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Ministering to Survivors of Sexual Trauma

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ABSTRACT:

To what extent do ministers-in-training feel equipped to serve survivors of sexual trauma? Considering sexual trauma is a sensitive and complicated topic, education is key to understanding sexual violence and the ramifications on survivors- spiritually, mentally, and physically. To understand the problem of sexual violence, we must look at the psychological theory of congruence to understand victimization. We must look at how an incarnational view of theology frames the importance of physical healing, given the significance of Christ taking on flesh and living among us. Then we can develop an educational program assisting those working with survivors of sexual violence.

Ministering to Survivors of Sexual Trauma

by Leah Wakefield

DESCRIPTION

Sexual violence can be found in various aspects of life- from the workplace, to church, to home, on the street, and almost anywhere else. The Catholic Church is, first and foremost, a church made up of the people for the people. Ministering to all people is vital to the members feeling accepted and welcomed. As part of this ministry, survivors of sexual assault and violence need to feel their individual churches (and the Catholic Church as a whole) is a safe place that can help foster healing. This begs the question: to what extent do ministers-in-training at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary feel equipped to serve survivors of sexual trauma? Considering sexual trauma is such a sensitive and complicated topic, ministers must be properly educated to understand the complexities of sexual violence and the ramifications it has on the survivor as a whole- spiritually, mentally, and physically. In order to better understand the problem of sexual violence, we must look at the psychological theory of congruence which attempts to understand victimization. We must also look at how an incarnational view of theology frames the importance of physical healing, given the significance

of Christ taking on flesh and living among us. Then we can outline a proposal for an educational program which will help with ministerial formation and pastoral care for those working with survivors of sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a very prominent problem today. Numbers vary across demographics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and more, but overall, most statistics say one in five women will be raped in their lifetime.¹ Additionally, one out of three women in the United States will experience some kind of sexual violence in their lifetime.² While this paper will not focus on the experience of male survivors of sexual violence, evidence suggest violence against males does happen and is necessary to discuss, but it will be beyond the scope of research for this presentation. While 20% of women may be raped in their lifetime, these numbers are even higher on college campuses and may not even fully capture the epidemic of sexual assaults, as up to 63% of assaults are not reported to police.³ One study has found that up to one in four women on a college campus will be raped during their time at college and nearly two thirds of students experience sexual harassment while in college.⁴ While prominent among college-age students, sexual assaults happen at a higher rate among college-aged (18-24 years old) adults who are not in school. These adults are up to 20% more likely to experience rape or sexual assaults than their peers who are in college.⁵ Even fewer college-aged women who experience sexual assault report the crime to police; one survey found only 32% of college-aged women not in college report their assault, and even fewer students (20%) report.⁶ A significant number of women, especially young adults, experience sexual violence, yet very few report. These survivors need resources besides legal action to help themselves heal. One of these sources that offers effective and meaningful healing should be their faith and their church.

1 "Get Statistics," National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), accessed 5 October 2019, <https://www.nsvrc.org/node/4737>.

2 NSVRC.

3 NSVRC.

4 NSVRC.

5 "Campus Sexual Violence: Statistics," Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), accessed 5 October 2019, <https://www.rainn.org/statistics/campus-sexual-violence>.

6 "Campus" RAINN.



DOORWAY TO THE SOUL

by Katryna Bertucci

In order to establish a baseline for how prepared ministry students at Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary feel, I interviewed five students in the Master of Divinity and Master of Arts and Ministry degrees in various parts of their program.⁷ I asked three questions:

1. On a scale from 1-5 with 5 being “very well equipped” how equipped do you feel to serve survivors of sexual trauma?
2. On a scale from 1-5 with 5 being “very much” how much did the curriculum at Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary (SOT) contribute to your readiness?
3. On a scale from 1-5 with 5 being “very important” how important is your ability to serve survivors of sexual trauma?

THE RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Questions	Very				Not at all	Average
	5	4	3	2	1	
How equipped do you feel to serve survivors of sexual trauma?	0%	20%	20%	60%	0%	2.6
How much did the curriculum at the SOT contribute to your readiness?	0%	0%	0%	40%	60%	1.4
How important is your ability to serve survivors of sexual trauma?	80%	20%	0%	0%	0%	4.8

Responder one: **2, 1, 5** Responder two: **2, 2, 5** Responder three: **2, 1, 4**
 Responder four: **3, 1, 5** Responder five: **4, 2, 5**

These results reveal ministry students from Saint John’s School of Theology and Seminary do not feel equipped to serve survivors of sexual trauma. Only two (40%) of those surveyed felt their ability to minister to survivors of sexual trauma was average (3) or better. Of those, neither felt the curriculum at Saint John’s significantly contributed to their readiness to minister to survivors of sexual trauma. All five of those surveyed put a high importance on being able to effectively minister to this demographic.

⁷ While five people is a relatively small sample size, it still lends insights into what ministers at Saint John’s are feeling.

Spiritual healing in the wake of sexual violence is as important as physical and mental healing. Ministers should not (and cannot) replace licensed and trained therapists in the healing process, but they can be a strong supporter to help survivors use their faith to heal. Just as ministers may not have the psychological training therapists do, therapists may not have the pastoral training ministers do. The line between the job of the minister and therapist can become blurred when working with trauma. Therapists incorporate their vast knowledge of mental and physical health into regularly scheduled talk-therapy sessions and help restore the survivor's relationship with others. Ministers, on the other hand, can more readily incorporate pastoral care principles to help restore the survivor's faith and relationship with God in addition to their relationship with others. The ministry of care is a critical portion of all types of ministry, especially when ministering to survivors of trauma, and

[t]he tradition of care derives from the biblical image of 'shepherd' and refers to the concern for persons in trouble or distress. The ministry of care, or pastoral care, has traditionally included four aspects: healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling. The practices take place with persons, groups, and communities; care at its best is rooted in and facilitated by community, even when it is practiced one-on-one. Healing generally refers to helping a person, group or community 'overcome some impairment by restoring' them to 'wholeness' and 'leading them' to advance beyond a previous condition.⁸

This is the biggest difference between ministers and therapists: ministers have a distinct call to shepherding and are trained to help people (re)build their relationship with God; this is outside the scope of a therapist's training. I believe both are necessary for some survivors to find holistic healing because of the difference in foci of each specialty.

As stated earlier, this paper does not look at the statistics or experiences of male survivors, nor does it address the current sexual abuse epidemic within

⁸ Kathleen Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press), 2010, 79-80.



THE CORE OF OUR BEING

by Katryna Bertucci

the Catholic Church. Rather, it looks at the experiences of ministry students at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary to evaluate what need there is to enable ministers to feel better able to serve survivors of sexual assault.

I also spoke with a few survivors themselves to obtain both perspectives on how ministers are serving survivors of sexual trauma. The interviews were overall disheartening tales of vulnerable women taking their brokenness to the church and often being met with judgement or not experiencing the compassion they expected. I asked what type of counseling they sought- church or secular- and why, and if they did disclose to a member of the church, what their experience was like. Here are two of the stories:

When asked why they did not seek counseling from their church community, answers ranged but included reasons such as a fear of not being believed, a sense of embarrassment, guilt and shame, fear of being blamed or having their experience viewed as sinful pre-marital sex and not as an act of violence. Others felt they had no one in the church with whom they were comfortable talking to about their experience. One woman attempted to seek guidance from a priest, and when she disclosed about the violence she experienced, the priest recommended she seek counseling from a therapist, as he did not feel qualified to effectively minister to her. When asked about her reaction to this priest's response, the young woman said she partially felt relieved because she was concerned she would be blamed for putting herself in an unsafe situation; however, she also said it made it more difficult for her to seek solace in the church and her faith because she now saw the rape as something so outside her religion and faith that she saw it as something about which she could not even pray.

Another woman said she was concerned about talking with her priest because of his wandering eyes. This same woman also had both positive and negative experiences when holding her trauma experience in tension with religion. When she told a select few lay religious persons in her community about her experience, they were overwhelmingly supportive. However, she ended up leaving this community. Leaving left her retraumatized and made her feel less comfortable seeking out support from another community - her new church. Eventually, when she felt the need to seek support again, she opted for a therapist with the same religious denomination instead of seeking support

from within her church, in part because she felt uncomfortable talking with her priest, but also because she was not sure to whom she could speak about sexual trauma within her church.

From the survey responses of ministers, we see ministers' lack of readiness to serve survivors of sexual trauma; the personal stories from survivors about their disheartening encounters with ministers reiterate this lack of formation. Therefore, ministers need more formation before serving survivors of sexual trauma, and the Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary has a special call to ensure their ministers are ready and feel confident in their ability to serve this group, which likely includes educating the ministers in trauma work, including how and why victimization may happen.

THE CONGRUENCE THEORY

Before moving further, we will examine the problem of sexual violence through a psychological theory. While many theories attempting to understand sexual violence exist, I will look at one in particular: the congruence theory. Due to limitations of other theories, Drs. David Finkelhor and Nancy L. Asdigian established a new framework to understand victimization. David Finkelhor works at the University of New Hampshire as the Director of the Crimes against Children Research Center, co-directs the Family Research Laboratory, and is a professor of sociology. Nancy Asdigian works with the University of Colorado in the Department of Community and Behavioral Health. Together, they developed a new theory in 1996 that addresses risk factors for youth victims that modifies and expands the previously accepted theory around victimization. Their congruence theory pays more attention to "risk-increasing potential of individual characteristics and attributes" than other theories.⁹ The congruence theory aims to address the complexities ignored by a previous theory by addressing three aspects of victimization: 1) target vulnerability, 2) target gratifiability, and 3) target antagonism.¹⁰ This theory supports much of other theories, but it expands upon them to include more variables. The congruence theory proposes a

9 D. Finkelhor & N.L. Asdigian, "Risk Factors for Youth Victimization: Beyond a Lifestyles/Routine Activities Theory Approach," *Violence and Victims*, 11(1), 1996, 6. <http://www.unh.edu/ccrc/pdf/CV13.pdf>

10 Finkelhor & Asdigian, "Risk Factors," 6.



LIFE RUNNING THROUGH OUR VEINS

by Katryna Bertucci

foundational understanding of violence in a way that applies to male-female sexual violence in young adults. Learning this theory allows ministers to obtain a deeper understanding of *why* sexual violence may occur; with a better understanding of the why, ministers can begin to serve sexual violence survivors in a more effective manner.

The first facet of the congruence theory is target vulnerability. The notion of target vulnerability addresses how, for several reasons, one may be more susceptible to violence, becoming an easier target for the offender. Such factors may include small physical size, weakness, disability status, or emotional deprivation. Emotional deprivation can allow for easy manipulation or coercion. In the general instance of youth violence, this offers one explanation for why children are often victims. More specifically within the context of sexual violence within the framework of this paper, males may target females because of a perceived inability to resist the man's advances due to intoxication, a previous sexual relationship, smaller stature, etc.

Target gratifiability, the second component of the congruence theory, refers to how offenders may be more likely to choose victims who "are some quality, possession, skill, or attribute that an offender wants to obtain, use, have access to, or manipulate."¹¹ An offender may target someone who has valuable possessions. Within the context of sexual assault, women are targeted because of their sex.

The third and final category, target antagonism, states "some characteristics increase risk by being qualities, possessions, skills, or attributes" that arouse negative emotions, such as jealousy or anger, in the offender.¹² An example is an effeminate or gay man being the target of a hate crime. Within the framework of male/female sexual assault, this may look more like a hatred for women in general or a specific characteristic of women- race, the way they dress, treat others, etc.

While the target congruence theory focuses on youth victimization by (primarily) adults, many of the characteristics of this type of violence are similar to male-female sexual violence. Through the three categories that increase risk,

11 Finkelhor & Asdigian, "Risk Factors," 6.

12 Finkelhor & Asdigian, "Risk Factors," 6.

the emphasis is given not to the act of violence itself but instead focuses on exerting power. In target vulnerability, offenders intentionally target victims who are the easiest to control through physical strength or mental coercion. In target gratifiability, offenders target victims who make the offender feel the most satisfied by their actions by obtaining, accessing, or manipulating a specific characteristic. In target antagonism, the offender chooses the victim based on qualities that upset the offender, and through violence, express these negative feelings. In each case, the offender is using the victim to control them and, in some way, please themselves emotionally, mentally, and/or physically. Therefore, male-female sexual violence has nothing to do with the act of sex itself and more to do with the male's ability to control and victimize the female.

THE CONGRUENCE THEORY IN MINISTRY

The target congruence theory applies to the pastoral problem of a lack of support for sexual violence survivors because it offers a foundation for understanding some of the reasons *why* sexual violence happens. Through understanding *why*, ministers can begin to understand how to respond. One way in which an increased understanding of the motivations of offenders helps ministers respond effectively is beginning to understand the complexities of victimology and understanding sexual violence not as a problem of sex but of power and control. Understanding sexual violence as a problem of control and power puts the blame not on the victim but on the offender because of the offender's need to abuse their current power or gain more power over their victims. Understanding sexual violence in this way may allow ministers to better remove the shame associated with sexual violence because the victim is not to blame.

The three characteristics of the target congruence theory can lead ministers to several new insights surrounding how to serve those who have experienced sexual violence. First, target vulnerability can allow ministers to gain some insight into *why* a specific person may have been targeted. Once ministers realize survivors of sexual violence are targeted not because of something they did but rather a set of environmental factors beyond their control, ministers can work to help remove some of the blame and guilt associated with experiencing sexual violence. Secondly, target gratifiability gives ministers the insight that survivors were targeted out of the offender's

need for power and control. Understanding people are targeted because of innate characteristics or lifestyle, ministers can respond to survivors in a way that may alleviate some of their guilt, just as understanding the notion of target vulnerability can. Additionally, knowing that an offender commits acts of violence in order to gain a sense of gratification reinforces the lack of culpability on the part of the survivor. The element of gratification highlights how sexual violence is not about sex (a sin in the eyes of the Church) but about *power*. Finally, target antagonism teaches ministers that survivors are targeted because of the anger of the offender; not the survivor's own actions. Understanding the anger that can motivate some instances of violence helps ministers serve survivors because it encourages the ministers to respond in a way that counters that anger.

One problem with ministry around sexual assault is the general misunderstanding of sexual trauma. In secular society, advocacy groups are making gains in raising awareness and opening the dialogue around these problems, but the same cannot be said (or at least to the same extent) in the Church. Possible pastoral responses must be shaped by these insights as provided by the convergence theory in order to help alleviate guilt, shame, and anger survivors may experience after enduring sexual violence. The realization that sexual violence is less about sex and more about power encourages pastoral responses to focus on the importance of education not only about sexual violence and why it may occur but also about how to respond to survivors.

Sexual violence is increasingly becoming a problem in secular society at an alarming rate. When the Church is an institution made up of people from the world, it is therefore a problem within the Church community. The question of why sexual violence happens is very difficult to answer, but the convergence theory provides insight into *why* it happens: target vulnerability, gratifiability, and antagonism. Knowing *why* it happens forms the type of ministerial response: one that counters these influences and strives to alleviate some of the guilt and shame survivors experience. Relieving some of the shame around sexual violence may make it easier for victim-survivors to seek support. If the Church and ministers have a better understanding of the causes of sexual violence and how offenders choose their victims, it may make them better able

to assist in relieving some of the self-blame and guilt that survivors experience; educating ministers is critical in developing effective pastoral responses.

THE INCARNATION

After examining a psychological theory that offers a deeper understanding of sexual violence and some insights into pastoral responses, I will use this section to examine the theological concept of the incarnation as presented by Ronald Rolheiser in his book, *The Holy Longing: A Search for a Christian Spirituality*. I will highlight how an understanding of the incarnation lends itself to better understanding of the question of if ministers are equipped to minister to survivors of sexual assault and provide insight for possible pastoral solutions.

In order to understand the importance of proper pastoral care and healing for sexual violence survivors and how ministers can more effectively serve these survivors, I will use the theological concept of the incarnation in order to gain more insight on the importance of community and the body to emphasize the importance of proper education and formation of ministers.

The first important characteristic of the incarnation is that God is made flesh. As theologian Ronald Rolheiser says, the incarnation “is the mystery of God taking on human flesh and dealing with human beings in a visible, tangible way.”¹³ God became flesh and took on a body when he sent Jesus to earth. Because Jesus is fully human and fully divine, we understand God’s teachings in a way that enables us to relate to God concretely and in physical way beyond the abstract idea of God’s will. The embodiment of God, through Jesus, brought Divinity into the world in a way that allows for personal interactions and the formation and strengthening of relationships. As physical beings, we interact with our world in a sensory way. The incarnation allows us to interact with God in a sensory way, too.

The second element of the incarnation also deals with the physical way in which we interact with the world. Rolheiser emphasizes the importance and significance of a physical embodiment of God:

13 Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: Guidelines for a Christian Spirituality*. “Christ as a Basis for Christian Spirituality.” (New York: Crossroads, 1999), 76.

A God who is everywhere is just as easily nowhere. We believe in what we can touch, see, hear, smell, and taste. We are not angels, without bodies, but sensual creatures in the true sense of the word sensuality. We have five senses and we are present in the world through those senses. We know through them, communicate through them, and are open to each other and the world only through them. And God, having created our nature, respects how it operates. Thus, God deals with us through our senses. The Jesus who walked the roads of Palestine could be seen, touched, and heard. In the incarnation, God became physical because we are creatures of the senses who, at one point, need a God with some skin.¹⁴

God knows the importance we place on our physical selves and our ability to interact with the world in a physical way. Given our physical nature and our ability to interact with the world around us and learn from it through our sight, touch, taste, and hearing, it only follows that God would interact with us through these senses. In a very literal sense, we interact with Jesus through all of our senses. God became flesh so that we see God as accessible, visible, and all around us- in our homes, our churches, the faces of our neighbor, the actions of our friends, the love of our family, and even in our enemy.¹⁵ Seeing God in everything and everyone around us enhances our interactions not only with other people but also with God. Through the presence of God in everyone, we interact with Jesus. An important part of our ability to interact not only with the historical Jesus who walked through Palestine and suffered but also the Son of God who lives eternally is that the incarnation did not end when Jesus physically died on the cross; rather, the incarnation is ongoing and continues today.

The continuation of the incarnation is a third critical component of this theological concept. The incarnation and the physical presence of God did not end when Jesus died on the cross or ascended into heaven: "God's physical body is still among us. God is still present, as physical and as real today, as God was in the historical Jesus...In a certain manner of speaking, it is true to say that, at the ascension, the physical body of Jesus left this earth, but

¹⁴ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 77.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 78.

the body of Christ did not. God's incarnational presence among us continues as before."¹⁶ The distinction between the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ is important here because it reiterates the point that since Jesus was fully human, his body can die, but since he was also fully divine, the divinity (and thus God) lives on in the world, even today, thousands of years after Jesus physically died. This continual, physical presence of God in our world calls us to a higher way of living. We must try to see God in all people, places, and things because God *is* in all people, places, and things.

The fourth characteristic of the incarnation is the literal, etymological characteristics of the word "incarnation" itself. The word "incarnation means *in—carnus*; literally, in physical flesh."¹⁷ The emphasis on the flesh reminds us that Jesus was a literal being, encased in the flesh we all have. His body was subject to injuries and illness, and the word "incarnation" reminds us of Jesus' physicality. This physical fleshiness of Jesus also supports the idea that the incarnation is ongoing: we have the same flesh Jesus did, subject to the same injuries and illnesses. Not only do we interact with God in a physical way through the incarnation, but the incarnation also means Jesus interacts with *us* in a physical way. Jesus highlights two ways in which he interacts with his body; the terms *sarx* and *soma* both refer to the human, fleshy body but in different ways. *Soma* refers to the positive aspects of the body; *sarx*, conversely, refers to the negative aspects of the human person.¹⁸ *Sarx* "refers to the human person insofar as there is something unfavorable about him or her."¹⁹ The fact that Jesus referred to his body with words that convey both the positive and negative aspects highlights the reality of human nature and the fully human and fully divine nature of Jesus. "Jesus is referring to his body precisely insofar as it is not simply his sinless, glorified body in heaven, nor simply a sterilized white communion wafer in church."²⁰ In a real way, the incarnation brings the physical and human nature of God to life throughout time. We relate to God in a physical way continually through time; not only through celebration of the Eucharist or during prayer but in everything and everyone in the world around us.

16 Ibid, 79.

17 Ibid, 78.

18 Ibid, 97.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid, 97-98.

Jesus and God interacting with us in a physical way brings us to the fifth characteristic of the incarnation: the people of God are the body of Christ. The incarnation allows us to understand ourselves as not only in relationship to God but also in relationship to each other. When forming a community- in a small geographical area or across the entire world- a foundation built on strong relationships is vital. We need to establish emotionally intimate relationships with each other if we hope to work together as a community to serve God and our neighbors. We cannot do theology or have a relationship with God without having strong, healthy relationships with each other. Through the incarnation, God becoming flesh, we are called to live in relation with our neighbors and God in a physical way.

THE INCARNATION IN MINISTRY

The incarnation presents a very literal description of the problem of sexual trauma and difficulties of ministering to survivors. Christ is physically present in all of us, and we make up one physical body. Sexual trauma affects our physical body, and when our physical body is part of a large body (i.e. the Body of Christ), the Body suffers, too. Just as the incarnation is ongoing, so is the healing process of recovering from sexual trauma.

An incarnational view also emphasizes the importance of healing physically, mentally, and emotionally from sexual trauma because we interact with the world and our community in a physical way, through our senses. If survivors never heal from their trauma, the ways in which they interact with the world will be damaged as long as they are not healed. Their inability to connect with the world in a physical way also prevents them from physically interacting with God. Through the incarnation, we literally see Christ in all people; when survivors are not healing and isolate themselves from the community, they miss the opportunity to see God. This only worsens the healing process because the restoration of relationships is vital to healing from any type of trauma.

An incarnational view of ministry highlights the importance of effectively ministering to trauma survivors because ministers and survivors are part of the same Body of Christ in a physical and theological way. Ministers ineffectively ministering to these survivors not only damages the survivors,

but it damages the entire Body of Christ, including the church community, the family and friends of the survivor who suffer when their loved one suffers, and the ministers themselves. Understanding the community as one physical body that cannot function when pieces of that body (persons) are damaged or broken (i.e. recovering from trauma) gives a holistic view of the complex relationships between survivors and others. It gives ministers a personal reason to get involved and effectively serve: it directly affects them and their community.

Jesus used both *sarx* and *soma* to refer to his human body. These words emphasize the need to accept both the positive and negative aspects of our human nature. *Sarx* refers to the unfavorable qualities in a person; *soma* refers to the positive.²¹ Today, we use “somatic” to refer not to positive aspects of the human body but to distinguish the body from the mind. This distinction is important because of the psychophysical effects of trauma. Science is increasingly revealing how psychological trauma, such as sexual violence, manifests in physical ways throughout the body. “Trauma is a psychophysical experience, even when the traumatic event causes no direct bodily harm...direct somatic interventions, when used as adjuncts to existing trauma therapies, can be powerful in combating the effects of trauma.”²² The incarnation emphasizes the importance of the body for how we relate to God, the world around us, and our salvation. It appreciates the body as positive, necessary, and incredibly important; the physical manifestation of trauma damages the body and requires healing. Just as we need the incarnation for salvation, we need an incarnational view of pastoral care for sexual trauma survivors because of the physical damage trauma can do to the body which needs to be restored and healed.

Through the incarnation, Jesus is not only present in the Eucharist or when life is going well. Therefore, neither can we love our neighbor only when they are well. “In essence, Jesus is saying: You cannot deal with a perfect, all-loving, all-forgiving, all-understanding God in heaven, if you cannot deal with a less-than-perfect, less-than-forgiving, and less-than-understanding community

21 Ibid, 97.

22 Babette Rothschild, *The Body Remembers: The psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*. “Part 1: Theory,” (New York: W.W. Norton & Company) 2000, 5.

here on earth. *You cannot pretend to be dealing with an invisible God if you refuse to deal with a visible family.*²³ We cannot claim to love God if we cannot love the members of our body who are suffering. We cannot only celebrate community when our members are healthy, but we must especially support our community during times of suffering. The incarnation, when applied to the problem of sexual violence, leaves us no option but to ensure our ministers are very well-equipped to serve trauma survivors.

POSSIBLE PASTORAL RESPONSE: EDUCATION

Sexual trauma is an abuse of power that breaks down trust and damages relationships. When we, as Christians, are hurt physically, sexually, and emotionally, and we make up the Body of Christ, the Body of Christ suffers, too. An incarnational view of theology lays the foundation for a strongly relational and physical theology. Through the image of all people of God belonging to (and forming) the Body of Christ, the pastoral solutions to helping those who have experienced sexual trauma needs to incorporate a way for this person to heal relationally to their community and to God. Before ministers can begin to aid survivors in this process, ministers themselves need to learn about the relational damage sexual trauma can inflict.

As the congruence theory described in the previous section explains some ways in which an understanding of victimization can enhance ministers' abilities to serve survivors through understanding *why* the attack occurred, the incarnational model of theology emphasizes the need for physical, mental, and spiritual healing: Christ literally becoming flesh elevates our humanity. Storing trauma physically in the body, somatically, requires a physical component to pastoral care, especially since Jesus discussed his *soma* and *sarx*.

It is vital for ministers to understand victimization and have an incarnational view of theology. From these two theories, a natural solution seems to be to educate ministers about the complexities of victimization and the necessity of physical restoration. Through a thorough education about how to serve survivors of sexual trauma, ministers will be better equipped to do so. The education should be available to ministers- either through school or the parish- and may have different formats. There should, however, be a standard

23 Rolheiser, 98, italics mine.

for competency and the program should be geared toward those goals. This education should focus not only the topics mention above (motivations of offenders in victimization and the incarnation as a way to understand the necessity for restoration) but many more in order to encapsulate the wholeness of a survivors- physically, mentally, and spiritually.

EDUCATION AS PASTORAL RESPONSE

In this section, I will describe possible plans which will better equip ministers to serve survivors of sexual violence. In the previous sections of this paper, we learned about the prevalence of sexual violence and how the congruence theory of victimization explains some of the motivations behind sexual violence from a psychological perspective; understanding *why* sexual violence happens will allow ministers to better serve these survivors. We also explored how an incarnational view of theology can provide a theological understanding of the importance of healing for survivors of sexual violence and their community. Therefore, in this section, I will outline my plan for ministers to be educated in serving survivors of sexual trauma. In this plan, ministers will be educated in the psychological components of sexual violence and the impact such an experience can have on one's relationships with God, others, and the Church and learn the necessary skills to interact with these survivors in a way that creates a positive experience for all parties involved.

The main goal for this project ministers will be able to serve survivors of sexual violence. To reach this goal, ministers will:

- a. increase their knowledge about sexual violence
- b. describe how to interact with a survivor during their initial disclosure and
- c. gain confidence in their ability to minister to sexual violence survivors

In order to measure these objectives, I propose a series of assessments that can objectively gauge ministers' knowledge and confidence. The administration of both pre- and post-assessments that measure knowledge of the psychological background of sexual violence and ramifications such trauma can have on relationships, thought processes, and one's life is critical. An important part of ministry is one's confidence in oneself to do well. While ministry is a life-long

learning process, as is confidence, the more knowledge a minister has, the more likely they are to feel confident. Finally, part of the assessments can ask them to describe ways in which they can work with sexual violence survivors to foster positive interactions during survivors' disclosures.

Already in place are the competencies for lay ecclesial ministers here at Saint John's. Awareness of sexual violence and how to minister to survivors of sexual trauma intersects with all four categories: human, intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral. A minister's competency, therefore, depends on their knowledge and ability to serve survivors of sexual trauma. We have a responsibility to ensure the ministers educated at Saint John's can serve any type of person they may encounter in their ministry, especially survivors of sexual trauma.

My plan to provide ministers with this type of training is a course in the ways to work with survivors of trauma. This is obviously a very complex field, has many components, and one could spend their whole life working with survivors and continue to learn, but this course would offer the basics on how to receive survivors' disclosures with compassion and without perpetuating the societal phenomenon of "victim-blaming" that can contribute to a survivor's guilt about their experience.

Within the context of the Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary, this course could take several forms. One way in which I see this course coming to fruition is as being an intensive course, such as a one credit option. It could also be a more involved component of a pre-existing semester-long three credit course of its own. Taking this course, in any form, would be optional for all students. Ideally, it would be mandatory for all ministry students, i.e. those in the Master of Arts and Ministry or Master of Divinity (Lay and Priesthood Studies). At the beginning of the course, students would take the assessments (described above) and repeat these same assessments upon completion of the course. They would also evaluate themselves against the competencies for lay ecclesial ministers set by Saint John's specifically in reference to knowledge and ministry to sexual trauma survivors. Given the prevalence of sexual violence, ministers will likely interact with a survivor. This is not to say, however, that ministry for survivors of sexual violence should be prioritized over other societal and personal traumas- e.g. discrimination/violence based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, history of familial abuse, etc. The skills

necessary to effectively minister to survivors of assault also apply to other types of trauma. The compassion, understanding, open-mindedness, and judgement-free environment is as important for sexual trauma survivors as it is for other types of trauma. Given the unique psychological, physical, emotional, and relational effects of sexual trauma (and other traumas), the specific skills needed to effectively minister to survivors go beyond the skills necessary for general ministry. Thus, ministerial formation for addressing trauma should either be its own course or part of a course that focuses on these specific traumas.

Additionally, since up to 1/4 or 1/3 of the female population comprises of sexual trauma survivors, an option for ministry students should be to incorporate work with survivors into the Field Education or instead of the Clinical Pastoral Education components of the degree. This hands-on experience will prepare ministers for the survivors they will inevitably encounter, whether the survivors disclose or not and make their experiences known or not. Giving students the option to develop and strengthen their ministerial skills in this area is critical to Saint John's producing well-formed ministers. Again, this is not to say survivors of sexual trauma should deserve more or better pastoral care than survivors of other traumas, but because of the intersectional nature of sexual violence, it warrants targeted attention and education.

One of the most important components of ministering to survivors of sexual trauma is receiving a survivor's disclosure, especially if it's the first time they've discussed their experience. Ministers at Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary should receive training on how to receive such a disclosure. One possible way ministers can receive this training is an hour or two session that incorporates pastoral care techniques and psychological techniques to give the survivor a positive and affirming experience during their disclosure instead of continuing to perpetuate shame and guilt. One topic covered should be a "Dos and Don'ts" type session that will include but not be limited to guidelines such as don't ask the survivor:

- what they were wearing
 - if they were drinking or using drugs
- or
- if they had a past relationship with the offender.

These questions implying the survivor is at fault because of their clothing or behavior. Previous acts of consensual sex do not imply future acts of consensual sex; consent needs to be renewed *every single time*. Some “dos” would include the following:

- statements that express empathy, such as “I’m sorry this happened to you.”
- make the survivor feel safe physically and emotionally in this space; ask them what they need to be comfortable (water, snack, etc.), if they would prefer you not look at them or face away from them

and

- ensure you are receiving this disclosure in a room where you will not be interrupted but that is not secluded in a way that may make the survivor feel vulnerable.

Another component of this session can be a type of role-playing. While this may be difficult to do, it is important; the more times ministers practice receiving a disclosure, the more comfortable they will feel doing so when they need to in the future. This type of role-playing is not meant to make light of traumatic situations; rather, it is meant to allow ministers to practice their ministerial skills in an educational manner. It may not be realistic to expect survivors to partake in this type of session, but it is important the practice is authentic and formative. Therefore, it would be appropriate for members of the community, such as counselors here at Saint Benedict’s and Saint John’s to act as survivors.

Perhaps the first round of practice should be two counselors, one serving as the survivor and one as the counselor. This will exemplify an effective way to receive the disclosure from a psychological standpoint. Additionally, using counselors from our community will allow ministers to hear examples of real disclosures from our community while protecting the survivors’ anonymity. It will also allow the counselors to shape the way ministers respond by providing immediate feedback on the minister’s verbal responses and body language. For example, if a counselor is fulfilling the role of the survivor, the counselor can guide the minister on appropriate facial expressions, how to offer empathetic comfort, and how to encourage the survivor to tell their story without prying.

During this practice, trained ministers should be present as well, listening to the entire session. The ministers should first work with the counselor who is acting as the survivor to exemplify to the ministers-in-training how to effectively receive the disclosure from a pastoral viewpoint. The trained ministers can then act as the survivor and work with the ministers-in-training to offer real-time feedback just as the counselor did.

A key concept throughout the course and short session described above is active listening. Ministers receive training and practice this skill through other pastoral care classes, but it is important to note the significance of active listening during a trauma disclosure and should be a learning objective of both the proposed course and session. While the course can be optional for ministry students, the training session should be mandatory. This will ensure all ministry students will receive at least a foundation for serving survivors of sexual trauma.

Through these education plans, such as the course and the short session which collaborates with counselors, ministers will gain confidence in their ability to serve survivors of sexual trauma as they become more experienced and more knowledgeable, thus meeting the third objective of this plan.

I believe this plan of having a course and session that focuses on ministering to trauma survivors, particularly those of sexual trauma, will address the problem that ministers are not fully equipped to effectively minister to survivors, and it will improve ministry because it will improve ministers' confidence in themselves and increase their knowledge about the psychology of trauma and the effects of trauma. Sexual violence is prominent in society and especially so on college campuses. Therefore, it is imperative that ministry students at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary receive education and training in order to effectively minister to the survivors they may encounter here on campus on in their ministry positions off-campus. Ministry students here at Saint John's University School of Theology and Seminary do not feel prepared to serve survivors of sexual trauma. Of the students I surveyed, they expressed their feeling of preparedness came from work outside of their courses in

school. Since proper education and formation are missing in our ministerial formation programs, the need for improvement is that much more pressing and requires immediate attention.

