposite—victims who attempt to speak up are treated with hostility by church and denominational leaders, and also by congregants,” Brown said. “Clergy-abuse victims can readily see that climate of hostility.”

- **Abuser database.** The public is used to criminal predator lists in secular world. But critics say they are inappropriate and unsavory for churches and denominations, not to mention a legal liability issue. In a realm where guilt is difficult to prove, and innocence is sometimes harder, what level of certainty is sufficient? Do you list only the convicted? Or do you include the indicted, the accused and those who confess or settle out of court? (Breaking the cycle; *How can churches escape the trap of recycling sex abusers*: Greg Warner; Associated Baptist Press)

http://stopbaptistpredators.org/article07/allegations_often_untold.html