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Designing a Program to Train Elders to Respond to #MeToo Experiences of Adult Females in a Church Context

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ABSTRACT

This project intervention explores resolution of systemic issues of church-based sexual harassment, abuse, and violence, referred to as #MeToo, through design of a training program for elders. As theological foundation for the project, the Gospel of Luke frames positive approaches modern church leaders can align with in the quest for solutions to #MeToo. The Good Samaritan parable and the story of Mary and Martha extract valuable lessons for church elders addressing sexual harassment, abuse, and violence experiences of adult women. In Luke, we find fresh understanding for questions of #MeToo through the highly relevant concept of "neighbor." Luke will serve as a framework for how Jesus and his near contemporaries would interpret and address #MeToo. Aligning with theological themes of freedom and healing, the theory pursued in this project also utilizes best practices including family systems theory and trauma-informed care.

Designing a Program to Train Elders to Respond to #MeToo Experiences of Adult Females in a Church Context

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To my husband Jim, my partner in life and ministry,

for your encouragement, love, and caring heart for those most vulnerable.

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The courage, care, and spiritual mooring of OP's aspirational egalitarian church has been foundational on my journey throughout the DMin education. This project has been a labor of love towards a desire to honor God in all aspects of our congregational life.

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INTRODUCTION

> With an old house, the work is never done. . . . When you live in an old house, you may not want to go into the basement after a storm to see what the rains have wrought. Choose not to look, however, at your own peril. The owner of an old house knows that whatever you are ignoring will never go away. Whatever is lurking will fester whether you choose to look or not. Ignorance is no protection from the consequence of inaction. Whatever you are wishing away will gnaw at you until you gather the courage to face what you would rather not see.[1]

The research and intervention to design a program to train elders in their response to women's church-based, sexual harassment/abuse/violence experiences involves gathering, "the courage to face what you would rather not see." Thus, this intervention has been analogous to facing the tough realities of dwelling in a stately but instable manor. When it comes to addressing sexual misconduct, the church, like an old house, is sorely in need of repair. With its salvific foundation, the church is the most honorable of "houses," however, and eminently worthy of our authentic restoration.

In her seminal work on systemic racism, *Caste*, Isabel Wilkerson explores the inherent tensions and terrors of the oppressed as they must dwell with their oppressors. Likewise, work to navigate church-based, sexual victimization requires exploration of the overlooked reality of abused and abusers in the pews—a truth that demands our best workmanship. Victims of sexual harassment/abuse/violence will also be referred to as

1. Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 15-16.

"survivors" in this work—honoring their difficult, courageous, and ongoing journey. Development of a training program designed for elders is a key step in the restoration process.

Exploration of our "old house"—the church—begins by penetrating a comforting exterior that conveys well-being but sometimes shields incidents of sexual harassment/ abuse/violence. Our proud heritage offers resonating acapella voices, the beauty of sacraments like weekly communion, full-immersion baptism, and prayers of praise that have bolstered us through tumultuous persecution, reconstruction, and reformation. Family marriages, births, and deaths have been memorialized in our shared sacred spaces midst weekly Bible classes, all-church potlucks, and missional efforts to feed, clothe, and share gospel with our neighbors.

The laughter of our children, tumbling from Sunday school, impishly boosting sugar packets from the coffee bar, and occasionally loop-de-looping paper airplanes from the balcony can be idyllic camouflage. The "all will be well" lilting lullaby of soothing mother-church must be reconciled with reality, however.[2] For survivors of congregational-based sexual harassment/abuse/violence, faux harmony has met with discord. Enter the unruly, unwieldy, and unwanted intruder of church-based #MeToo.[3]

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2. Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund College and James Walsh. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 152.

3. The term "#MeToo" as utilized in this project, means any incident of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or sexual violence. The #MeToo movement, established October 15, 2017, is a social-media-initiated mass reporting of sexual harassment and abuse, primarily of women. This global movement is originally attributed to American activist Tarana Burke, then was initiated by American actor Alyssa Milano who used Twitter and wrote, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." Millions world-wide posted affirmatively in response.

Our heartfelt hymns are a resounding signature to our enduring faith in God, but our mouths must testify as our eyes open wide. We must look closely and speak courageously of *all* the truths within our walls, including those we would rather not see.

Church abuse survivors, if they choose to stay in the fold, are forced to reconcile the preferred, cheery picture of congregational life with chilling actuality. The survivor's energies must necessarily turn to bravely processing or alternately suppressing the menacing specter of sexual harassment/abuse/violence. Either path is intimidating and uncertain.

Coexisting with a sincerely spiritual and grace-filled congregational life, another world exists for #MeToo victims. Survivors are left to watch their backs and look over their shoulders, wrack their brains for ways to avoid or deflect the abuser, wrestle with whether they should tell someone (in absence of any policy), brace for possible retaliation from the offender and/or the offender's family and friends, worry for their own family's well-being, or simply dwell in silence, all as church gossip spins. These options leave the survivor anxiously wondering if their motivation, morality, or mental health will now come into question. If they try to tell a church elder of a #MeToo experience, will they be listened to or believed? Will they find solace? Will they find justice?

Survivors sometimes wonder why God, let alone congregational leadership, has allowed this abuse to happen and fear it may happen to another church member as well. For the #MeToo survivor, this struggle can color every aspect of their congregational life, trust in leadership, and even faith in God.

To frame exploration of church-based #MeToo, facts about the high prevalence of sexual abuse within the culture illuminate. Statistics show that one out of every three girls

and one out of every seven boys will be victims of sexual abuse before their eighteenth birthday.[4] These figures further demonstrate that 300,000 new incidents of sexual abuse occur annually in America. In 80 percent of these cases, the perpetrator was a family member, with the entire remaining 20 percent of cases involving another known friend or acquaintance.[5] As children become adults, the impact of abuse continues, often exacerbated by further experiences of #MeToo. Unfortunately, the church is not excluded as a place of harassment/abuse/violence.

While researching religious contexts and #MeToo incidents, I have drawn on knowledge from my own church experiences as well as interviews from OP Church's brave members. For thirty-eight years, I have been a member of OP Church (OP), serving in roles as ministry staff member, women's Bible leader, children and youth volunteer, adult classes teacher, prayer leader, and deacon and elder's wife. I have shared the love of this church family but have also witnessed perplexing and disturbing #MeToo phenomena from my inner circle seats.

After a career in adult education development for a large telecommunications organization, I felt the call to pursue ministerial education and serve in Christian hospital chaplaincy and religious nonprofits. In these roles, the needs of underserved females became compelling. (In my experience, Christian Family Services remains outstanding among these nonprofits in the level of integrity and respect shown to women.) During my tenure (in some but not all of these organizations), I witnessed and/or heard of multiple

4. Brittany J. Arias and Chad V. Johnson, "Treatment of Childhood Sexual Abuse Survivors: Voices of Healing and Recovery from Childhood Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 22 (2013): 823.

5. Andrew J. Schmutzer, "Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse: Embodiment, Community, and Healing," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* (2009): 69.

stories of sexual harassment and abuse—sadly, some at the hands of professing Christian leaders. As recent statistics show, clergy abuse alone is at an alarming rate where eight percent of congregants from a variety of denominations indicate they know about sexual misconduct occurring in a church they have attended.[6]

My years in the corporate world indicated that it was highly incented to manage sexual harassment/abuse/violence of women with clearly communicated, timely, and supportive policy. Though this business policy may not have been motivated by altruism but rather fear of reprisal, the fact remained that my company had #MeToo policy, but my church did not. The church of the Lord's people should do better, I reasoned.

As I made the professional transition from secular to sacred endeavors, I was initially stunned to encounter not only the existence but the frequency of sexual misconduct within multiple Christian organizations, including the church. My observations and experiences underscored that there was no parallel to the corporate-world #MeToo process in the church—a place that should be a safe haven.

This unexpected dissonance and belief that the church should serve as role model to the world in comforting and healing victims fueled my efforts to begin this project. The #MeToo movement of 2017, our OP church women who courageously shared their truth then on social media and in person, and our OP elders who asked me to create a team to minister to women impacted by #MeToo, were all catalysts back in 2017 for this DMin research.

6. Diana Garland, "The Prevalence of Clergy Sexual Misconduct with Adults: A Research Study Executive Summary," Baylor University, 2008. https:www.baylor.edu/social_works/index.php?id=936023.

Thus, this project was begun with enduring love for the church, the elders that lead it, and the survivors *and* offenders who I pray will someday be healed. No longer can our beloved community maintain the luxury of looking the other way. It is time to re-examine and rehabilitate our sacred but neglected house.

The Project Meets Pandemic

In the middle of this project in April 2020, an extraordinary transformation began as we grappled with a pandemic that closed our churches, confounded our traditional ways of handling crisis, and challenged our roles as Christian leaders. Not only did we have an ongoing health pandemic; we had a "societal pandemic." With domestic and other forms of violence soaring, economic deconstruction, and the recognition of systemic racial inequalities rising to the collective conscience in unprecedented ways, we found ourselves at a crossroads. Exacerbated by the pandemic, #MeToo continued to rise.

The #MeToo movement had been a catalyst for needed change in the culture at large and church and that has been exponentially confirmed by the pandemic. The global havoc of Covid-19 served to further expose our fracturing religious architecture and underscore the need for authentic assessment and fixing of #MeToo fissures. Although the objective of this project did not expand because of the pandemic, my understanding and empathy did. Issues related to rise in abuses during Covid-19, including the spike in domestic violence, increased awareness and informed this project.[7] For example, during this time it became apparent that the domestic violence crisis paralleled if not superseded

7. UN Women, ed. "The Shadow Pandemic: Violence against Women during Covid-19." *UN Women*, n.d. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19-response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19.

the #MeToo occurrences in churches originally targeted. The horror of having crime, including sexual violence, perpetrated in one's own home was even more compelling when considering that Christian women are often encouraged by church leaders to stay in an abusive home due to errant religious beliefs.

As the pandemic has exposed, societal issues like #MeToo are right beneath the surface. With church-based sexual harassment/abuse/violence, we must tear out the rot of our "old house" and shore up the foundations, beams, and ceilings with a clear read of Scripture, dedicated listening and learning, and Spirit-empowered will to act. Our esteemed architecture will endure only if we do the challenging work of repair. God's "old house" has Jesus Christ as its foundation and it is eminently worth the saving.

Description of the Ministry Context

The OP Church, a Church of Christ (OP), formerly Mission Church of Christ (1950-1970) and Overland Park Church of Christ (1970-2015) in Overland Park, Kansas, provides the ministry setting of this project. OP functions denominationally as a Restoration Movement church.

OP currently sits on sizeable, wooded acreage with a creek bordering an upper middle-class homes subdivision. A busy intersection provides access from four directions where drivers can easily view our attractive, landscaped grounds, modern facility, and welcoming signage. While situated in the suburbs, OP is easily accessible to urban Kansas City to the north and rural farmlands to the south by I-35, which dissects the United States border to border.

Overland Park is the second most populous city in the state and lies on the southern edge of the larger Kansas City metroplex, stretching across both Kansas and

Missouri. With a population estimate of 191,278, the city has 5% African American, 6% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and 81% Caucasian citizens.[8] There is also have a small deaf population in Overland Park, as nearby Olathe School for the Deaf attracts students from across the country. Though the church has approximately sixty members that are non-Caucasian and a deaf community of about thirty members, OP doesn't fully reflect the city's demographics.

Located in education-focused Johnson County (there are more than five colleges here), most citizens of Overland Park are well-educated (approximately 60% of those over age twenty-five have college degrees) and upwardly mobile.[9] The median income in Overland Park is $78,217 per household with a "persons in poverty" statistic of 5.1%.[10] The church membership generally reflects this educated and primarily Caucasian, white-collar demographic.

OP's first meeting was held in 1951 in the Kansas City suburb of Mission, KS, where the ministers, elders, and deacons were all male, as Church of Christ (C of C) tradition dictated.[11] This would be the first of several moves to more demographically white, affluent, suburban areas where direction of the church would be decided upon primarily by men in these roles of leadership.

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8. "QuickFacts Overland Park, Kansas" in The United States Census Bureau, 2017. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/overlandparkcitykansas

9. "QuickFacts."

10. "QuickFacts."

11. Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 261.

Since 2015 at OP, we have made strides towards gender inclusion (inclusion of females into roles of the congregational worship service and ministry) modeling Gal 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” To this end, over time, OP has hired female ministers that lead worship and occasionally preach (though neither deacons nor elders are female), and we currently employ four women on our ministerial staff of six. Affirming these female ministers and other female volunteer leaders has positively impacted the conversation at OP concerning women’s issues. There are, however, still traditions and taboos surrounding sexuality that limit authentic dialogue and ministry.

As with many suburban churches, the appearance of propriety, prosperity, and stability have been interlocking themes at OP. This recognition brings challenges as we normalize facts and terminology needed to navigate #MeToo within our walls. In the patriarchal past at OP, open discussion of sexual themes was not forbidden but was infrequent. An increasing number of congregants are open to this dialogue, but there are remnants of embarrassment, fear, and shame in even broaching the topic of #MeToo.

In the early 2000s, OP moved to its newest building at 119th and Pflumm. OP grew to a membership of 1,200 members by 2006 but currently has approximately three hundred active members in post-pandemic 2022. Despite our changes to church worship (i.e., gender inclusion and instrumental music) that have been well received by many, there is palpable tension about the loss of members and related budgeted income. Our large, custom-built facility is attractive and well-used by the congregation and surrounding community but is expensive to operate.

Recent loss of members has had an undeniable impact on an already-strained budget. In turn, this impact exacerbates existing anxiety throughout the church. This anxiety has the effect of subtly blocking exploration of some social justice issues, such as #MeToo, which have been traditionally viewed as distractions from OP's primary mission.

One OP ministry leader said he felt the #MeToo movement was too politicized for our church to address while maintaining our good standing with traditional C of C members. This well-intended leader who advocated for a young, female abuse victim at the church also supported a focus group about #MeToo. Despite this leader's good efforts, he displayed what I have termed "hero-enabler" characteristics. Such hero-enablers significantly support #MeToo best practices, even heroically in some cases, while also exhibiting contradictory actions. In one example, the hero-enabler seemed sympathetic to the female victims and was vocal about supporting expanded women's roles in the church, but he also advocated for a repeat sexual offender to stay at church, to show mercy and grace to those needing a fresh start. This hero-enabler seemed not to understand or fully empathize that the abuser's continued presence in worship was intimidating to the female survivors who he perceived as long-time members who did not need the same consideration as the abuser.

Related to the "hero-enabler" is the "conflicted-survivor." In this scenario, a #MeToo victim, for assorted and often understandable reasons, is unable or unwilling to articulate the fact of their victimization. Both the "hero-enabler" and the "conflicted-survivor" impede effective resolution for #MeToo events within the church.

Despite the confusing messages leaders give about addressing #MeToo, congregants at OP who identify as progressives lean towards the idea that social justice issues, like #MeToo, *are* our primary mission. This fact creates additional incentive to tackle church-based #MeToo.

This theological shift towards social justice as gospel has fueled the creation and funding of an urban Kansas City mission and International Hospitality Network (IHN) for homeless that are hosted over night at OP. Various other ministries that serve the disenfranchised have begun, including an event to stop human trafficking in Kansas City. This growing acceptance of involvement in culturally relevant causes, including those that impact women, gives opportunity to minister healthfully to those impacted by #MeToo in our congregation and community of outreach.

Despite progress, roots of patriarchy at OP mute voices addressing #MeToo. Because of the traditional C of C institutions of male authority, past decisions on incidents of sexual harassment/abuse/violence as experienced by OP females were made by men who did not have proper tools or incentive to address #MeToo.

Sexually harassing and abusive behaviors from the past, not well managed, still impact the spiritual life of one leading female congregant, Respondent F. In a recent interview, Respondent F said, "I never lost faith in God, but I did lose faith in some of his people for a time." Elders interviewed acknowledged they had little or no personal experience or training from which to draw to make informed responses to #MeToo incidents.

Supporting the assertion that there is a gap in awareness and education, Respondent B, who had been an elder in the past when some incidents of sexual

misconduct took place within OP, asked the question reflexively, “Why have I, we as elders, focused more on the abuser and their healing, than upon the one who was abused?”

In addition to lack of awareness and skills on the part of leadership, church norms that incented female victims to remain silent served to mislead about the actual scope of the #MeToo problem. Additionally, a repeating theme that emerged in an OP focus group and OP interviews featured unhealthy secrets—both the keeping of and the unburdening of. According to the interviews, some in the church have been locked into managing #MeToo secrets—victims and their families as well as various ministry leaders.

“Secret keeping” was often the response concerning #MeToo incidents in the church where there were no tools/policy to deal with it. Evolving best practices training drawn from caring industries could have informed #MeToo policy development at OP, too, but was not significantly accessed in the past.

The fact that women had much less voice in church life (pre-egalitarian years) and had reticence to speak about sexual harassment/abuse/violence incidents also contributed to the de-prioritization of creating #MeToo policy. Stigmatization of sins of a sexual nature also played a part in secret keeping, as did a well-intended, but sometimes misdirected, leadership desire to protect the reputations of those involved. For example, if the alleged offender was an elder’s friend and/or was filling essential church roles, the reporting process and follow-up resolution were often directly negatively impacted.

It has also been found in this study that if women did try to report, the arbitrary process could be confusing, lengthy, ineffective, humiliating, scary, and even traumatic. There also seemed to be significant gaps in confidentiality throughout the reporting and

post-reporting process. All of these factors influenced substantial incentive to hold secrets involving #MeToo.

Edwin Friedman examined the role of secrets within churches in his seminal work on family systems theory. Family systems theory, which melds strong commonalities of nuclear and church family dynamics, has since become a standard for interpreting and providing conflict resolution for contexts like OP. [12]

Friedman proposes that secrets create an underlying tension within the congregation. Secrets, as outlined in family systems theory, include these outcomes: "Secrets function to divide a family, create unnecessary estrangements as well as false companionship, distort perceptions and exacerbate other unrelated pathological processes."[13] Friedman further informs that when secrets are revealed, "the anxiety of the [church] family generally decreases."[14]

Those in leadership may have believed that unveiling secrets challenged appearances or perceived spirituality of the church. The appropriate divesting of secrets, however, holds encouraging potential for healing and moving forward with future incidents of #MeToo at OP.

Respondent B, an elder who served both in the past and in recent years at OP, affirmed this truth. Reflecting on the dynamics of sexual harassment in the current #MeToo media coverage, Respondent B said he was convicted that OP had not adequately addressed the pain of female congregants who experienced sexual harassment,

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12. Edwin Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 52.

13. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52-53.

14. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52-53.

abuse, or violence in the past. Further, Respondent B suggested that new perspectives within church leadership had arisen due to the societal impact of the #MeToo movement and also with new knowledge of family members that had been victimized. This cultural movement, release of toxic secrets, and new empathy, he said, served to spotlight incidences within our congregation and incent further understanding among the elders.

This reflexivity implies progress and indicates a climate where training can be successfully delivered for the eldership dealing with #MeToo. It is hoped that these elders will have information and renewed incentive to evaluate past decision-making and "re-tool" concerning #MeToo at OP.

At OP, the elders have the final word on overall church direction, but they typically empower ministers and work toward consensus. Once elders make decisions, ministers and volunteer leaders communicate and help the congregation align on implementation. Thus, designing #MeToo training for the elders will benefit the ministerial staff and the congregation. #MeToo training will also potentially lead to buy-in of future, elder-created OP policy as well.

OP is a unique community of believers in ways that make it an excellent context for this study. First, OP's location in Overland Park is an extension of a major metropolitan city. OP therefore has access to an expansive network of counselors, healthcare providers, and helping agencies that can assist in our understanding of best practices for #MeToo training. Members are also impacted by negative aspects of large city life as well, however.

One example of needed social justice work in our city involves navigating crime. For example, the metroplex currently has one of the highest crime rates in the country—

128% higher than the national average per capita. In Kansas City there is a one in sixteen chance of becoming a crime victim.[15] Racism is another example of a justice issue that is being explored at OP. The church must address systemic bias as we process the fact, for example, that in 2017 the NAACP designated the first-ever state travel advisory for Missouri (including Kansas City) due to incidences of racism.[16] Our city is also recognized as a large human trafficking hub due to the centrality of Kansas City and the large intersections of major highways that cut through the nation north and south (I-35), as well as east and west (I-435.)[17] These societal truths, belied by the suburban location of OP, impact our community and congregants who travel, in some cases, from over a forty mile radius to attend church due to C of C "brand loyalty." We are a church that is increasingly aware of the challenging dynamics of a large city and hope to be responsive as Christians. Our mission statement, "Joining the work of Jesus for the good of the world," reflects this desired core belief.

Secondly, members at OP are attuned to those outside of the mainstream, and that outlook may make us more receptive to the disenfranchised of #MeToo. Membership at OP consists of about half with roots in the Restorationist tradition. This tradition, rooted in a scriptural reformation and modeling of the early Christian church sought to "be biblically faithful because it held that such biblical fidelity was (and is) the only viable

15. Areavibes. "Fairlane, Kansas City, MO Crime." *Fairlane, MO Crime Rates & Map*, n.d. https://www.areavibes.com/kansas+city-mo/fairlane/crime/.

16. Nancy Coleman, "NAACP Issues Its First Statewide Travel Advisory, for Missouri." *CNN*. Cable News Network, August 3, 2017. https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/02/us/naacp-missouri-travel-advisory-trnd/index.html.

17. "Prevention and Protection Services Human Trafficking." *Human Trafficking - Prevention and Protection Services*, n.d. http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/ArchivePages/Human-Trafficking.aspx.

basis on which to . . . achieve the unity for which the Lord of all Christians earnestly prayed."[18]

The other half of OP is made up of a variety of religious backgrounds, including former Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, Mennonites, and Jews. Significantly, six of our ten elders at this time have come from heritages other than the C of C, which influences our awareness, openness, and sensitivity to those who are outside our traditional borders.

One of the largest of several Churches of Christ in the Kansas City metroplex, OP is viewed as most "progressive." This is in large part due to our aspirational, theological-openness and adoption of some traditions outside our tribe (such as *lectio divina* prayer time and some Easter liturgical offerings.) These optional hybrid adaptations are embraced by growing numbers even though approximately half of our congregation still identifies with much of their traditional C of C heritage.

OP reflects the diversity of our leaders and experiences a broader embrace of people and issues outside the walls of the church. Although we have an emphasis on study of Scripture like most in our religious tradition, we also have a distinctive openness and inclusiveness that members experience as a departure from some more traditional Churches of Christ.

At OP, this attitude of engagement with the culture is normative and usually not seen as contradictory to church leadership. This lens, which influences us to embrace the

18. Henry E. Webb, *In Search of Christian Unity: A History of the Restoration Movement* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003), 34.

often-hurting "outsider," is informed by experiences of our own transplanted congregants.

The third factor that makes OP an excellent context for this study is that women constitute over fifty percent of the church, and we are perceived to be more incented to empower female voices in our congregation at this time. As we restructure at OP with realities of decreased membership and increased ministry needs, the contributions and support of female congregants becomes pivotal. Our recognition of women as equal partners in Christ's body necessitates care and attention to the issues of women. Although the #MeToo movement also impacts males, females statistically have been the primary respondents to the social media phenomenon of #MeToo as well as targets of the spectrum of sexual harassment/abuse/violence events within culture and church.[19]

Changes have been made on behalf of the women of OP through the years to the benefit of the entire church, but effort is still needed. Our mission to share the gospel in a relevant fashion continues, but tensions exist with perceived lingering discriminations of the female majority members concerning #MeToo.

The past lack of awareness and missed response about #MeToo issues indicates a level of disengagement towards human rights issues concerning females. Tendency to prioritize appearances also seems to have diverted energies from addressing #MeToo at OP. Respondent D, a past minister at OP, perceived addressing issues like #MeToo as becoming a litmus test of sorts for the C of C's relevance, "I think just being of the

19. Rhitu Chatterjee, "A New Survey Finds 81 Percent of Women Have Experienced Sexual Harassment," NPR, February 22, 2018. https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2018/02/21/587671849/a-new-survey-finds-eighty-percent-of-women-have-experienced-sexual-harassment.

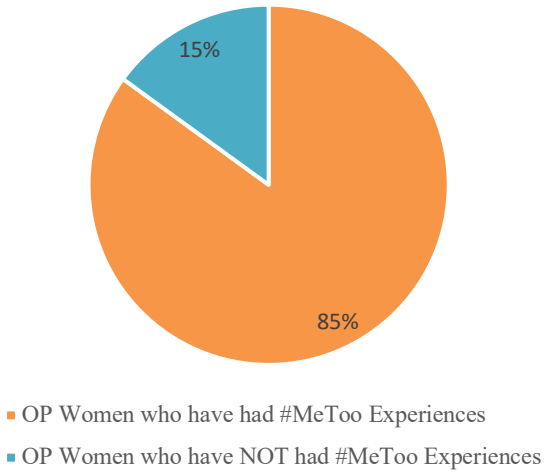
millennial generation that a lot of this social justice stuff is very at the forefront. I think that the church is getting a lot of flak from my peers and people my age even in the Christian circles that the church doesn't address a lot of the social justice issues, whether that means race or the #MeToo."

Survey Results

To gain insight further into the #MeToo landscape at OP, a survey was administered to a random group of twenty adult women ranging in ages from eighteen to seventy-eight years who chose to attend REFRESH ministry on Thursday morning, July 26, 2018. Women were invited to respond to survey questions concerning sexual harassment/abuse/violence experiences at OP and/or OP-related events: At this event, a discussion involving the #MeToo movement, the strong representation of OP women who had posted on social media in 2017, a theological frame about God's care for survivors, as well as a personal testimony about church-based #MeToo took place. At the end of the REFRESH session, participants were offered a paper survey that they could choose to fill out anonymously and turn in to a box in the back of the room. From a group of twenty-four attendees, twenty women chose to turn in the survey. The following sections present the results of a survey which supplied data about the extent of #MeToo experiences at OP. These survey findings include:

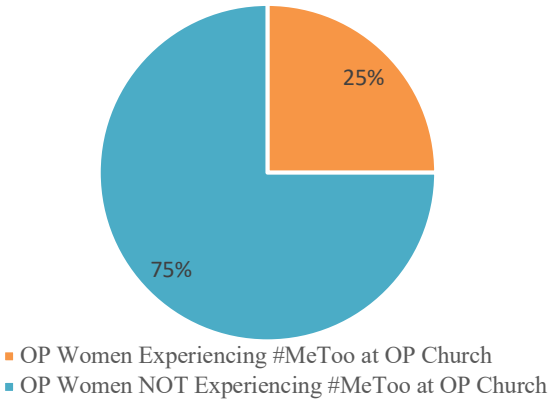
- OP females have experienced incidents of sexual harassment and/or spectrum events (e.g., abuse, violence) outside of OP. Seventeen of twenty respondents indicated "YES."

Figure 1. OP Women and #MeToo Experiences Outside of OP Church



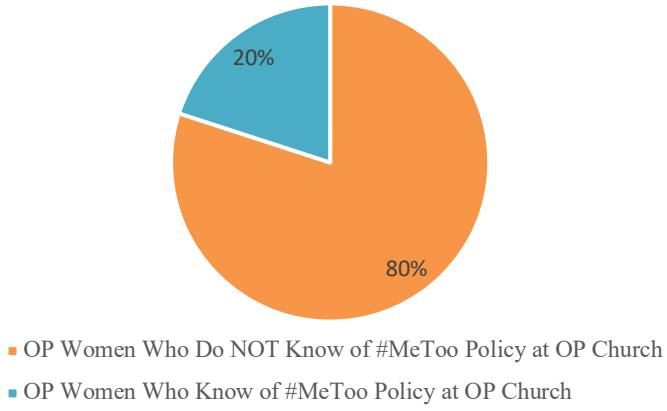
- OP females have experienced incidents of sexual harassment and/or spectrum events (i.e., abuse, violence) **at** OP and/or OP-related events. Five of twenty respondents indicated "YES."

Figure 2. #MeToo Experienced by OP Women While at OP Church/Events



- OP has **no** consistent, well-communicated, trauma-informed policy for incidents of #MeToo perpetrated upon adult females who attend OP and/or OP-related events. Sixteen of twenty respondents indicated "YES."

  Figure 3. Awareness of OP Church Policy for Adult Females Experiencing #MeToo at OP Church



Comments from the survey respondents concerning OP policy about #MeToo included:

- "Is there protocol/steps in action to protect the girls/women in our church?" (from a woman between twenty-one and twenty-nine years old who has attended OP between one to five years)
- "How can we access these policies?" (from a woman between sixteen and twenty-five years old who has attended OP over sixteen years)
- "I don't remember ever hearing about such policies in any setting." (from a woman between seventy to seventy-nine years old who has attended OP an undisclosed number of years)

The results of this initial survey indicate that there is confusion and miscommunication about how OP addresses #MeToo. The current ambiguous process of

handling #MeToo incidents highlights needed areas of improvement. Addressing the complex physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of victims is desired for future project phases but is currently outside the scope of this project. Though there are other viable interventions to achieve equipping of OP leaders navigating #MeToo, as the primary researcher, I have selected to design a training program for elders.

Designing training for elders addressing #MeToo experiences of adult female congregants at OP can facilitate God's healing and freedom and enhance our mission to reach our community for Christ. This effort involves not only acknowledging the cultural shift begun by the #MeToo movement but seeking best-practices and designing training to facilitate compassionate ministry to those women impacted at OP.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of this project is the absence of an elder training program to address the #MeToo experiences of women at OP. While policy and structures are in place for children, pathways guiding the appropriate and consistent policy to address #MeToo experiences of adults are not in place. An identified gap of knowledge exists with elders in awareness and education about #MeToo experiences of women at OP, and there is no policy for managing these events. Elders are currently the initiators and facilitators of policy at OP, so their enhanced understanding of #MeToo is essential for future policy.

Addressing issues involving sexual harassment/abuse/violence of adult females necessitates training that draws from professional caring resources. Thus, a training program for male elders addressing adult female #MeToo victims is needed.

Statement of the Purpose of this Project

The purpose of this project is to design training for elders addressing #MeToo experiences of women at OP. The intervention will consist of recruiting and leading a team of care professionals and vested congregants to design curriculum that will help elders in addressing #MeToo incidents. This team will focus on:

1. Gathering and reporting best practices from healthcare, professional counseling, and crisis response disciplines.
2. Determining integration with scriptural foundations and doctrinal guidelines within OP which functions denominationally as a Restoration Movement church.
3. Designing curriculum.
4. Participating in evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention.

Basic Assumptions

OP congregants sign a covenant membership agreement upon placing membership at OP. Members are committed to following the direction of the exclusively male OP eldership.

Elders at OP provide spiritual direction and oversight of the ministerial staff and congregation. The elders initiate, implement, and interpret OP policy with guidance from a board governance model. Though these efforts are often collaborative with staff, the responsibility for policy, such as for #MeToo, lies within the eldership.

This project also assumes that continued egalitarian support of women's participation at OP as well as demonstrated support for #MeToo education and ministry continues. Elders unanimously voted for me to lead ministry efforts beginning with the "After #MeToo" event in November 2017.

Definitions

#MeToo Movement: The term "#MeToo" as utilized in this project means any incident of sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or sexual violence. The #MeToo movement, established October 15, 2017, is a social-media-initiated mass reporting of sexual harassment and abuse, primarily of women. This global movement is originally attributed to American activist Tarana Burke but was then showcased by American actor Alyssa Milano who used Twitter and wrote, "If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet." Millions world-wide posted affirmatively in response.

Trauma: Trauma is an event or series of events, an experience or prolonged experiences, and/or a threat or perceived threats to a person's well-being.

Trauma-Informed Care: Trauma-informed care is a prescribed set of practices that acknowledge and carefully minister to "traumatic experiences which lead to a set of emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses that arise in the service of survival and safety."[20]

Sexual Harassment: Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual advance or demand, either verbal or physical that is perceived by the recipient as demeaning, intimidating, or coercive. Sexual harassment must be understood as an exploitation of a power relationship rather than an exclusively sexual issue. Sexual harassment includes, but is not limited to, the creation of a hostile or abusive environment resulting from discrimination based on gender. Contrary to a nurturing community, sexual harassment creates improper, coercive, and abusive conditions wherever it occurs in society. Sexual

20. "Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI Training)," n.d. https://www.crisisprevention.com/CPI/media/Media/download/PDF_TICRG.pdf.

harassment undermines the social goal of equal opportunity and the climate of mutual respect between men and women. Unwanted sexual attention is wrong and discriminatory. Sexual harassment interferes with the moral mission of the Church.[21] Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general. Both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.[22]

Sexual Abuse: Sexual abuse is behavior including but not limited to rape, statutory rape, indecent exposure, engagement in or promotion of prostitution, incest, pornography involving children, or fondling, molesting, or sexually assaulting a child. Sexual abuse taking place in a church context involves a betrayal of sacred trust, a violation of leadership roles in the church, and exploitation of those who are vulnerable.[23]

Sexual Violence: There are many types of sexual violence, including rape, child sexual abuse, and intimate partner sexual violence—and other crimes and forms of violence may arise jointly in these instances.[24] This term is far broader than just sexual assault which primarily includes sex crimes committed against adult victims referencing isolated acts, such as a single incident of inappropriate or nonconsensual sexual touching. Sexual violence includes acts that are not codified in law as criminal but are harmful and

21. "The Book of Discipline_Ctcumc."Central Texas Conference Policy Statement on Misconduct Of a Sexual Nature, n.d. https://www.ctcumc.org/files/fileshare/SexualHarassmentPolicy2001.pdf.

22. "Sexual Harassment." U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, n.d. https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-harassment.

23. SexualHarassmentPolicy.pdf..

24. "About Sexual Assault." *RAINN*, n.d. https://www.rainn.org/about-sexual-assault.

traumatic. Sexual violence includes using false promises, insistent pressure, abusive comments, or reputational threats to coerce sex acts. It can encompass noncontact acts like catcalls and whistles, which can make women feel objectified and victimized. It includes nonconsensual electronic sharing of explicit images, exposure of genitals and surreptitious viewing of others naked or during sex.[25] It is worth noting that abusive or violent behavior often occurs within multiple categories of sexual misconduct.

Hero-enabler: This is a church leader or influential congregant who advocates for justice, even heroically doing so in some areas, but who applies this "justice" inconsistently within the church. For example, while the "hero" theoretically aligns with #MeToo advocacy, their misdirected or incomplete interventions may enable abusers. This enabling phenomenon often results in more distress for victims.

Conflicted-survivor: This is a #MeToo church victim who is unable or unwilling to articulate the fact of their victimization. For example, some victims of #MeToo incidents have been conditioned by numerous factors to accept behaviors of sexual harassment, abuse, or violence as normal. This perception does not negate the fact of their victimization nor the need to address the victimization appropriately within the church.

Discontinuous Change: Discontinuous change is disruptive and unanticipated; it creates situations that challenge our assumptions. In responding to discontinuous change, an organization, such as a church, will have moved to a level of complexity that is

25. Sarah L. Cook, Lilia M. Cortina, and Mary P. Koss, "What's the Difference between Sexual Abuse, Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment and Rape?" *The Conversation*, August 18, 2021. https://theconversation.com/whats-the-difference-between-sexual-abuse-sexual-assault-sexual-harassment-and-rape-88218.

beyond its skills and ability to address. Leaders suddenly find that the skills and capacities in which they were trained are of little use in addressing this new situation and/or environment.

Delimitations

The training design will be to address only #MeToo incidents at OP/OP-related events and only for those incidents experienced by adult females, both members and nonmembers, over age eighteen years old and out of the youth group. The training program design is only for OP. Training program design will be only for the current, all-male eldership of OP. The completed writing of the elder training program and delivery lies outside the parameters of this intervention but is hoped for implementation in the future.

Limitations

The training program design for elders at OP will be foundational for enhancing awareness about #MeToo, though addressing specific #MeToo victim's needs is beyond the scope of this project. OP currently has an all-male eldership and maintains some, though not all, traditional C of C leader characteristics. OP has a primarily racially white congregation and eldership; thus, a lens exists with male Caucasian orientation that potentially excludes other racial perspectives, including those of non-white, adult female #MeToo victims.

The impact of #MeToo experiences of women associated with OP has not been measured prior to this project. Therefore, there are unknowns about the incidences, extent of impact, and implications of those #MeToo events at OP.

Limitations also include that planned audio recording of the design team group sessions may not pick up full range of emotions that are displayed by physical responses (such as facial expressions, other forms of body language). Finally, another limitation is the Hawthorne Effect. Since team participants are church members who may be invested in the project's success and/or are deferential to elders and elder spouses (a role I filled in addition to being primary researcher), they may exhibit less objectivity concerning the project.[26] In Chapter 2, we will explore the theological foundation for this intervention.

26. Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research*: *A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 82.

CHAPTER II

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

"#MeToo" is enlisted in this research project as a description of incidents of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence of church women. These egregious events have occurred since biblical times, and the modern #MeToo movement gives anachronistic voice to the ancient religious question, "How can leaders of the church allow sexual oppression of women?" It is hoped that the secular genesis of #MeToo will shed light on the sacred resolution.

The #MeToo movement is theologically significant as it remains a worldwide phenomenon with long-lasting societal impacts comparable to those of the Vietnam War. This cultural shift has not only helped identify the scope of a pervasive problem, but it has also helped explore questions that have been asked since time immemorial.[1]

To see why God cares about the #MeToo movement and why Christians should care, we begin with search of the Scriptures and find ample indication that sexual injustice towards women took place. Biblical responses to such injustices can inform leaders' responses today.

1. Sophie Gilbert, "The Movement of #Metoo," *The Atlantic*, October 16, 2017. https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/10/the-movement-of-metoo/542979/.

Traditional church responses to #MeToo questions offer reductionist answers, if any, and link #MeToo with other topics that challenge church polity. The complexities of #MeToo and past murky theological responses pose significant challenges. Many women ponder allegiances to a God and religion that they perceive to have disadvantaged them in significant and multiple ways.

With minimal, if any, scriptural study on sexual injustice, little trauma-informed care training, and no feminine personal experience to draw from, leaders struggle with how to address church #MeToo incidents. Additionally, as McKnight and Barringer write in *A Church Called Tov*, there is often personal stake in maintaining a status quo that advantages a male leader and disadvantages females who report abuse.[2] Designing a program to train elders to respond to those traumatic experiences of women is vital for exhibiting God's mercy, making positive changes in church culture, and bringing congregational healing.

Elders, exclusively male and autonomously governed at OP as in most Churches of Christ, are generally caring and well-intentioned spiritual leaders. Some elders are inclusive of women's perspectives. Consistent good character, good intentions, and inclusivity are not guaranteed, however, depending on many factors, including the church context in which the elder serves.[3]

Elders' decisions regarding #MeToo can be linked to "contributing factors such as faulty theology, authoritarian leadership, and church leaders who prioritize forgiveness

2. Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2020), 2.

3. Foster, *Encyclopedia*, 261.

for the abuser above justice and care for the victim."[4] Regardless of the congregation, the role of elder traditionally carries definitive authority in the C of C, and that authority can be misapplied concerning #MeToo events.

In this project, it was found that sometimes empowered but overly stressed or under-informed church leaders become "hero-enablers," advocating for justice, even heroically, but applying this "justice" inconsistently. In some cases, misdirected church authority enabled #MeToo abusers. For example, one church leader in this project compassionately advocated for a released prisoner to be incorporated into church life but did not concurrently explore the implications this registered sex offenders' presence had for female #MeToo victims. He did not seek these survivor's perspective prior to his decision. These survivors not only did not feel heard or valued, but they did not feel safe in their own church.

This over-looking and under-listening towards survivors is not atypical in some NT churches. Female victims of #MeToo often are marginalized in our churches. It is worth exploring how Jesus would have observed and heard the plight of those so oppressed and then incorporate those results into an elder training program. On further examining church and the issue of #MeToo, there is expectation that a shepherd/leader will prioritize the needs of victims who are part of the flock. John 10:11 (NIV) reads, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." The elder is to safeguard the church from without and within, as stated by Acts 20:28-30 (NIV):

> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among

4. McKnight, *A Church*, 65.

you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

When prioritization of the #MeToo victim's needs does not happen or happens inconsistently, emotional and spiritual devastation for the victim can follow.[5] Another all-too-common leader response involves the misapplication of Scripture concerning #MeToo. Elders advising survivors towards speedy forgiveness and simplistic grace can make victims feel even more voiceless and vulnerable.[6] A #MeToo elder training program can help leaders search Scripture for more caring, informed responses to victims.

As additional support for the need for training, one #MeToo victim interviewed was advised to remain silent while a decision on an abusive congregant's behavior was finalized. The de-prioritized and lengthy deliberation process left this woman vulnerable to the abuser's continued harassment for several more months prior to his eventual dismissal from the church. The perceived inaction of church leadership created long-term distress for the victim as well as distrust of the elders.

The low prioritization and paternalism towards those suffering from church-based #MeToo finds parallel in the historical attitude towards racism in the church. Employing Martin Luther King's voice, James Cone reminds of religious leaders' sacred calling to both conviction and efficiency in acting on that conviction: "It is hardly a moral act to encourage others patiently to accept injustice which he himself does not endure."[7] King's

5. Nancy Myer Hopkins and Mark Laaser, eds. *Restoring the Soul of a Church: Healing Congregations Wounded by Clergy Sexual Misconduct* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 31.

6. Hopkins, *Restoring the Soul*, 31.

7. James H. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 39.

speech on racism and church-based #MeToo find strong linkage. Both racism and #MeToo victimization are overwhelmingly outside the experience of primarily male, Caucasian church elders at congregations like OP. Could leaders learn how all victims should be treated by studying God's mercy and Jesus's ministry? A program to train elders on #MeToo would include education on these scriptural best practices.

In one incident in OP's past, a man who had sexually abused his stepdaughter and had served prison time was given the microphone during a worship service altar call. The man, with the elder's permission, wanted to repent and ask the congregation to accept him back. Because females were not allowed to speak, this man's victimized child and separated wife sat silently in the pew until he finished his plea. His confession and request were met by acceptance back into the fold and warm embraces from more than one teary-eyed church member who felt they were emulating God's grace.

The females involved were not afforded the opportunity to publicly respond to his impassioned speech even if they had wanted to, since tradition dictated their silence during congregational worship. The man stayed on as a church member for about a year, but both mother and stepdaughter left the congregation within months. It is not known where they are now. The unanswered questions about the impact to this young woman and her mother have mostly been pushed to the recesses of our church life, but their presence still haunts us. Would Jesus have asked more convicting questions on behalf of these females? Would Jesus's example penetrate hearts of those men who were charged with the spiritual oversight, care, and compassion for these females? What could be learned about Jesus's justice and grace that would encounter the abused and abuser more

appropriately? Design of a training program for elders responding to #MeToo experiences of women can help provide answers to these questions.

Well-intended but misplaced grace can undermine the faith and short-circuit the healing for female victims of church-based #MeToo. As Elaine Heath, theologian, pastor, and #MeToo survivor, writes,

> One of the worst things the church has done to us survivors in relation to offenders is to lecture us with false doctrines of forgiveness. We have been told in a thousand different ways that if we don't first forgive our offenders of their crimes, God will not forgive us of our sins. We have not been able to comprehend a God who would do this, who would damn a person who was raped as a child if she would not cozy up to her offender when she was an adult. Such a God is an abomination to us. Too often the message has been that forgiving means allowing the offender back into our lives. . . . Often we cannot do that, for our own safety and that of our children. No one who survived and was healed from sexual abuse would make this demand on another.[8]

Heath's words shed light on why some conflicted-survivors at OP have suffered in silence. There is negligible incentive to communicate #MeToo incidents to elders who don't fully consider the needs of victims or advocate for them, whether willfully or out of naiveté. With exploration of Scripture and trauma-informed care practices within #MeToo elder training, leaders can better help victims.

In addition to the realization that leaders' advocacy for victims is lacking, females have other good reasons to stay silent about #MeToo experiences at church. Shaming and unwanted speculation about a female's complicity in her own abuse still happen, serving to "blame the victim" into silence.[9] During this research, one congregant reported that she was abused by an adult church member as a preteen and that her parents forbade her to

8. Elaine Heath, *We Were the Least of These: Reading the Bible with Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2011), 156.

9. Heath, *We Were the Least*, 156.

speak about the incident for fear she would be cast as morally "loose" and she and their family would be gossiped about.

Even with inclusion of women in public worship roles now like at OP, there is still reason for female victims to exercise caution when reporting incidents of #MeToo. One interviewee, who participates in our new egalitarian opportunities at OP, was apologetic that she did not speak more boldly to church elders about her abuser, a popular male congregant. While admiring the empowerment she saw from #MeToo survivors speaking out in media, she still felt if she had voiced concerns to leadership there would have been negative social consequences potentially impacting her extended family and her volunteer ministry.

As a result of these various roadblocks to resolving #MeToo, some C of C women—whom I have termed "conflicted-survivors"—unfortunately, become complicit in continuing the cycle of sexual abuse, stunting their own spiritual growth and healing. Paradoxically, they join their abusers and some leaders in perpetuating the #MeToo problem. Elders who choose to do so can learn from Scripture on hearing and conveying value to victims so that undeserved shame, fear, and distrust are minimized. Designing a training program for these elders can give survivors fresh confidence and increased security to speak up about sexual harassment, abuse, and violence.

Ignoring the #MeToo movement and proceeding as usual is an option for C of C leadership, but it is increasingly culturally if not—more importantly—religiously unacceptable for *any* follower of Jesus. Designing a program to train elders to respond to #MeToo experiences of women can be a significant step towards God's preferred future of hope and healing for his church.

Scriptures and #MeToo

Theologians, grappling with issues of #MeToo, have birthed a hermeneutical lens that explores the gaping religious conundrums that are present for leaders and congregants concerning sexual offenses within the church. These theologians and Christian social activists are among growing numbers raising their voices in congregations like OP. They are employing Scripture to substantiate their efforts towards justice.

Our exploration of two Lukan pericopes, the Good Samaritan and the story of Mary and Martha, provides valuable lessons for church elders addressing #MeToo. Among these lessons, we will learn of expanded borders for "neighbor," reasons for the empowered to draw physically and emotionally close to survivors, and ways to identify what God's mercy should look like employed on behalf of those disenfranchised by #MeToo.

The NT, also with its stories of injustice towards females, offers fresh hope and reversal with the arrival of Jesus's new kingdom and his treatment of women. In the Lukan texts, extraordinary attention to the perspectives of women is given, closing the social distance that separated male and female in the ancient Mediterranean world.[10] As Cukrowski illuminates, in the book of Luke there is heartening evidence of God's care for females and Jesus's inclusion of them into the new kingdom. The many women described (balanced in number with men—several of whose narratives are featured prominently and many individually named) demonstrate that females are heard and

10. Kate Cooper*, Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* (New York : Overlook Press, 2013), 52.

valued. “Ancient writers often referred to a married couple by the man’s name only,” so it is significant that women are not just assembled with a male spokesperson to represent them.[11]

The other three Gospels, penned by men, apportion most of their text for male characters. This writing style is not unusual, as it is reflective of a society that generally sublimated women’s perspective to men’s.[12] By contrast, “one of Luke’s particular gifts is this ability to see how God speaks to, and through, women.”[13] Largely relegated in other Gospels to supporting characters, Luke spotlights women as lead actors, crafting character, plot, and dialogue that would have drawn in non-literate ancient listeners. The fact that Luke expounds on the feminine experience is significant and is a reversal from “an ancient Mediterranean society where men and women’s social lives were largely separate.”[14]

This third Gospel includes at least fifty references to women; the sensitivity to feminine experience stands out, and the sympathetic view intentionally reflects the reversal of Jesus’s new kingdom where “indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” (Luke 13:30.) “An unsympathetic writer could easily have suppressed the stories that tell us about the distinctive pressures that women face, but Luke chose not to.”[15] Luke shows us that women are named and therefore noticed.

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11. Cooper*, Band of Angels,* 6.

12. Stuart L. Love, *Jesus and Marginal Women: The Gospel of Matthew in Social-Scientific Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 8.

13. Cooper, *Band of Angels,* 52.

14. Cooper, *Band of Angels,* 52.

15. Cooper, *Band of Angels,* 53.

Significantly, Jesus also compassionately draws near to women. “Jesus touches and is touched by those whom we would not expect to find in such proximity to Him.” Among others, he “allows a sinful woman (Luke 7:39) and one with an issue of blood to touch him (Luke 8:44-47)” confirming Jesus’s extraordinary care for an oft-neglected population and his intentionality in closing the gap between these women and healing.[16]

By implication, church leadership should model this informed, appropriate physical affirmation for women who are #MeToo survivors, showing fatherly compassion for those under their care. These best-care practices can be learned and adopted within a training program for elders responding to #MeToo experiences of church women.

The Lukan texts show through a virgin forbearer (Luke 1:46-55) and a worldly woman (Luke 7:37) that *all* will be heard and provided for in Jesus’s kingdom. The Gospel of Luke is therefore a unique road map to help navigate the emotional and spiritual health of women for all times, including those impacted by #MeToo experiences in the church.

The Scriptures share many stories of women in the Bible who were not only unprotected but did not receive justice—at least not in any biblically recorded timeframe. This fact frustrates and illuminates why, arguably, there are fewer easy answers than hard questions in the pursuit of biblical response to #MeToo. From sexual misconduct perpetrated in ancient landscapes to today’s (Catholic and otherwise) church sanctuaries, there is informed and courageous navigation needed to address #MeToo.

16. Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds. *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 562.

Absence, or at least abdication, of leadership for #MeToo victims prevails in some biblical narratives, as it sometimes does in modern churches. For example, David, who is designated in the NT as "a man after God's own heart" (Acts 13:22), is not only woefully absent before and after his daughter Tamar's abuse but contributes to his daughter's further victimization by focusing more on others' acts of retribution.[17] Tamar, like many modern #MeToo victims who are collaterally wounded by those charged with their protection, is left in despair (2 Sam 13:20).

Despite missed opportunities to healthfully address #MeToo, redemption can occur from past mishandling of these events. With God, there is rich potential for church leaders who may have missed the mark.

This hopefulness recently occurred at OP when ministers and leaders quickly and transparently addressed an incident of sexual harassment that happened at a community event that OP hosted. Appropriately and courageously, the ministers and elders prioritized the needs of the young girl—a church visitor—who had been impacted. Rather than withholding information from the congregation, the minister disclosed appropriate details of the event during the following Sunday worship gathering and opened paths for further dialogue and support within the congregation. The minister's transparency and elder supported care for the girl and her family began healing for those most directly impacted. Additionally, some OP congregants appreciated the advocacy which they personally had not experienced in past church #MeToo incidents. The immediate outcomes showed increased trust in leadership because of the authenticity they

17. Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 42, 53.

demonstrated. There is hope that the increased awareness and advocacy for children will increase needed awareness and advocacy for adult female #MeToo victims as well. Designing training for elders handling #MeToo experiences of church women can affirm the need for courageous intervention on behalf of all victims and help mitigate a tendency for the #MeToo missteps of "hero-enablers." Leadership must be willing to hear victims and act swiftly on their behalf, not prioritize personal or institutional agendas. "Too little too late" occurs too frequently in responding to church-based #MeToo.

When a victim must wait for leaders to act on her behalf, she is subjected to fear that the abuser may harm her or another congregant during the interim while the elders are deciding what to do. Such was the case recently at OP when a young woman was sexually harassed by an older man who had repeatedly offended through the years. Leadership's tendency towards the abusive congregant in the past was to "talk with him" to show him the error of his ways, "keep an eye on him" to make sure he did not bother anyone again, and to temporarily limit his volunteer leadership roles. When, after a two-year suspension, he sexually harassed another woman, the elders decided he should leave the church for good.

This outcome gave the woman a sense of personal safety and confidence that leadership was looking out for her interests, not just those of the abuser. Though the prior victims were not afforded this positive outcome, they were hopeful that healthful progress was being made at OP in the present.

There is still education needed on how victims experience abuse and how leaders may sometimes unwittingly create additional burdens for the abused. To understand this concept, we know that women were often viewed as just a personal asset in the male-

dominated Israelite world that is foundational to our modern patriarchal traditions. Thus, anyone who violated a woman incurred wrath from her "owner." Trible summarizes this ancient patriarchy well, "Outrage erupts at the harm done to a man through his property but ignores the violence done against the woman herself."[18]

In this ancient landscape, we see that male-initiated protective and kind actions could bring significant and positive outcomes for vulnerable women. By extension, we can surmise that modern women congregants in a male-led church still should be listened to and compassionately honored when #MeToo experiences have occurred. The correct application of power by elders can yield life giving benefits not only for a survivor, but for the entire congregation. Outsiders who are assessing Christianity through the lens of #MeToo may also be positively impacted by this demonstration of justice. Discerning church leaders, through helpful training on #MeToo, can leverage this same compassion for marginalized victims to help them receive healing from our compassionate God.

New Testament Background

Both the emic (native) language of the broad spectrum of characters in Luke and the etic (outsiders) language serve to underscore Jesus's sympathetic trajectory of mercy and compassion. Our focus, emic language, refers to the perceptive communications of persons featured in the parables of Luke such as the one expanded here: the Good Samaritan, which is paired with the story of Mary and Martha. Cukrowski notes that, "When considering the moral vision of Luke, one finds a strong emphasis on love of God and neighbor" (Luke 10:27, 10:37, 10:38, 11:42).

18. Trible, *Text of Terror,* 83.

The Gospel of Luke frames positive approaches with which modern church leaders can align in the quest for theological solutions to #MeToo-based problems. Our exploration of the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha will extract valuable lessons for church elders addressing #MeToo.

In Luke, we find fresh understanding for questions of #MeToo through the highly relevant concept of "neighbor." Related to the theme of "neighbor" examined in Luke 10:25-37 are the adjoining intersections of reversal, distance, and kingdom.[19] Luke will serve as a framework for how Jesus and his near contemporaries would interpret and address #MeToo.

Luke 10:25–37 (NIV):

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

> 25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?" 27 He answered, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" 28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." 29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. 31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. 33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' 36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to

19. Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Gospel of Luke," *Sacra Pagina, Vol. 3,* ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 14, 22–24.

the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" 37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Jesus's teachings on "neighbor" give timeless messages on both who should encounter victims of sexual misconduct and how they should encounter those victims so that healing and true freedom result. These truths can be adopted by modern Christian leaders as they address #MeToo experiences of church women. In applying these truths, leaders can discover "a religious and theological vision that is, at its heart, liberative and potentially transformative for the social worlds human beings inhabit."[20]

In the story of the Good Samaritan, the central figure is the victim, a Jewish traveler that passersby encounter, and one with which Jewish listeners would identify.[21] The priest and Levite "represent typical representatives of Judean Judaism (priest in 1:5–8; 5:14; 22:50 and 54; a Levite appears only here in Luke and Acts 4:36)."[22]

The Samaritan character as rescuer defies traditional Jewish thought. The Samaritans, by NT times, were looked upon by the Jews as foreigners (Luke 17:18; cf. Matt 10:5), and mutual hostility existed (Luke 9:51-56). Though no clear answer for the breach is known, "there was apparently a period of gradual drifting apart during which a number of antagonisms, economic and political advantages, as well as religious differences intensified feelings."[23] Despite their antagonism, "the Samaritans shared with Jews who looked to Jerusalem many characteristic beliefs: an uncompromising belief in

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20. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, ed. *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* Vol. 3. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 725.

21. Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 184.

22. David A. Neale, *Luke 9-24: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2013), 69.

23. Neale, *Luke 9-24,* 69.

and worship of the one God; avoidance of images; loyalty to the law given by Moses, e.g., in rigid observance of the Sabbath, circumcision, and festivals."[24]

Jesus's use of the Samaritan as one who fulfills the role of rescuer—a reversal—would disrupt the scribe's elevated view of his own people as the rightful moral heroes.[25] By weaving the Samaritan figure into the lesson of "who is neighbor," Jesus is altering the narrative of who should receive mercy and who should administer it. Simultaneously, Jesus teaches about his enlarged new kingdom through both the disenfranchised Samaritan hero and a disenfranchised stranger. Ferguson writes of the empowered Samaritan character as a narrative vehicle, "Their position of religious proximity to but alienation from Jews who looked to Jerusalem meant that Christian preaching to them was a significant step toward the universalism of the gospel (Acts 8)."[26]

Jesus's use of the Samaritan in the story broadens the base of those who will serve their neighbors. There is an implication for today's Christians and church leaders to broaden and incorporate the best of care practices for those impacted by #MeToo.

For example, though both Jews and Samaritans shared fundamental beliefs about God, they seemed averse to partnering for ministry to the marginalized victim. As a design program to train elders in the best responses to female #MeToo experiences evolves, we can envision effective partnerships with others similarly motivated to bring freedom and healing—even if these collaborators are not from our tribe.

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24. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 423.

25. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 322.

26. Ferguson, *Backgrounds,* 424.

Another application for today taken from the Jewish religious leaders passing by the presumed Jewish victim is that we should be disturbed if our own eldership, the moral heroes of our church, will not take on the ministry of #MeToo for our own people. We should be discomforted that "heroes" from other organizations perform this ministry instead of our leaders.

The thought of "outsiders" doing ministry for our people because we refuse to do so is alarming and convicting, as much as Jesus's reversal of the moral hero would have been to the Jewish lawyer. Rather than overlooking the important ministry to victims of sexual misconduct, our religious leaders should be honored to administer informed care and mercy to #MeToo survivors. To embrace ministry to those in need is in our NT-church DNA. Training on how best to embrace those in need can aid elders.

In early Christianity, there was imperative to minister from the roots of Judaism as well as from Jesus's new kingdom inclusion of the marginalized. "Charity for the poor and the underprivileged was a characteristic of early Christianity. Benevolence toward others was an imitation of God's philanthropy for human beings."[27]

Early church fathers affirmed the need to care for those who were hurting. "Justin and Tertullian report that the contributions collected in the assemblies were used to provide for the sick, elderly, widows, orphans, prisoners, travelers, and burial of the poor. . . . Clement of Alexandria counseled that it was better to do good to the unworthy than, by guarding against the unworthy, to fail to do good to the worthy."[28] This rich heritage

27. Everett Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, vol. 1 of *Church History,* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 156.

28. Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation,* 156.

of service substantiates our need to address #MeToo compassionately for our fellow Christian congregants, even if some *might* take advantage of this care in some fashion.

The Good Samaritan story unfolds as Jesus fields a challenge from a Jewish lawyer, or "scribe." Jesus's "counter question . . . implies that the core of the gospel is present and knowable to the scribe in Torah, 'concealed in the OT and revealed in the NT,' as Augustine would later say."[29]

While Jesus answers the lawyer's question about eternal life with another question, the Lukan Jesus retains his general regard for the OT and a specific regard for the law. "But the continuing legitimacy of the Law has a conditional aspect based on the emergence of the new age (16:16–17 and 24:44–49)."[30] This new age, a kingdom where love of God and love of neighbor are equal, shapes our reaction to those who are our unlikely neighbor.

In reviewing Cukrowski's analysis of the marginalized, we see that the unlikely neighbor is considered disenfranchised because he is beaten, robbed, and helpless. The traumatic experiences of this stranger parallel those of many victims of #MeToo and find expansion in the additional, often emotionally complicated circumstances of women abused within the sanctity of their church.

Initial responses of the priest, the Levite, and the Samaritan to the broken traveler reveal much about the new kingdom and how we and our leaders should respond to victims. The priest and Levite's actions consist of two sparse movements concerning the traveler: "saw him" and "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31):

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29. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 318-19.

30. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 68.

> A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. 32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

In stark contrast, the use of verbs by the good Samaritan is intentionally rich and varied (Luke 10:33-36).

> But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. 34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. 35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

The underlined verbs of the Samaritan's actions serve to emphasize the minimalist movement and verb forms of the earlier passages about the religious onlookers (Luke 10:26). Notably, the actions of the Samaritan include significant physical contact: drawing near, bandaging wounds, applying healing oil, picking the man up, lifting the man onto the mule, delivering the man to an inn, caring for the man, paying the innkeeper for the man, and opening an extended tab for the man.

The priest and the Levite are juxtaposed with the Samaritan to spotlight their corresponding negative treatment of the fallen traveler. With the Samaritan, rich in response, there are at least twelve action verbs. The many action verbs indicating that the Samaritan moves close to the victim demonstrate Jesus's teachings about the distance (emotional, spiritual, and physical) between those who are commanded to show mercy and those who are to receive it.

One #MeToo survivor said,

> It was the distance she stood from me that hurt me—as I told my story of sexual abuse, I saw the look of shock and obvious discomfort on my Christian friend's face and she physically moved away from me—as if I, her once cool and *normal* friend was now infested with some condition that she could neither relate to, respond to, or offer comfort for.

The humiliation this survivor felt with one of her own church members finds parallel with the Jewish onlookers and the Jewish victim. Even if the victim is "one of our own," there is perceived emotional if not physical risk in drawing near to ones who are wounded like the battered traveler in the Good Samaritan parable. The risk is even more pronounced if the victim's condition has the taint of sexual exploitation with its associated taboos.

Actions speak louder than words in #MeToo situations, and training can help leaders understand dynamics of trauma-informed care so they do not inadvertently speak words or display body language that further alienate a victim.[31] Humiliation finds linkage with Jesus's ignoble death by crucifixion, an intentionally debasing act for the victim, often involving nudity and torture.[32] In application, church leadership should be honored to minister to those survivors of #MeToo, just as if they were ministering to the Lord. Ministry can be enhanced by #MeToo training. This #MeToo ministry will require courage, determination, and intentional adaptation of best care practices by church leadership.

The experience of the referenced #MeToo survivor, Respondent H, echoes the space and distance in the Good Samaritan parable. Noteworthy is the distance the first two onlookers maintain from the wounded man as they "passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:22–23). The Jewish religious leaders remain uninvolved—unmoved by this unidentified victim's suffering. In application, for church leaders to ignore #MeToo

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31. Trauma Informed Care Resources Guide: Crisis Prevention Institute, 2017. https://educate.crisisprevention.com/Trauma-Informed-Care.

32. Robin M. Jensen, *The Cross: History, Art, and Controversy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), 41.

victims is to defy God's commands to show mercy for those who are suffering in our midst.

Additionally, throughout the text of Luke, themes involving distance are employed. Passages describing coming and going from Jerusalem abound (Luke 9:51–19:27.) Jerusalem serves as a base of Jesus's operations, and a motif of movement in relation to the holy epicenter stands out. God's kingdom that will supersede Jerusalem metaphorically solidifies new identities for Christ followers as well.

Continuing the theme of time in the Good Samaritan parable, we see that contrasted to the Jewish leaders' brief encounter, the Samaritan's care for the victim spans at least two days and puts him at personal risk. "Public inns and houses were often associated with prostitutes, thieves, bedbugs, and filth. Depositing two denarii—equivalent of two days wages (Matt 20:2)—with a proprietor of such a place, attest to the serious condition of the wounded man and the risk incurred by the Samaritan to help him."[33]

The lengthy time of care contrasts with the shortened distance between the caregiver and the cared for. The Samaritan risks closeness to the wounded traveler. The Samaritan has emotionally and physically connected with the victim. "The Samaritan's compassion is not just a feeling but a series of concrete actions in which the Samaritan expends himself and his resources to meet the needs of the injured man."[34]

These actions include multiple ways of caring, going beyond the standard Jewish expectations of that day and exponentially growing the definition of "neighbor.

33. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Luke*, 323.

34. Tannehill, *Luke*, 184.

Additionally, the concept of "neighbor" reveals Jesus's vision of how one who follows Christ should respond to suffering humanity.

In parallel, we find the responses to #MeToo today by some church leaders to include reactions of indifference, fear, embarrassment, or, latent guilt. Perhaps, like the ancient Jewish religious onlookers experienced, there is perceived to be too much to be lost and nothing to be gained by getting involved.

In telling the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus has inaugurated a new spiritual imperative for moral leaders to risk the perceived losses and physically and emotionally "draw near" to those who are wounded. Is the sexually harassed or abused female in our church context our "neighbor"? If so, what is our commitment and concern and care for this unfortunate "neighbor"? How extravagantly will we choose to care for those who have been victimized? Like the man fallen on the road, the circumstances leading up to the abuse may not be apparent or ever fully known. Yet, we are urged—no, *commanded*—to recognize the pain of our neighbor and intersect their victimization.

Examination of the juxtaposed stories of the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha follows. At first glance, these two passages have little connection. Upon a closer look, however, there is evidence that these stories with male and female characters are intentionally paired, as are over twenty, gender-descriptive passages throughout the Lukan Gospel. The balance of male and female characters connotes the value given to both sexes, implying God's equal care for issues of men *and* women.

> Luke 10:38–42 New International Version
>
> At the Home of Martha and Mary
>
> 38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary,

> who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."

The story of sisters Mary and Martha exhibits traditional Mediterranean hospitality but transforms the scene with behaviors that indicate Jesus's new kingdom. As Joel Green expounds, "Luke's narration is manifestly concerned with the motif of hospitality. This is apparent already in the opening sentence, with the use of language that ties this episode to the preceding scenes of journeying and receiving welcome (and rejection.)"[35]

In a reversal of traditional roles, Mary is granted access and affirmed in her desire to learn at the feet of Jesus. Mary "is positioned 'at the Lord's feet,' signifying her submissiveness, particularly her status as a disciple (Acts 22:3)."[36] This posture of submission is like that of a disciple learning from a rabbi and is natural for teacher and student. As Mary fulfills this new role in neglect of her former, restricted female role, she exemplifies new emphasis on listening to God's word. Through Mary, "Luke illuminates his overarching concern with genuine 'hearing' of the word of God (cf. 8:4-21)."[37]

Mary's access into an intellectual world where women were not usually allowed signifies change. For Martha, the change may be temporarily unwelcomed, effectively leaving her to manage the necessary aspects of hospitality for the gathering on her own.

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35. Joel B. Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 433.

36. Green, *Hearing the New Testament*, 435.

37. Green, *Hearing the New Testament*, 433-434.

Jesus collegially chides Martha whose hospitality he both expects and enjoys, indicating that though her traditional roles are not diminished, an enlarged opportunity for egalitarian fellowship is now begun. Some scholars believe Jesus's reprimand of Martha simultaneously shows his affection for her and his familiarity with her hospitality, another indication that He considers her an equal worth speaking candidly to.[38] While encouraging Mary in her new discipleship posture, Cooper offers that "Luke is also exploring the concerns of the women like Martha who shouldered responsibility for the fledging movement. He stops to consider the resentment they would feel if they began to suspect that their generosity or their work of organizing and providing was being taken for granted."[39]

Jesus's frank criticism of Martha is simultaneously a redirection and a sign of respect.[40] Martha is actively serving others just as the Samaritan served "neighbor." Mary, however, is esteemed with the counterbalance of ministry—that is, the discipline of "listening" to the Word. We will see linkage to #MeToo ministry as, "the Samaritan loves his neighbor, and Mary loves her Lord . . . but the model for the disciple is found in the juxtaposition of the two. To the lawyer, Jesus says, 'Go and do,' but he praises Mary for sitting and listening. The life of a disciple requires both."[41]

Both the commandment to "go and do" as well as the mandate to "sit and listen" serve to give insight on how church leaders need to approach #MeToo scenarios.

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38. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, 45.

39. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, 45.

40. Cooper, *Band of Angels*, 46.

41. Leander E. Keck, ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. 9* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 232.

> The parable of the good Samaritan notes how one is to be a neighbor rather than simply to identify who a neighbor might be. . . . Mary sits devotedly before Jesus, earning his praise. Jesus then teaches the Disciples' Prayer (often called the Lord's Prayer) as he shows them how to depend on God and turn to him in prayer for God's will and for core material and spiritual needs.[42]

Jesus is instructing in the dual purposes of discipleship that church leaders must embrace to effectively minister to #MeToo experiences of women. Though comforting and traditional acts of service may lead us down familiar paths, Jesus instead calls us to prioritize listening and learning from Him and, in turn, hearing those who are our neighbors, including #MeToo survivors. Only after this contemplative expenditure can those addressing #MeToo have comprehensive resources to minister well.

Returning to the parable of the Good Samaritan,

> Jesus presents his final challenge. The lawyer may or may not 'go and do likewise,' but having come to understand love of neighbor in a new way through the parable, new ways of acting are made possible. The scene ends with this possibility rather than with rejection by the lawyer. Thus, this dialogue with a lawyer qualifies the possible impression of verse twenty-one that those who value Jewish wisdom are hopelessly closed to the new revelation.[43]

The focus on themes of reversal, kingdom, and distance, exhibited by Jesus's "long, circuitous journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51–19:27) serve as foundation for responding to women impacted by #MeToo.[44] This scriptural foundation will inform the design of training curriculum for those in OP leadership tasked with responding to the pain of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence.

In Chapter 3, theoretical foundations for this intervention will be explored.

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42. Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 73.

43. Tannehill, *Luke*, 181.

44. Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary,* 727.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

As we search for God's will in the church-focused #MeToo movement and attempt a Christian response, we must employ the wisdom of caring professions best practices. These practices include professional counseling and crisis management techniques. This *phronesis* (wisdom that is good judgment)[1] gained through such resources creates linkage for our effective ministry, which in turn, is God's activity or praxis. *Praxis* is the way we as a church align with his mission while seeking answers as witnesses, guides, and interpreters.[2]

How do these professional resources intersect with the tasks of OP? How do these professional resources align with the goals to use the Bible as foundation for teaching and responding to social justice issues like #MeToo? These questions and their answers serve as a theoretical frame as we strive to minister to OP-based, #MeToo as Jesus would.

Background

Rather than ignoring culture, OP ministerial leaders are called to interpret #MeToo and guide others towards God's response. As media coverage of a wide

1. Dorothy C. Bass, ed. *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 5.

2. Carson E. Reed, "The Geometry of a Theology of Ministry," *ResQ* 56 (2014): 179.

spectrum of sexual misconduct continues via #MeToo, we can compassionately connect with those OP adult women harboring pain inflicted in our context. This project indicates that the female congregants at OP experience #MeToo scenarios statistically the same as females of all populations in general.

In conducting initial information gathering, ethnographic tools were employed. Applying family systems theory to church relationships as well as encouraging congregants to tell their stories lends insight into how OP truly functions. This narrative, in addition to resources on trauma-informed care, creates a practical framework for navigating #MeToo events at OP.

While acknowledging God's characteristics of mercy, love, and justice and aspiring to them, leaders at OP have not always emulated those characteristics in #MeToo situations. For example, one elder, Respondent B, reflected on the fact that we have often worked hard at OP to extend grace to the offender, while denying the same merciful, loving, and just responses to the abused.

Respondent C, a licensed family therapist who works in mental health with vulnerable populations (90 percent of whom are victims of sexual abuse), offered that, "Trauma-informed care is really, really important. . . . for example, we need to make sure that victims don't have to re-tell their story multiple times, because that act in and of itself can be re-traumatizing." Respondent C's professional experiences add to her conviction as a Christian to "be the ones to speak about these [#MeToo] issues because we are the ones with the power [God's] to heal."

Reed informs us that being a minister entails "Encountering a person or a community that needs transforming work." As such, we are called as ministers to make a "soteriological move"—producing a solution or pastoral help for one in need.

For the training need at OP, best practices and trauma-informed care principles that we can utilize include: [3]

1. Deeper awareness about key trauma-related concepts:
    a. Trauma: An event or series of events, an experience or prolonged experiences, and/or a threat or perceived threats to a person's well-being.
        i. Acute trauma (Type I): Results from exposure to a single overwhelming event.
        ii. Complex trauma (Type II): Results from extended exposure to traumatizing situations.
        iii. Crossover trauma (Type III): Results from a single traumatic event that is devastating enough to have long-lasting effects.
    b. Trauma-Informed Care: A framework of thinking and interventions that are directed by a thorough understanding of the profound neurological, biological, psychological, and social effects trauma has on an individual—recognizing that person's constant interdependent needs for safety, connections, and ways to manage emotions/impulses.
    c. Triggers: Signals that act as signs of possible danger, based on historical traumatic experiences and which lead to a set of emotional, physiological,

3. Crisis Prevention Institute, "Trauma Informed Care." 2017.

and behavioral responses that arise in the service of survival and safety (e.g., sights, sounds, smells, touch).

d. Vicarious/Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue: A process through which one's own experience becomes transformed through engagement with an individual's trauma.

2. A greater understanding of trauma's effects on behavior.
3. Tips for preventing re-traumatization.
4. Learning as much as you can.
5. Growing your skill of attunement.
6. Looking for the causes of behaviors.
7. Using person-centered, strength-based thinking and language.
8. Providing consistency, predictability, and choice-making opportunities.
9. Always weighing the physiological, psychological, and social risks of any physical interventions.
10. Debriefing.
11. De-escalation techniques.
12. Legal considerations.
13. Resources and activities to address #MeToo in appropriate theological frameworks.
14. Creating a safe and confidential environment for listening to #MeToo survivors.

Creating a safe and confidential environment for listening to #MeToo survivors is a primary need at OP and an expected outgrowth of the training design's future

implementation. Also, including regular places for small group dialogue and spaces in our corporate worship for lament will help victims heal.

This healing activity, supported in Scripture, gives expression to both lament and hope. Steinke writes, "In a broken world, hope and lament are partners."[4] Even in imprecatory psalms, such as Psalm 13, we understand that God hears us and accepts our cries for justice and restoration. The Scriptures give individuals hope for a better future that can be shared. These church spaces for healing expression "are reinterpreted to articulate the new thing God is doing and will do as the people of God continue on their journey."[5]

Acknowledging the pain of those who are sexually victimized and conveying that we can listen to hard things are the beginnings of our care. There is wisdom in sharing from our collective leaders as well as professionals affiliated with #MeToo experiences. Together, prayerfully, we can make plans to respond lovingly and prudently to acts of sexual misconduct and utilize best practices to focus on the healing of the victim.

Family Systems Theory and the Role of Secrets

During this project, a recurring theme of secrets and their ramifications emerged. Some interviewed at OP have become part of the "inner circle" that Friedman describes in his seminal work on family systems theory (as will be further explored below).[6] Family systems theory helps interpret and consider time-tested, healthful counseling-based care options as we encounter the #MeToo movement.

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4. Peter Steinke, *A Door Set Open: Grounding Change in Mission and Hope* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2010), 39.

5. Steinke, *A Door Set Open*, 9.

6. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52.

Family Systems and Secrets Background

As discussed in Chapter 1, Friedman's theory uses characteristics of nuclear family dynamics to provide insights for conflict resolution within a church family. The family systems way of thinking is characterized by:

> Focusing on (emotional) process rather than symptomatic content, seeing effects as integral parts of structures rather than as an end point in linear chains of cause, eliminating symptoms by modifying structure rather than by trying to change the dysfunctional part directly and predicting how a given part is likely to function not by analyzing its nature but by observing its position in the system.[7]

Applying family systems theory to results from key interviews with invested OP congregants (elders, ministry staff, and mental health professionals) has resulted in initial insights into the dynamics of our congregation. Ability to conduct this good ethnography through listening and learning at OP comes best from maintaining "low anxiety."[8] Moschella informs us that though we are always *part* of our context and cannot fully separate from what we study, we can study our environment more effectively if we are not caught up in over-arching emotionality.[9] Friedman also describes this often sacrificial, non-anxious presence as "the capacity of members of the clergy to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters."[10] He further illuminates that this ability to maintain emotional balance, "may be the most significant capability in . . . [our

7. Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 18.

8. Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 18.

9. Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2008), 88.

10. Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 18.

ministerial] arsenal."[11] Nonanxiously joining the work that God is already doing helps to relieve unhealthy stressors at OP as well as begin healing from #MeToo.[12]

One theme in my OP interviews features secrets—both the keeping of and the unburdening of. Secrets, as Friedman explains, "act as the plaque in the arteries of communication; they cause stoppage in the general flow and not just at the point of their existence."[13] He continues, "Far more significant than the content of any family secret is the ramification of its existence for the emotional processes of the entire family."[14]

This principle is true of families, but also as Friedman (and my project) indicates, it is true of congregations like OP. Being able to authentically hear truths about #MeToo for the first time in our church history is potentially blazing a trail for authentic dialogue in other areas as well.

Friedman informs, "The formation of a family [or church] secret is always symptomatic of other things going on in the family [church]."[15] The recent OP interviews indicate that ripples extend from key events to form secrets. The OP interviews, an ethnographic "telling of story," served as a powerful mechanism to process #MeToo church secrets.

This processing revealed support of Friedman's theory of triangulation (rigid relational formations which are often present in secret keeping.)[16] In some cases these

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11. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 208.

12. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 208.

13. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52.

14. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 52.

15. Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 53.

16. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 19.

secrets have been kept strictly and willfully, and in some cases these secrets have been kept loosely and reluctantly (for example, by some who seek to extract themselves from #MeToo secret keeping.) Our collective church secrets have shaped us in ways that are not clear but hinted at significance as my project continued.

OP Interviews and Implications of Family Systems Theory

The result of my project (a survey, focus groups, interviews, and design team sessions) confirms that the OP congregation navigates in various (unhealthy) ways around its secrets, including prominent #MeToo secrets. A line-up of characters and triangulated episodes emerge as family systems theory is applied to OP. A brief look at our rules, rituals, and goals sheds light on how we may have gotten here—a juncture where authentic assessment and course correction can lead to God's preferred future at OP.

Some of the rules aspired to at OP include:

1. Adherence to Scriptures: All communications align with Scripture.
2. Alignment with leadership: Everyone is to follow the elders' decisions and stance on teachings.
3. Egalitarianism: All male and female members are to be included and treated fairly.

Some of the pertinent rituals at OP include:

1. Meeting with elders: Meetings on important topics occur with elder(s). These meetings may be initiated by elders, ministerial staff, and congregants.
2. Going "down front" during Sunday morning worship service: Speaking, serving, asking for special prayers (these prayers are generally treated as higher

priority than others), confessionals, etc., given at the front of the auditorium signify importance, especially if an elder is present there as well.

3. Savvy use of optics and communication forms, especially social media: Congregants see more positive communications presented more quickly and they are usually accompanied by pleasant optics. For example, reaching a special budget goal is a joyful event and often is delivered in communications with colorful, celebrative visuals and a jovial in-person announcement in church. For unpleasant news, such communications may be delayed significantly. Additionally, if the optics or delivery of important news is not pleasant and/or familiar, the general interpretation is that there is trouble. Silence on an issue historically indicates *bigger* trouble. An example of this might be a significant dispute amongst leadership or, as found within this study, an issue of sexual harassment within the congregation where there is not a clear path for resolution and/or communications at this time.

The interviews in this research reflect OP rules/rituals and spotlight historically unarticulated experiences in the area of sexual harassment and abuse. One of the interviewees, Interviewee F, a past ministry leader at OP, shared her experiences about sexual harassment at our church. Courageously and unexpectedly, Interviewee F consented to my interview. She relayed that it was in part because of my work with the "After #MeToo" event and her interest in the growing #MeToo movement in the culture. Interviewee F described one of her #MeToo experiences at OP:

> Personally, with this person, I, uh, would, not even occasionally, but consistently be, what I would say, be held hostage in conversation, um, with this person who was large, intimidating, um, kind of a person and he would say things like, 'You know I can't live without you,' um, and not quietly, but where everyone could

> hear. And at first, you're thinking, 'Alright, calm down,' but as it goes on, it does get more uncomfortable when that conversation goes on and won't stop. And that's the most recent thing I've experienced, and that has been in the last year.

Interviewee F also later relayed sexually abusive incidences that she and others had endured previously with a leader who was their superior at church. Her prolonged anxiety over non-resolution and feeling that she must remain silent was palpable. By Interviewee F's example, we can see that anxiety related to these "secrets," as Friedman suggests, can remain powerfully in place for a long time. Self-imposed distancing from church-wide events that would put in her contact with the abusive leader resulted in internalized feelings of loss and disorientation. Interviewee F said, "I couldn't stand listening to this person telling us what the Bible said and how to live, all the while getting by with abusive behaviors in our church."

This portrayal of abusive behavior, going unchecked for a time, still impacts the spiritual life of Interviewee F. Interviewee F's choice not to share the information from our interview with the elders at the time of this writing, illustrates another aspect of secret keeping. Interviewee F exhibited anxiety about consequences if she should report—another challenge experienced by other #MeToo victims.

A conversation with a current elder, Respondent B, (who had also been an elder in the past when known incidences of sexual misconduct (including Interviewee F's) had taken place in our congregation), was insightful. Respondent B significantly built bridges of trust since in contrast, some elders seemed to be "looking the other way" in their official response to church impropriety.

Respondent B reflected on the dynamics of sexual harassment in the current #MeToo media storm and said he was convicted that OP had not addressed the past pain

that has been incurred by congregants experiencing sexual harassment and abuse. Respondent B opened new lines of reflection on how we manage alleged sexual misconduct at OP. He reiterated the incident that had happened over three decades ago when a stepfather was found guilty and imprisoned for sexually abusing his stepdaughter who was in the OP youth program.

In authentic reflection, Respondent B told how he and the other OP elders supported the man as he come forward "down front" during worship service to confess his sin and desire for reconciliation with OP and his wife (who had separated from him.) Applying family systems theory, the initial acceptance of this man back into the church and the desired reunion of the man and his wife may have been forced—with the untrained, well-intended OP leaders complicit as they tried to "work with this man and his wife to reconcile the marriage." Respondent B implied that the sexually abused young woman became collateral damage in the pressing, homeostatic (preferred church balance) goal of showing grace and restoration to the stepfather and in the goal of trying to avoid a divorce within the congregation. The stepfather thus became the "identified patient."[17] This designation is consistent with Friedman's family systems theory as the stepfather was the one in whom the church family's stress most surfaced. The congregational stress manifested in what appeared to be positive attention or 'grace' for the stepfather. In giving 'grace' to the stepfather, however, the well-meaning congregants simultaneously conveyed neglect for the wife and young daughter. This misplaced focus on the abuser resonates with Respondent B's reflective question and is a common theme in stories of #MeToo.

17. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 19.

Respondent B said that in hindsight, more should have been done for the daughter involved, as well as the secondary victim, the man's wife, who briefly reconciled and then divorced. Respondent B exhibited genuine sadness as he shared that he had no idea what had happened to the daughter in ensuing years.

This experience and reflective "look back" led Respondent B to share that in the future, we need policy and procedure to genuinely care for the pain that the victims had felt and that this should always include employing outside professionals. The #MeToo movement, Respondent B shared, had shined a light on better practices of care than had been readily available/utilized at OP in the past.

With a victimization at church, as Respondent B and Respondent C concluded, it can be easy to believe that "the matter has been handled," when it has only been addressed on the surface. The optic of the stepfather coming "down front" for confession and the well-intended, tearful congregants trying to restore him was dramatic and convincingly sincere, but it was detrimental to the victim.

In *Restoring the Soul of the Church*, Hopkins and Laaser extended the concept of family systems theory as they elaborated that healing (especially from abuse within a trusted church context) can take a very long time, depending on the relational positioning of the various congregants to the abuser and the abuser's role in the church.[18] These authors testify of many cases where the church leaders "moved on" more quickly from the abuse than was prudent, since the impact to them was perhaps much less than to the victim and more closely devastated congregants (for example, the victim's family, new converts who looked up to the abuser as a spiritual father (or mother), close fellow staff

18. Hopkins and Laaser, *Restoring the Soul of a Church*, 31.

members of the abuser, relatives of the abuser, etc.)[19] In assessing the many angles of #MeToo, further relational dynamics of OP are evaluated.

The Level of Anxiety and Reactivity in the System

From events that have been observed at OP during this project, the level of anxiety seemed high and was then exacerbated by the pandemic. This anxiety is generally present if dramatic events—such as financial distress, serious illness, or departure of a leader occur. Another source of anxiety arises with the championing (often on social media) of a perceived too-liberal, social justice cause, even if it is initiated by well-loved, sympathetic, and/or respected members of the congregation.

Congregants who go to meet with the elders leverage a traditional reactivity in the system because they will often receive more attention than others due to their perceived respect of the elder position and honored request for an in-person hearing. In one case, an offender who was friends with an OP elder repeatedly went to an additional elder to request a meeting with the victim. When this second elder, sensitive to the survivor's needs, flatly refused to hold the meeting, the offender went back to his original elder friend to complain about unfair treatment. The savvy abuser had attempted a sympathetic, even spiritual-seeming face-to-face reconciliation with the victim by using his knowledge of "elder-respect."

Wisely, in this case, the elders stood with the victim, although, because there was no clear policy, they were not able to provide convincing assurance to the victim that the offender would not repeat offend or retaliate against her. The elders at the time resolved to "keep an eye on him."

19. Hopkins, *Restoring the Soul*, 31.

Renowned trauma specialist Judith Herman explains why there is a tendency to overlook the survivor in this way: "It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. . . . The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering."[20]

Two years later, this aforementioned man sexually harassed another younger woman at OP who bravely reported it, and the elders eventually told the offender to leave the church for good. This application of biblical church discipline was a sign of healthy progress at OP, notably impacted by the rejection of the "conflicted-survivor" role, as this young woman bravely reported and self-advocated. Likewise, a core group of elders truly supported this survivor, becoming heroes rather than "hero-enablers."

When dealing with other public and/or potentially negative impacts to OP (unrelated to #MeToo events), anxiety is generally managed by leadership with quick reactions. In addition to elders-only meetings, elders and staff regularly have joint meetings including prayer times that serve to seek God's wisdom and ask direction. Reliably, these are sincere rituals to invoke God's blessing.

Most of the elders and ministers exhibit self-differentiation in that they can remain a non-anxious presence while exhibiting "the capacity for some awareness of their own position in the relationship system."[21] Patterns at OP include swift action followed by selective outpourings of grace, but sometimes the follow-up, such as in #MeToo events, has been lacking. The initial "fire" seems to cool as either the focused congregant

20. Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* (New York: BasicBooks, 1992), 7–8.

21. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

(sinner or victim—as Friedman designates, "the identified patient") gets somehow "detached" from the focused effort, either because they are perceived to be getting better and there is convincing indication of "progress," or the lack of professional skills, understanding, and/or dedicated time commitment to the event is diminished. These factors have characterized the addressing of #MeToo in the past.

This project has evidenced signs of health and hopefulness. The goal at OP of incorporating women into avenues of worship is a healthy one that also has linkage to addressing #MeToo as well as other issues that impact women.

Similarly, efforts to directly impact OP with authentic teaching of God's word about sexual expression are a healthful sign. Respondent A relayed efforts to support such positive changes: "what led to the #MeToo movement was an unhealthy expression of sexuality, right, and who knows, I mean, every different individual who took part in that unhealthy expression had various events in their life leading up to that unhealthy expression of sexuality." Changes like Respondent A are making give room for addressing #MeToo issues and extending healing more effectively at OP. Additionally, the giving and receiving of authentic grace plays a big part of the hopeful story at OP. Sometimes "grace" has been misappropriated by leaders to religiously shove an issue under the rug—especially when it comes to #MeToo scenarios. As the interviews demonstrate, however, there exists a great motivation to emulate God's pure grace at OP.

Though an imperfectly executed response to #MeToo has happened in the past, there is true conviction that God is capable, faithful, and merciful. We as his people must demonstrate this authentic grace in navigating sexual misconduct that has been present in our congregation.

It is healthful that for the first time we are having intentional, guided discussion on #MeToo as it applies to OP. As a by-product, we can address other societal issues that need answers. It is spiritually healthy that Christians lead in this effort.

OP elders have recently been supportive of two larger events directly addressing human trafficking as well as the "After #MeToo" event. This new, general openness to the topic of sexual exploitation is informed by the #MeToo movement and is healthfully supported by OP leadership.

Conclusion

The theory pursued in this project to design training for elders at OP navigating #MeToo with the church utilizes best practices including family systems theory and trauma-informed care. As Richard Osmer's work affirms, #MeToo ministry is "the liberating work of God against institutional structures that bind and oppress."[22] This ministry towards resolving systemic issues of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence aligns with theological themes of freedom and healing.

Transformational ministry will occur in designing training for elders addressing #MeToo. This training design will enhance theological frames to incorporate best practices towards the spiritual freedom from #MeToo found only in Christ.

22. Richard Osmer, "Empirical Practical Theology," in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 61-77.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION

Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated the need for both theological and theoretical foundations for church leaders navigating #MeToo. Chapter 4 describes the method that was developed to begin addressing those needs through a training program design for elders.

Methodology

This section introduces the methods used in this intervention. These methods include the formation of a Christian training design team, a description of the team sessions, and subsequent curriculum elements found necessary for an effective OP elder training design. This team focused on:

1. Gathering and reporting best practices from healthcare, professional counseling, and crisis response disciplines.
2. Determining the best integration with scriptural foundations, doctrinal guidelines, and normative practice within OP.
3. Designing a curriculum framework for the elder training program.
4. Participating in evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention.

The Formation of the Training Design Team

The formation of the team began with recruiting care professionals and vested congregant-leaders to design curriculum that would help elders in addressing #MeToo incidents. I would serve as facilitator with the six team members.

These team members would bring the spiritual gifts, skillsets, and influence to help elders understand and respond to sexual harassment/abuse/violence experiences of adult females at OP. The team came with extraordinary expertise and energy, as well as key relationships and positive history towards influencing the elders to accept the training program design. Since OP, like most churches, has not had a policy on #MeToo experiences of women in the church in our past, we would be breaking new ground in many ways.

The discomfort of addressing an oft-taboo topic of sexual harassment/abuse/ violence in the church while also navigating a pandemic would be challenging. As described earlier in this project, handling the #MeToo topic *alone* at OP would entail acknowledging hard truths and making significant paradigm shifts.

Though several of the elders had professional backgrounds that gave exposure to secular language and some training on sexual harassment/abuse/violence of women, they did not have an accompanying theological foundation to moor identification and employment of #MeToo best practices. For example, one of the elders had management training concerning #MeToo at his workplace, but its focus was not as much about attending to the survivor as avoiding liability. Such training efforts, though informative, were devoid of a scriptural and religious basis for addressing sexual harassment and abuse of church women by other church members.

There would be additional challenges for this project. Of the original elders who supported this effort to address #MeToo in 2017, five resigned, moved, or passed away. (The training design program was eventually presented to the remaining elders and approved in February 2021.)

The ongoing pandemic and state and church restrictions played a factor in elders being able to meet as they had prior to the pandemic. The past elder group had voiced strong support for an egalitarian worship model, and women had just recently been accepted as leaders in the traditional first service (non-instrumental and historically exclusively male-led.) As discussed earlier, there is strong linkage to a church's egalitarian views and human rights of women; if both are not supported by church elders, it is likely neither is supported. Additionally, this research strongly indicated that though we were an emerging egalitarian congregation, we were still not immune to church-based sexual harassment/abuse/violence of women, even women who were in leadership roles. In *A Church Called Tov*, McKnight and Barringer described a parallel phenomenon at Willow Creek Community Church where several female survivors were also church leaders.[1] Aspiring egalitarianism is not a cure for preventing church-based #MeToo.

Members of this intervention design team, in addition to being well-qualified, needed to be bridge-builders and influencers as well. It was hoped that the team's close interaction with the elders and positive conversations about the design program's progress would help normalize #MeToo concepts and win acceptance of a final training design.

I recruited a team consisting of four men and two women ranging in age from early twenties to early seventies. One member of the team was a person of color. Members were affiliated with a variety of disciplines, including professional counseling, ministry, medical and allied healthcare, business/project management, and church eldership.

1. McKnight, *A Church Called Tov*, 2.

Placing two elders on the team was highly beneficial. Not only could we best access their discernment, spiritual strength, and skills, but we would also benefit by their congregational influence. The biblically based, relational status of elders in our context would prove essential to program design approval. Though beyond the scope of this intervention, the elders' influence could help achieve much desired training implementation and policy in the future.

I leveraged my own background in adult education, hospital chaplaincy, OP staff work, and advanced theological training from both Pepperdine University and Abilene Christian University (ACU) to facilitate equipping the team and structuring each team session. In addition to my own field notes and recordings of each meeting, a team member volunteered as scribe to summarize key points of our meetings each week and share them on Google Docs. This allowed everyone to add comments and resource links.

After initial informal conversations with past focus group members and prospective new team members, I assessed basic personality characteristics, emotional maturity, willingness to work on a difficult topic, and capacity to respect and effectively collaborate with the other proposed team members. I next assessed the ability of the members to work within their own emotional, psychological, and spiritual limits on this difficult subject, drawing from my training in clinical pastoral care. Additionally, I evaluated the ability of team members to maintain the highest levels of confidentiality while dealing with discussion of potentially emotionally charged content around church-based #MeToo.

As a last step, it was important to gain understanding of the team members prior exposure to #MeToo events as well as their perception of the continuing #MeToo

movement and associated movements such as #ChurchToo. Although such #MeToo experiences and perceptions could enhance a person's performance on our team, it was also true that these experiences and perceptions could impede performance on our team. For example, possible unresolved issues stemming from their own #MeToo-related experiences could add complexity to our task. Of primary concern was the consideration that a team member's past sexual harassment/abuse/violence experiences or pain surrounding such events might be negatively triggered by discussion of #MeToo and that there could be potential re-traumatization. Though team members were not directly asked if they had had personal sexual harassment/abuse/violence histories, some had self-reported during our focus group and interviews. These members shared that their experiences/perceptions would strengthen their contributions to the team. Additionally, some said that being a member of the team would be cathartic and empowering for them personally.

After these communications, I sent a formal invitation email detailing the objectives, schedule, and projected time commitment for the design team intervention, and follow-up communications were made as needed. All agreed to sign on to the team except one female medical professional who chose to opt out due to pressing family commitments.

The core design team emerged with one female professional counselor with specialized training and work with sexual abuse survivors, a male healthcare businessmen with leadership responsibilities in several social justice ministries of our church, a male with undergraduate theological training who has given pastoral care to both survivors of abuse as well as offenders, a female with advanced theological training who has

counseled some OP survivors of sexual abuse, two elders (an administrative elder with professional human resources management experience who leads a racial unity ministry team and a pastoral elder who was a certified spiritual director and also a medical professional) and myself as researcher with advanced theological training and hospital chaplaincy training, as well as professional adult education course design and delivery expertise.

After opening with prayer, making introductions, overviewing scope and objectives of the training design team, stipulating confidentiality standards, reviewing and signing recording consent forms, introducing key terminology and definitions (e.g., #MeToo, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, trauma-informed care, etc.), limitations, delimitations, and scope of the project intervention were covered. Although important related topics were suggested by the team, including care for male survivors of sexual harassment/abuse/violence, care for LGBTQ+ survivors of sexual harassment/abuse/violence, and care for #MeToo offenders, I reiterated that these topics remained outside the scope of this project, but such important interventions might be considered at later dates.

Next, there was a brief overview of the #MeToo movement begun in October 2017, followed by recapping of milestones of pertinent OP history including the first elder-initiated November 2017 women's event addressing sexual harassment/abuse/violence within the church ("After #MeToo"). An interdisciplinary team of OP church members and I had led this event.

Further reviewing OP history, I shared that REFRESH ministries had administered an anonymous and voluntary survey in July 2018 to twenty randomly

selected OP women concerning #MeToo events. Twenty-five percent of the women indicated they had experienced sexual harassment/abuse/violence at OP and/or related events. Additionally, a recap of key findings from the focus group led in October 2018 took place. (It is worth noting that some of the training design team members were also present in that group.)

We then took a short break and enjoyed snacks and bottled water I had purchased for the evening. I noted the group was enjoying each other's company and seemed to be feeling proud to have been invited on the team. I sensed things were going well so far and was excited to see our training design come to life.

After our break, I overviewed theological foundations for God's care for victims and passed out the training resources packet. In retrospect, by adult education theory standards, this was too much content for a first meeting. I was enthusiastic for our work but intentionally slowed the pace for our remaining sessions.

We easily and naturally shared team conversation, as each contributed to the discussion of the collective positives of our joint history at OP. Our pseudo-appreciative inquiry exercise evidenced our shared pride in OP—we loved our church and wanted to make it the healthiest church it could be. I reflexively felt thankful for this warm and mission-focused camaraderie.

After our pause, I passed out paper copies of a thought-provoking #MeToo case that had taken place over thirty years ago at OP, predating most of the team's church membership at OP. Members volunteered to read sections of the dramatic incident captured on a two-page handout. Confidentiality of names was maintained, and dates were avoided to further protect those involved, even though this event had been discussed

by members of the prior focus group. After the readings, I facilitated discussion about the case, unpacking it to give context for our contemporary task ahead. This past event of sexual abuse and domestic violence, the aftermath, and the current implications for our congregation framed our purpose with eye-opening application.

The selected training design team began our work that night. We attended six key sessions that were an hour and a half each. These took place in a classroom at the OP church building on successive Monday evenings from January 20 to February 24, 2020, just prior to the pandemic. Two later sessions of an hour and a half in length were conducted via Zoom following the shutdown of OP due to the Covid-19 pandemic and state mandates on social distancing. In addition to the Covid-19 rulings, we were incented to meet via Zoom because one of the team members had recently been diagnosed with a serious health condition that necessitated social distancing.

The #MeToo movement in the fall of 2017 quickly drew social media postings from OP women representing various demographics. Some of the women's comments included first-ever public admissions that they were survivors of sexual harassment/abuse/violence. Because there was such a high participation of OP women on social media, and there was significant participation at the following OP "After #MeToo" event (where many shared their stories of #MeToo,) it seemed likely there were also reports that still hadn't surfaced. Consequently, there were possible unreported/unresolved sexual harassment/abuse/violence experiences for OP women that we might uncover in our research team sessions.

Many of our team members were dedicated ministry leaders and volunteers who regularly interacted with women, so they might learn of these stories through additional

ways. It was important to acknowledge/anticipate how intertwined this team might become with #MeToo impact that was continuing in our midst.

With the impact of global media and commentary on other expanded media platforms, it was also important to understand relevant negative moral and/or negative politicization of the #MeToo movement. I was aware of at least one male team member who thought the name "#MeToo" and related terminology was politicized and that the politicization would create roadblocks to church acceptance. Another female team member felt the #MeToo movement served as an umbrella for other activities that were immoral and using the name #MeToo or conjuring association with the #MeToo movement might be counterproductive. I processed each valued team member's concerns.

Although I grappled with the initial title for the project prospectus, I felt the wide recognition of #MeToo would be most effective in the long run. As a global shift advocating for survivors' needs, I assessed that the #MeToo movement and its language was best for broader, future application, including missional efforts to non-Christian victims of sexual harassment/abuse/violence. We kept the title and honored the dissenting team members by reducing the number of #MeToo references in our final training design.

I knew and worked closely in various OP ministries with each of the members, and my final assessment was that each would be a favorable addition to the team. Coincidentally, several of the prospective team members had taken part in a past OP research project I conducted in 2019 utilizing Social Games Theory (SGT). I was reminded of their responses that indicated favor towards this #MeToo research.

Most participants in my design team aligned more with OP standards as "progressives" rather than "traditionalists," making it easier to discuss sexual harassment/abuse/violence as a human rights issue. In our OP context, the term "progressive" is applied to Churches of Christ that have instrumental music and/or women's inclusive roles in worship and/or participate in dialogue/action on other social justice issues like ending racism. This designation of "progressive" is disconcerting to some traditionalist members who value the traditions/opinions of the larger Churches of Christ and still live within the "meritocracy" system at OP. As Graham Hill's course in Christian leadership taught, meritocratic churches highly value propriety and resist change. Further, this type of church typically rewards congregants who "obey the rules" and "do their time."

This hybrid identity of traditional-progressive at OP creates challenges that have reduced our church membership. Applying research on SGT, OP has an Individualistic Authority Social Game. This individualistic factor coheres with many aspects of "progressives." As further background, converts who had placed membership and shown loyalty to OP in the past through consistent attendance and good works tended to endear themselves to traditionalist C of C congregants. The original SGT-Egalitarian (mostly traditionalist) base at OP that accepts those who have embraced the C of C "right way" had eventually even approved six (of ten) elders who were not originally from the C of C. Though these converts affirmed and reinforced the SGT's traditionalist, egalitarian mindset, they simultaneously influenced OP to become more individualistic and progressive. Thus, OP had significantly progressed in egalitarian worship while also still

having a strong traditionalist base. Recognition of these simultaneous truths was an essential starting point for this research.

Despite our highly motivated, informed, and collaborative team, discussion would still be challenging in ways. As our research intervention unfolded, one of the members became seriously ill, an incident of sexual harassment that had happened to a team member and was still being processed was disclosed at our session, and the pandemic necessitated social distancing and new forms of meeting at the very end of our intervention.

The Training Design Team Sessions

Following are outlines of the team sessions. Each session began and ended with prayer and an informal emotional "well-check" for team participants.

Session 1: Orientation

- Designate scribe to record highlights of session and communicate via Google Docs within set time frame
- Introductions of team members
- Orientation to the project
- Introduce consent forms/answer any remaining questions/administer and gather consent forms/confirm all consent forms are signed before proceeding
- Begin recording of session after all consent forms are completed
- Facilitated discussion of OP's current cultural context
- Review of current data (anonymous women's #MeToo survey, (Appendix B) and associated implications of that data)
- Theological framework and incentive for elders training program (using theology section and available expansion of current Unruh DMin prospectus)
- Objectives for the team/expected outcomes/deliverables and projected timelines
- Responsibilities of team members and guidelines of conduct with subject matter experts/research sources inside/outside of OP
- Brief explanation/demonstration of how to use Google Docs

This first session included brief introductions, including my relevant experiences and expertise with #MeToo research. Additionally, each member shared their interest/motivation in being a part of this team. Following those foundational introductions, discussion of the OP ministry setting as well as acknowledgment of the contributions each team member had made to our church through their tenure gave a framework for our team's task. The members discussed the realities of living in an aspirational egalitarian, but still strongly patriarchal church tradition. The dual truths of our existence were pondered in relation to the high-profile incidences of sexual harassment and abuse regularly playing out in the media since 2017's #MeToo phenomenon.

It became essential insight during this introduction that as a team we all had a common social-justice orientation. Several of the team members were actively leading or engaged in other justice issues, including aiding homeless populations, serving an inner-city teen mission, fostering children, feeding local grade-school students, and beginning research on racial reconciliation in our city.

My SGT research had indicated, however, that there may still be a significant number of traditionalists – even more in number than progressives at OP, and that we should be aware of this fact as we created a training design. While maintaining our purpose, we needed to have as wide a circle of acceptance as possible. A congregational survey in 2016 indicated that around 40 percent of church members thought social justice ministries should be limited at OP, and we needed to try to address this large constituency.

By inference, as discussed earlier, those at OP who do not support full egalitarian

worship roles for females would also be less likely to support advocacy of human rights issues, like #MeToo for women regarding their victimization within the church setting. One team member quickly processed this truth, asking, "How do we move from apathy to advocate?"

The team noted that in recent years, traditionalist women had led the migration with their families to other more conservative Churches of Christ in part due to OP's recent inclusion of women leading prayer, giving communion meditations, and occasionally preaching. As my SGT research indicated, traditionalists—men or women—who did not support egalitarian church roles could either subtly or overtly stall #MeToo discussion.

At the end of our first session, participants were asked to give any additional remarks about how we would proceed to design a training program that would be effective in its training of elders. We briefly overviewed the goals for the next session and dismissed for the evening with closing prayer. The following sessions are overviewed here:

<u>Session 2: Brainstorm and assignment of outside research roles</u>

- Scribe records highlights of brainstorming session and communicates via Google Docs all potential training design components
- Brief explanation/review of how to use Google Docs
- Brief introduction of trauma-informed care principles (handouts for each & learning assignment)
- Brief introduction of family systems theory principles (handouts for each & learning assignment)
- Brainstorm essential components of desired training (including trauma-informed care principles and family systems theory)
- Identify areas of outside research for additional information on best care practices
- Assign additional outside research gathering on best practices and establish timelines for outside research completion

- Scribe completes discussion and draft of training design thus far and distributes to team members according to pre-set timeline

Session 3: Formalize the training design (Part 1)

- Brief presentations on outside research assignments and recommendations for inclusion in training program. ACES presentation by social worker
- Guided discussion on presented items/decision on inclusion into training program
- Scribe accurately organizes and records, then distributes to team members
- Assign any additional outside research gathering and timelines for research completion

Session 4: Formalize the training design (Part 2)

- Team members report on status of outside research gathering/any known issues/action plan for resolution of those issues and any timeline adjustments to project
- Domestic violence presentation by licensed marriage and family counselor
- Extended question-and-answer time
- Assimilate all outside research data for design plan via brainstorming exercise
- Assign needed supplementary roles for completion of outstanding items

Session 5: Formalize the training design (Part 3)

- Team members report on status of open issues and any timeline adjustments to project
- Conclude all data submissions/changes and assimilate any new outside research data for design plan (finish design)
- Instruct scribe to communicate finalized design plan through Google Docs
- Identify/schedule if there are additional post-session adjustments prior to final product
- Overview next week's evaluation process and roles
- Confirm design team, post-evaluation (Session 6) follow-up meeting availability/time/location

Session 6: Evaluation

- Introduce final insider questionnaire and explain its use
- Distribute questionnaire, answer any remaining questions
- Gather and secure questionnaires
- Remind group of follow-up meeting with date/time/place/agenda to be determined by leader
- Scribe to communicate finalized design plan through Google Docs

- Thank participants
- Decision on pandemic back-up plans for follow-up meetings
- Special team prayer for serious health issues facing our team member

This final session in the church building was productive but bittersweet. Our beloved team member had been diagnosed with a possible terminal condition, and we were also aware that our church would likely be closing within days due to the pandemic and newly instated Covid-19 restrictions. We finished the design plan that had been achieved thus far during the two prior brainstorming sessions and quickly packed up. Each team member present completed a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the training design plan for elders.

We spent our final thirty minutes praying for our team member. It was a difficult and uncertain end point since we were not sure of his future. The bonds that had been created during the process of the design plan had been not only conducive to our task but had created spiritual solidarity. We reluctantly closed out our time, and many stayed to linger in conversation and help clean up even though they had responsibilities awaiting them yet that evening. I was very thankful for the help retrieving all our key materials from the room (brainstorming tools, poster boards with our results, and session notes/handouts.) In retrospect, I was very glad we did this as we were not able to return to the church for several more months. Our final sessions, via Zoom follow:

<u>Session 7 & 8: Design wrap-up/Plans for elder presentation</u>

- Check-in with team member's surgery and health update
- Special group prayer for healing and continued mission on our nearly complete project
- Introduce/complete collective brainstorming results from final church sessions (I had created a white board using the results from the brainstorming sessions and also sent photos and the brainstorming posters to each member prior to the meeting)
- Discuss components and order of final training design

- Discuss optimal time to hold the BETA training program design after we present to the elders and gain their approval
- Discuss additional details to optimally present to the elders
- Address remaining questions
- Remind group of follow-up Zoom meeting with date/time/place/agenda as determined by leader
- Thank participants

The final necessitated Zoom meetings made communication more difficult since we needed to wrap up plan details while also navigating new tools and technology limitations for some at home. We had to create new methods of collaboration and present our work to the elders online, rather than the preferred method of in-person. The pandemic had also impacted team members' work/life balance making it harder to dedicate their time to our project. Additionally, the political climate, economic downturn, racial unrest, and spike in domestic and other forms of violence in our city added to the necessitated prioritization of other pressing issues at church.

Also, the report I had given two years prior about #MeToo was understandably deprioritized. Leaders were shouldering many levels of pain and disorientation of the congregation making it difficult to dedicate time on this study. Church elders had more on their plates now than when we had started this project before the pandemic. I tried to resist the anxious thought that we may never get to finish our project, as we could not meet in the building at the time and did not know when we would meet. It was hard to know the best time to present our results to the elders, let alone try to get their approval of the training design and move forward.

Evaluation

The ministry intervention outlined in this project was evaluated from three angles. The insider, outsider, and participatory action researcher angles were all used to make a

conclusion on the effectiveness of the program design to train elders to respond to #MeToo experiences of adult females at OP. This triangulation facilitated a concluding synopsis on the effectiveness of the ministry intervention.

For the insider angle, I distributed a questionnaire to the team during the final, in-person training design session (Session 6). Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we could not return to the church building after Session 6, so we quickly had to determine how to hold our last meetings before presenting team findings to the elder group.

As the pandemic created continued uncertainty about the team's ability to meet again for the planned follow-up session, I chose to record and secure the paper questionnaires for later analysis. I weighed the fact that some team members had not been able to attend Session 6 and that responses of the team members who were present might be rushed. Necessitated discussions of how to proceed during the anticipated shutdown lent to abbreviated questionnaire answers as we were ending our session time.

I leveraged my adult education experience and Moschella's ethnography findings on gaining optimal feedback and decided further responses from the team would be difficult to obtain if we could not meet again or were significantly delayed in meeting.[2] In addition to social-distancing restrictions, one of the team members' health situation was rapidly declining, and it was uncertain if this member would be able to participate at all in the future.

The final questionnaire asked the team participants to consider the research covered, the experts learned from, and the discussion in team sessions, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the created training program design to meet our objectives. The

2. Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice*, 208.

results of this team, or "insider" evaluation, are considered in Chapter 5. As a second means of evaluation, an expert "outsider" was consulted. This expert "outsider," Dr. John Knox, wrote an assessment of the effectiveness of the training program design based on his advanced theological training and professional expertise as senior minister, police and fire chaplain, team developer, and designer of crisis management education. Dr. Knox has a doctorate in ministry from ACU and is a senior minister at Granbury Church of Christ in Granbury, Texas. Dr. Knox also works as a fire and police chaplain, regularly encountering intersections of theology and trauma. Additionally, Dr. Knox has developed a church-based crisis management team and accompanying training, which has informed this design intervention.

Dr. Knox has participated in numerous critical incident management training and debriefing scenarios which have involved victims of sexual harassment/abuse/violence. This insight into the world of survivors through a lens of spiritual care, hope, and healing has informed this work. Dr. Knox has served as ACU DMin cohort mentor and has been in close communication throughout this project. As a well-read and insightful spiritual leader, Dr. Knox possesses practical knowledge of church family systems and theological background to critique the spiritual as well as theoretical dimensions of this project. The results of this "outsider" evaluation, are considered in Chapter 5.

Finally, as a third angle, I made an evaluation as researcher participant from my session recordings, observations, and field notes. I reviewed the components included in the team design and assessed their efficacy in meeting intervention objectives. My work in learning theory best-practices, GROW coaching/mentoring, pastoral care, and

technology/project management skills from my Sprint/T-Mobile corporate background, were enlisted in evaluating the training program design's efficacy.

As researcher participant, I completed this evaluation utilizing theological and theoretical frames to analyze data from all sources. The themes were drawn from principles discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. This final assessment included reviewing, organizing, coding, and locating patterns, silences, and slippages of the data to find congruent as well as divergent themes. The result of this triangulation of data and my evaluation are considered in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER V

RESULTS

Chapter 4 discussed the formation of the training program design team, an overview of the team sessions, and the methods used in the intervention to create a training program design for elders. Finally, the strategy for evaluation of the effectiveness of the created design was overviewed.

Chapter 5 examines the results of the evaluation and interpretation of data from all three angles termed triangulation. This examination of the triangulated data gives a "thick" description and interpretation that is helpful as we seek to identify tools elders need to best respond to #MeToo experiences of adult females at OP.

Tim Sensing, expert on qualitative research, explains that this data triangulation "increases the trustworthiness" of research.[1] This trustworthiness is essential regarding #MeToo since it is a sensitive topic with far reaching physical, psychological, and spiritual implications.

The converging and diverging patterns discovered from data collection and evaluation gave new insights needed for elders' response to #MeToo. The resultant training program design from this intervention can thus be a catalyst for positive change concerning #MeToo experiences of female survivors at OP.

1. Sensing, *Qualitative Research,* 214.

Data from insider, outsider, and researcher angles helped create a predictive picture about the effectiveness of the team's produced training design. The insider perspective involved those who were directly involved in achieving this goal—the training design team members.

Their "inner circle" status as team members allowed them unparalleled access to events, interactions, and data collected in the process of the training program design sessions. As byproduct of our weekly sessions, team members became more attuned to #MeToo and related issues in their lives outside of the sessions, frequently commenting on situations they were encountering at work or in their community. Their level of awareness was also raised to incidents and outcomes of #MeToo within the church context.

The outsider lens expanded the view from the insider and involved "seeking an independent expert" or "utilizing the judgment of the larger community that the intervention will serve."[2] I invited Dr. John Knox to fulfill this independent role. As a qualified expert in both ministry and trauma-informed care for those encountered in his police and fire chaplaincy roles, Dr. Knox was a knowledgeable evaluator. Background in the patriarchal culture of the C of C as well as a courageous record handling difficult subject matter—including sexual crime—made Dr. Knox an excellent choice. Dr. Knox is a well-regarded senior minister, chaplain, ACU DMin graduate, and my cohort DMin mentor, and I was honored by his knowledgeable and generous fulfillment of this role.

The pandemic made it untenable to travel during the time my intervention launched in early 2020, so Dr. Knox's knowledge of this project, history of developing

2. Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 75.

crisis management training, and insight into church leadership dynamics were necessarily, though still very effectively, accessed long distance.

Finally, my fulfilling the role of researcher completed the analysis of data using the lens of theoretical and theological frames overviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. My interpretation of the answers to the insider team questionnaire from Session 6 was foundational for getting a picture of overall effectiveness of the training design.

As primary researcher, I also utilized field notes, observations, and recordings of the design team sessions. Finally, I reviewed Dr. Knox's outsider assessment to produce an interpretation of the effectiveness of our elder's training program design. This comprehensive researcher angle completed the project intervention.

Data Analysis

Insider Angle

A voluntary, anonymous questionnaire was administered to the team members at Session 6, the last in-person design team meeting (Appendix E)

The questions and corresponding answers from the team members were:

1) **How does the designed training program inform and/or expand on how elders understand "#MeToo" occurrences at OP? (Please describe)**

- Greatly! Process discussion is started.
- It allows them to consider incidences that may be occurring behind the scenes and allow them to support victims more effectively.
- Sets a theological foundation to hold in tandem with the professional wisdom.
- Being able to have better appreciation of the victim's hurts.
- Healing and reconciliation (if possible) require the courage and honesty to hear.

2) **According to the designed training program, why must elders lead the church concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities? (Please describe)**

- They don't need to lead because all men.

- Jesus was absolutely concerned with the welfare and safety of women and generally about the wholeness of his people. Sexual abuse of any kind disrupts our wholeness and grieves God.
- To take seriously the role of the church—care for the "least of these" and uphold our call to be a family.
- Male and female are created in the image of God. A holistic approach to the body of Christ suggests all are equal contributors to and receivers of the grace and blessings in being in the body of Christ. ALL must recognize the love of Christ is without discrimination.

3) **Which reasons given in answers to question #2 will most strongly incentivize elders to lead concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities? (Please describe)**

- Personal stories and stats.
- As shepherds it's their responsibility to see to the spiritual well-being of the body. Sexual abuse directly undermines spiritual well-being and causes a domino effect of issues.
- Robin's presentation! [expert training given on domestic violence of church members as it intersects with #MeToo]
- Understanding that men and women are equal in the body of Christ. Pain, emotional or physical, is capable of keeping one from experiencing the love God has, the fullness he has offered.

4) **According to the designed training program, what new best-practices will be given for elders to lead the church concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities? What new resources will be given? What new tools will be given? (Please describe)**

- A new process.
- A team of people who are trained to address the varying concerns for a victim and survivor.
- A tool to reference that follows a specific protocol that's both biblically and legally sound.
- Incorporating practices that include diverse voices – different genders, ages, professions.
- Creation of Compassionate Care [CCar] ministry to end #MeToo.
- Provide a process for CCar to assist those in need.
- Develop resources for all involved.

5) **What further questions do you believe leaders will have about response to #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities? (Please describe)**

- What are other churches doing?
- What are H.R. [human resources] and legal aspects?
- Continued conversations on making it practical and tangible.
- How to maintain confidentiality?

- Level of involvement of church leaders in individual cases?
- How does the biblical authority of elders ultimately discern the outcome?
- How does the victim and the offender ultimately find grace and healing?
- How does the victim and the offender ultimately find reconciliation?

Outsider Angle

As outside expert, Dr. John Knox evaluated the intervention thesis, data sets, and training program design plan and then wrote his assessment of the training design's effectiveness (Appendix H). Knox brought thirty-four years of service in professional ministry in the C of C, thirty-two years in police and fire chaplaincy, and DMin completion from ACU where he also assumed various leadership roles including DMin cohort mentorship. Knox has in-depth understanding of the C of C context, and in the line of duty he has also provided spiritual care to countless victims who were sexually violated by people who were initially perceived as trustworthy. These qualifications and empathy for the most vulnerable serve as framework for Dr. Knox's evaluation. Knox has great strength as authentic assessor in that he acknowledges the existence of #MeToo within our church walls—a necessary starting point for effective elder training and care for survivors.

Knox advocated for survivors throughout the course of this project. The chilling conclusion in this research that some victims have become conditioned by church to see their harassment/abuse as normative resonated with his professional experiences helping numerous crime victims.

Knox affirmed that the unabating "wash-rinse-repeat" cycle of church-based abuse is an accurate assessment and the practical acknowledgment of this is a strength of this training design. He affirmed that church denial or mishandling of #MeToo experiences wears down a victim's resolve. As is the case with many "conflicted-

survivors" a victim may eventually choose to quit trying to communicate to leaders about abuse or simply go into a state of denial that abuse took place at all.

Marie Fortune, founder of FaithTrust Institute, identifies the tendency for churches to stonewall victims as "institutional complicity."[3] Because unhealthy family systems are often in place in churches and there is no discernable path for justice, some victims suffer in silence or choose to leave the church altogether.[4] Dr. Knox felt this aspect of the training design for elders was necessary to confront and begin to change the faulty church systems that disadvantage survivors.

Dr. Knox affirms the elements in the training design that address unhealthy secret keeping and also impresses that such secret keeping sometimes "inhibits criminal actions from being thoroughly investigated." This assessment of legal implications of church-based #MeToo is an area of additional research and inclusion for the training design plan.

Helpfully, Dr. Knox notes that, "consistency and fairness are objectives that church leaders must aspire to in the quest to be guided by the strongest Christian ethic possible." By affirming this foundational aspect of the training plan, Knox legitimizes the segments of the training that lead elders to explore the prioritized perspective of the victim, rather than the offender. This section of the training design thus has potential to transform "hero-enablers" into heroes.

Dr. Knox further confirms the usage of the NT parable of the Good Samaritan in the training plan. Dr. Knox connected to the elements of training that will challenge the

3. Marie Fortune, "Is Nothing Sacred? 1 Timothy and Clergy Sexual Abuse," *Interpretation 75* (Oct. 2021): 319.

4. Mallory Wyckoff, "The Impact of Sexual Trauma on Survivors' Theological Perception and Spiritual Formation" (DMin diss., Lipscomb University Graduate School, 2017), 11.

elder learners with the question, “Is the sexually harassed or abused female in our church context our neighbor? If so, what is our commitment and concern and care for this unfortunate neighbor?”

Dr. Knox strongly endorses the inclusion of domestic violence-based #MeToo as an area of training and finds our coverage in the design plan very effective. Knox has extensive experience in pastoral care to these sometimes-overlooked victims of church-based #MeToo. Additionally, team analysis that our Caucasian-oriented leadership must be informed by realities of our increasingly multi-cultural context gives expanded insight to the training design. Circumstances of non-white and/or non-English-speaking #MeToo survivors need to be considered in the training plan in order to make it inclusive and effective. Dr. Knox notes this training design element mirroring empathetic care from church leadership reflects God’s care for the “other.”

Insightfully, Dr. Knox reflects that in the case of #MeToo, “movement in the larger cultural setting has the capacity to shape ministry in the church.” He draws from his many years of experience in the C of C and helpfully reminds, “As a rule, the church resists being shaped or influenced by the prevailing culture.” To make an effective training design, these key cultural realties must be acknowledged and positively framed. Knox’s suggestion for the training design is that it should emphasize that the church can stay true to biblical roots and still benefit from “the pioneering efforts of courageous individuals” as with the leaders of the #MeToo movement.

Knox affirmed the need to convey language and concepts of #MeToo for better understanding in the training design for elders. He assessed that vocabulary, including the terms “hero-enabler” and “conflicted-survivor,” needed to be emphasized. He suggested

that an additional training session should be dedicated to exploration of these concepts and their implications for leaders.

Finally, in considering the egalitarian setting of OP, Dr. Knox does not agree with the assessment that human rights and egalitarian worship are inextricably linked as I've stated. In this difference, Dr. Knox does bring helpful perspective with a more conservative view—one that likely coheres with some of our OP elder training audience. The astute observation that "Christians across the theological spectrum regarding worship viewpoints are equally guilty of victimizing women who have been on the receiving end of heinous sexual harassment" is worthy of reflection. Dr. Knox has discerned an area of training design that facilitates relating to a diverse elder audience while prioritizing care for #MeToo survivors. Incorporating Dr. Knox's perspective into the training program acknowledged realities of the C of C culture while still honoring victims.

Researcher Angle

In the researcher angle, noted themes, silences, slippages, and patterns were identified and discussed and compared with the other two evaluation angles (insider, outsider.) Additionally, they were also examined against the theological themes from Chapter 2. The triangulation resulted in enhanced understanding of the training design intervention's effectiveness.

Themes

Several themes emerged in the course of this intervention project. The themes identified are: #MeToo intervention/activity aligns with God's will; church leaders as well as #MeToo victims are to be regarded; #MeToo victims should be given the benefit of the doubt; dialogue about sexual topics at church is stressful and should be

acknowledged/factored into training design; adult education theory can be used at church for optimal training design; and concerning #MeToo, God calls us to enlarge our concept of "neighbor."

First, all the insider and outsider responses were recorded in an appended Word file, then searches made for the top occurrences of words/concepts. Initially, the highest word counts indicated references to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Bible—framing this task of having designed a #MeToo training program as "holy work," a noble task worthy of our efforts. One design team participant said, "Being Christ-followers should be emphasized. What would Jesus do? How would he react to #MeToo incidents so that the body of Christ is made whole?" The theme that this intervention was a spiritual endeavor recurred throughout our team sessions and our related project activities.

As an additional theme, the insider and outsider angles showed a high regard for church elders and high priority for care of victims. On a related theme of care for the survivor, defaulting to "benefit of the doubt" for the #MeToo reporter was identified as foundational for the training design and all intervention activities.

To make the case for training program design for elders responding to #MeToo experiences of females, it would be necessary to revisit some of the hard truths of OP church life. As many of the survivors' stories I heard at OP were not officially known, those who bravely shared them deserved and received honoring respect and confidentiality.

Sustaining survivors' privacy while simultaneously making a convincing case that #MeToo events had occurred and were still happening at OP was not a simple, one-size-fits-all undertaking. For example, throughout this intervention, I was aware of unresolved

episodes on our #MeToo landscape that would not be disclosed due to confidentiality standards—even though disclosing those episodes would help solidify the case that elder training was needed. Dealing with church-based #MeToo has therefore been an exercise in carrying secrets. The often-nonlinear process of getting the right information into the right hands is necessary to honor privacy and well-being of survivors, but this process is also sometimes an impediment to getting the actual scope of the #MeToo problem to the attention of church elders. Further complicating the process is the fact that if a sexual harassment/abuse/violence event is reported, there is currently no clear path for response to the victim in a confidential, timely manner. As another challenge, elders telling the offender of the accusation against them without first gaining consent from the #MeToo victim can put the victim/reporter of abuse—and potentially their family—at risk for retaliation. Interviewees and participants in this project reported that elders without focused #MeToo training have had an unfortunate history of doing additional damage in their communications/activities surrounding an abuse incident while attempting resolution.

Another related past practice concerning the theme of "benefit of doubt" for the victim has been the minimization or dismissal of #MeToo reports and often of the survivors themselves. Frustration, condescension, distrust, and even anger have been directed at some #MeToo reporters. Additionally, some survivors have experienced subtle forms of ostracization within church life as well. The wash-rinse-repeat cycle of sexual harassment/abuse/violence therefore continues for victims, while offenders enjoy their uninterrupted church life. It must be the default position to *trust* the reporter of #MeToo and to always *earn the trust* of the reporter. It is essential for leaders to maintain

confidentiality on this extremely sensitive topic. Though this standard should be a baseline for all communications of the church, a breach of confidentiality concerning #MeToo can be negatively life-altering for the victim.

Efforts have been made in the training design to employ privacy, but more should be done. Consulting with an objective and informed source, such as an outside consulting firm that specializes in church-based #MeToo, could be a worthy investment for the congregation before training design is launched.

Another theme for training design effectiveness has emerged from my professional education development work. Adult education theory shows that all adults, including elders, come with strengths and contributions to the training event that should be honored and tapped into. Similarly, all adults come into training with some degree of anxiety and even fear. This intervention revealed that church-based dialogue about sexual topics, especially those of #MeToo, is inherently stressful. Thus, the training design should acknowledge this fact in the design of the training and minimize the occurrences of stress. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including incorporating familiar, comforting rituals into the beginning of the training program. For example, if coffee and donuts are a usual precursor to upbeat church gatherings, it would be beneficial to extend this ritual to the more arduous agenda of addressing #MeToo. Likewise, employing anxiety-reducing elements like stress balls or fidget spinners at each training table can significantly help training participants relax.

On the related theme of adult education principles noted within this intervention, it is important to identify and honor the inborn learning styles of the training participants. A semblance of this learning-style identification was noted in the design team sessions

among the team members themselves. Like all adult learners, elders tend to experience the most positive outcomes for training when their distinct learning style is considered in the planning and preparation of the training curriculum.

Adult learners tend to fall into one of three categories: kinesthetic (those who learn best by tactile or engagement exercises), auditory (those who learn best by hearing or elements to the training that involve sound), and visual (those who learn best by incorporating optics and captivating/engaging visual elements.) Identifying each elder's learning style in the design prior to the training and then grouping elders in a creative, fun way based on those styles builds beneficial camaraderie while elders learn together.

As a final theme, while assessing Lukan frames surrounding the Good Samaritan and Mary and Martha in the training design, we learned of expanded borders for "neighbor" and Jesus's concern for all people. Jesus's inclusion of and care for marginalized women informed ways to identify what God's mercy (through the role of empowered elder) should look like on behalf of those disenfranchised by #MeToo.

Data Set Silences

Our exploration of The Good Samaritan parable in this study shows a strong imperative for Christian leaders to see an enlarged view of 'neighbor' and to treat those neighbors with dignity and care. There was data silence around the concept of expanding our ideas about "other" as it related to #MeToo's less heard, non-white victims. In researching #MeToo, it became apparent that women of color had significantly higher incidents of #MeToo experiences than Caucasian women.[5] At OP, the majority of our

5. Stephanie Crumpton, "No Safe Spaces: The Impact of Sexist Hermeneutics on Black Women Victim Survivors of Intimate Abuse: A Womanist Pastoral Care Perspective," *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 32 (Fall-Spring 2004–2005): 104.

membership are white women, but we must seek to minister well to *all* women experiencing #MeToo. In theological parallel, different ethnicities were intentionally featured in the story of the Good Samaritan, the victim the Samaritan assisted, and the indifferent Jewish leaders who held the most power. It is significant that our insider angles towards training design had little or no mention of the need to include women of color's experiences with church-based #MeToo when, statistically, these females are more vulnerable. Reflexively, although one team member was a woman of color, she may not have felt comfortable discussing this racial inequity with the remaining team members—myself as researcher included—all Caucasian.

Although OP—like most churches in our suburban area—is largely white, our global missions, including to the racially diverse Kansas City urban core and our increasingly multi-ethnic city population demographics, should be factored into this training design. As a white researcher, I regret that a collective "white myopia" likely influenced the silence in our data.

As Knox assessed in the outside angle, a robust church #MeToo training should be informed by the growing number of immigrants and non-English speaking citizens in our city. For an example, if a non-English speaking female experiences abuse at OP, how would the cultural and language barriers be handled? Because most of our training design team and elders are Caucasian and English-speaking, we missed needed content. I did not adequately include this perspective as researcher in my session observations. This cultural consideration bears further reflection and design plan revision.

Because of this "silence" in two of three data sets on this issue, there is an indication that the training design would not be as comprehensive, relevant, or Christ-like

compassionate as it should be. Its effectiveness for elders is therefore diminished and needs addressing.

Data Set Gaps/Slippages

There was a notable gap in the data sets around domestic violence as a form of #MeToo. Many of the comments indicated that participants from all angles were unfamiliar with some of the synergies of church family domestic violence, an unexplored branch of #MeToo. Insiders (design team members) needed to process the expert presentation that was given in Session 4 on church member domestic violence. The team's responses to the insider questionnaire given in Session 6 reflect these gaps:

When responding to question three on the insider questionnaire (Which reasons given in answers to question #2 will most strongly incentivize elders to lead concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP Church/OP Church related activities?), team members wrote: "Personal stories and stats [referencing sexual abuse stats, domestic violence stats, etc.]" and "Robin's presentation [referencing domestic violence expert]!"

Statistics given in the Session 4 expert presentation showed that 25 percent of adult females in the United States have been assaulted by a spouse or intimate partner. This assault likely included sexual abuse in some form.[6] Domestic violence, which can include overt as well as more covert forms of abuse (for example, as encountered in my hospital training, where a husband denied his wife needed medication as a punishment) has been the highest reason for hospital emergency care for women in the United States.[7]

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6. Mindy Makant, "Transforming Trauma: The Power of Touch and the Practice of Anointing," *Word and World* 34 (Spring 2014): 161.

7. Nancy Nienhuis, "Theological Reflections on Violence and Abuse," *The Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling* 59:1–2 (Spring-Summer 2005): 110.

In my hospital chaplaincy training (clinical pastoral education [CPE]), I learned that approximately 20 percent of our female patients were consistently admitted to our suburban hospital due to some form of abuse.

Pre-pandemic studies indicate a rising number of incidents of church families enduring domestic violence by the hands of a religious male head of household.[8] Alarmingly, these already high numbers for domestic violence (as well as all forms of violence against females) have spiked during the isolation of the pandemic.[9] This phenomenon, termed "the shadow pandemic," demands our attention as Christians.[10]

The presentation about church-based domestic violence during our design team session was riveting, informative, and galvanizing. Though not all domestic violence manifests in the church context, nor is solely male initiated, the counselor/presenter said that more abuse happens than acknowledged, and it is often tacitly sanctioned by misapplication of Scripture concerning spiritual male headship. Effectively, abusive religious men often use patriarchy as a shield for their sins. For training design effectiveness, a segment on domestic violence must be included.

In Dr. Knox's outsider angle evaluation, there was also concern about domestic violence: "Domestic violence is another common but frequently under-reported behavior in church settings. Family violence is clearly a criminal act, and thus cannot be ignored.

8. Donna Kane, Sharon E. Cheston, and Joanne Greer, "Perceptions of God by Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: An Exploratory Study in an Underresearched Area," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 21 (1993): 228.

9. UN Women, ed. "The Shadow Pandemic."

10. UN Women, ed. "The Shadow Pandemic."

For effectiveness, a segment on domestic violence must be included in the training design."

In the field notes taken during our expert's presentation on domestic violence, it was clear that most team members were stunned and newly incented to address such evils within our church walls. After the presentation, some mentioned past incidents they had heard about in other churches and shared (without disclosing identifiers) that Christian friends/family had been victims of domestic violence. One team member self-reported that they had been a victim of domestic violence by a religious head of household who simultaneously maintained C of C membership for many years. Another team member who found this information revelatory and shocking said passionately, "Every member of the church should see this presentation!" The visceral realization that events had happened to friends on our team and were happening to other church families in our pews (statistically speaking) filled him with righteous indignation and renewed energies to end all forms of #MeToo.

In considering our Lukan theological themes, we see that women experiencing domestic violence are like the disenfranchised that Jesus cared for. The victims of church-based domestic violence are analogous to the beaten man in the Good Samaritan parable. Like the Jewish religious authorities, some church leaders may have unknowingly "walked on by" our own painfully marginalized church #MeToo survivors that have endured abuse in their own homes. These #MeToo sisters are unfortunately a growing population evidenced by rising statistics during the pandemic. Reflexively, the data gaps around mention of domestic violence were significant and indicated more emphasis is needed in the training design for elders.

Data Set Patterns

One of the prominent patterns that occurred during this project was the basic discomfort that participants felt surrounding the topics and language of sexual harassment/abuse/violence of women. I observed gaps/slippages correlating to some of the challenging concepts/language surrounding #MeToo incidents during discussion in the earliest insider/design team sessions. Team members initially chose not to use words relating to sex or aspects of #MeToo while at church. This may have also been a holdover from times past in the C of C when men and women did not discuss such topics in a "mixed group" (or possibly *any* group) at church.

It was evident by my early session researcher observations that participants were "#MeToo-uncomfortable." Field notes recorded "stiffer body language" and "more formal speech" that contrasted with later sessions, when team members were less anxious, having bonded with each other and established their roles in the group. Their less-formal enunciation, dialogue, and casual body language at those later sessions facilitated their language of increased comfort as well as empathy for the victims. They couched terms related to "#MeToo" and "sex" with phrasing that indicated their concern, responsiveness to pain of victims, and desire for peace and healing for the #MeToo survivors. It is inferred that elders may also go through a similar transformation should our training design be implemented in the future. Thus, acknowledging and accommodating this natural anxiety would be an effective modification of our training design.

In the Lukan theological lens, Jesus boldly drew near to women in need. He was not inhibited by the realities that necessitated vocabulary describing atrocities done to

females, which would point to Jesus's potential comfort with #MeToo language in modern culture. As Cukrowski taught, the many women described in Luke (at least fifty)—several of whose narratives are featured prominently and many individually named—demonstrate that females are heard and valued. The other three Gospels apportion most of their text for male characters reflective of a society that sublimated women's sexual experiences of all kinds.[11]

Luke expounds on the feminine experience in a reversal from "an ancient Mediterranean society where men and women's social lives were largely separate."[12] It is likely that sexual harassment/abuse/violence was a common occurrence in the biblical landscape as well, and Jesus was able to articulate and address appropriately. [13]

As the pattern in the data sets showed an initial discomfort with the language of #MeToo utilized in the team sessions. Substitution words/phrases for sexual harassment/ abuse/violence and #MeToo were consistently used more often in the earliest sessions by team members. These substitutions imply that there was discomfort, embarrassment, social pressure, or other factors in making word choices that did not directly include "sex." According to notes from the first session, the following words were used in place of "sexual harassment/abuse/violence": "occurrences," "these concerns," "situations" "this," "difficult issues," "social justice at all levels," "biblical topic," "an incident," "incident of abuse," "#MeToo incident," and "harassment." Only two responses directly referred to "sex": "issues of sexual harassment" and "sexual harassment."

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11. Stuart L. Love, *Jesus and Marginal Women: The Gospel of Matthew in Social-Scientific Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 8.

12. Love, *Jesus and Marginal*, 8.

13. Fortune, "Is Nothing Sacred?," 317-18.

In Session 6, there was a divergence in words used denoting incidents of sexual harassment/abuse/violence, with more direct references to "sex." Additionally, the responses were also more directly referencing of pain/concern for the victim, including "personal stories," "concerns," "incidences that may be occurring behind the scenes," "victim's hurts," "pain, emotional or physical," "individual cases," and "domestic violence [implied by the phrase 'Robin's presentation!' referring to expert on church-based domestic abuse]. Again, only two responses directly referred to "sex": "sexual abuse of any kind" and "sexual abuse."

As researcher, I interpret that team members felt more connection to the victim/survivor inculcated over the course of our design sessions. By contrast, the Session 1 words seem more distant, abstract, even cold in comparison to the Session 6 verbiage. Learning about #MeToo in a safe environment helped the team express more empathy for its victims. This implies that the training design would be most effective if it included elements to alleviate the elders' residual discomfort with speaking (and then responding appropriately) to sexual harassment/abuse/violence of women.

There was considerable discomfort and concern initially even with the symbolic #MeToo verbiage as noted earlier. It carried connotations for some that were "immoral" and, for others, "too political." These findings should be considered for effective training design.

Data Set Congruency

Finally, all the angle's data sets cohered concerning the power of the elders at church and the responsibility to use that power towards positive #MeToo responses. This data congruency also shows a strong regard for the eldership role.

It is assumed according to our research that elders are imbued with spiritual power in our churches. How that power is used, and for whom, was of note within our intervention sessions recorded in my researcher field notes. The program design team and outsider/researcher data sets all indicated that participants thought elders are to embrace their role as a spiritual authority with the means to effect change for the good of others. In turn, patterns emerged showing the positives of responding to female #MeToo victims in the best possible spiritual, psychological, and physical manner. Elders using their inherent power in alignment with empathy and protection for the most vulnerable would indicate our training design was effective.

In the insider team questionnaire, some of the responses concerning elder's power stood out:

- "It allows them to consider incidences that may be occurring behind the scenes and allow them to support victims more effectively."
- "Sets a theological foundation to hold in tandem with the professional wisdom."
- "Being able to have better appreciation of the victim's hurts. Healing and reconciliation (if possible) requires courage and honesty to <u>hear</u>."

In the outsider evaluation, we saw a strong desire for authority figures in the church to compassionately and appropriately care for victims of #MeToo.

Dr. Knox echoes this in his evaluation informed by his decades of service in the church as well as in a law enforcement context:

> Serving crime victims has been a core component of the latter experience. As I read the ministry efforts entailed in this research, the names and faces of victims I have served over a period of three decades reappeared. The church can no longer ignore criminal and unethical behaviors directed toward the most vulnerable among us. The church cannot be a place for exploitation of any kind.

Allowing elders to get a passion for ministering to the "names and faces of victims" (without compromising victim's privacy) needed to be woven into the training design.

As a trusted OP leader and researcher, I experienced several women confiding their #MeToo experiences to me before, during, and after this project implementation. The scope of these conversations has unfortunately broadened as several decades and many OP women now bear first-hand evidence of church based #MeToo. During our team sessions, one member had added another fresh experience to the list—sadly reaffirming the need to address the systemic church unhealthiness of ongoing sexual harassment/abuse/violence.

Foremost, I assessed that this fact of present—not just past—reality of #MeToo, must be conveyed in the training program design. Extraordinary courage and trust in leadership is essential for women to share their #MeToo experiences. In my years of hearing these stories at OP, the women's confidence in my good intentions and confidentiality was key. Survivors choosing this trust in me has been a sacred gift, and their trust in elders should be viewed the same.

I assessed that a realistic, enlarged perspective about the existence of #MeToo needs to be a part of this training. I also believed that the courage and fortitude it takes to report abuse is a necessary inclusion for effective elder training design. From the data gathered from each angle, I felt confident we would be relaying vital information to our leaders.

Within the researcher field notes taken in insider angle team sessions, we saw an additional congruence:

- “Biblical justice is using one's power for those who have no power—if justice is of God and God is concerned about the powerless, shouldn't church leaders be too?”
- “It demonstrates to members the value and concern that leadership has for them and shows that they are interested in being just and protective where needed.”
- “The example of Jesus to address social justice at all levels leaves us no choice.”

All these comments show a concern for women as Jesus exemplified, specifically expanded upon in Luke through the Good Samaritan and the story of Mary and Martha where disciples were asked not only to “sit and listen” but “go and do.” Both give insight on how church leaders need to approach #MeToo scenarios.

Data Set Divergence

There was divergence in the insider data sets as one of the team members consistently interjected the priority for ministering to the spiritual needs of the offender. This team member empathetically digested the resources, group discussion featuring counselling principles that encouraged prioritization of the survivor’s care, and expert presentations on prioritization of the vulnerable targets of domestic abuse but still labored over the offender’s care at almost every session.

Though the other team members were considerate and respectful of this team member’s seeming preoccupation with the offender’s rehabilitation, it became apparent by one participant’s stiffened back, rapidly tapping pencil, and set jaw that he had had enough. This enthusiastic team member felt strongly that the victim’s needs should always be prioritized over the offender’s (a natural practical and spiritual outcome of our focused team sessions and alignment with best practices) and was irritated by the

illogical-seeming team member. He felt frustrated with the dissenter, as did other team members, as evidenced by their body language and increasingly direct comments to the outlier team member. The feeling that precious time was being wasted was palpable as team members tried to reconcile the trajectory of our meetings with the lone team member who kept trying to discuss forgiving and embracing offenders.

Another team member also diplomatically challenged the singular, "abuser-centric" team participant who often couched concerns for the abuser as "grace," voicing, "How does the victim and the offender ultimately find grace and healing? Reconciliation?" suggesting that the abused and abuser should somehow get together. The team sessions eventually resumed with the overwhelming spiritual, practical, and statistical data that informed the expert's best practices, but the exchange was highly informative. The team member who kept circling back to "grace," and who had a close relative convicted of crimes, did so with convincing, religious fervor. Did his sincere faith in forgiveness and/or relationship with an errant family member fuel his drive to spiritually "rescue" the offender? Was his faith in God's redemption more profound than the other team members?

This interplay was highly instructive in retrospect as team members had to grapple with their own beliefs and convincing articulation of those beliefs when another Christian clearly disagreed with them—a transferrable insight to our project intervention and training design. Deeply held beliefs about protecting the vulnerable often coexist with the desire to show grace. Some spiritual leaders even suggest that the offender is actually the most vulnerable in the spiritual realm, thus justifying the prioritization of the offender's needs over the needs of the victim.

Notably, at the eighth and final session, the dissenting team member stunned the group by withdrawing his earlier position towards offender-centric-care and made an eloquent and deeply spiritual stand about his change of heart. He passionately spoke of the need to prioritize the #MeToo victim in all circumstances.

This fascinating study of how hearts can change could be harnessed productively by including elements of this dialogue in the training design. Confronting the misguided application of Scripture on grace and the realities of some who have close relationships with abusers is an important addition to our program design.

Finally, data diverged in the outsider angle where egalitarianism was not specifically mentioned in connection with #MeToo response, but its absence was implied. Dr. Knox, evaluating incidences where church leaders sanctioned male offenders to "come forward" during church services and ask for forgiveness and acceptance back into the fold but female victims had no such avenue (due to traditional C of C restrictions on women speaking in church), insightfully assessed, "Male perpetrators of sexual misconduct are given the privilege of a public forum in a church meeting. Females were not allowed the same forum. The inconsistencies are destructive."

The confusion and miscommunication that all too frequently accompany church #MeToo incidents imply that male elders have not used their power effectively towards helping female victims. For example, in the outsider angle, Dr. Knox explores this dichotomy, stating, "Victims have no idea how to function in a family system steeped in denial, as they anticipate being on the receiving end of gossip or retaliation. . . . The church is known for its capacity to express love and care but acts of sexual harassment are also ignored."

This assessment contrasts with the more positive remarks from the researcher fieldnotes reflecting team members, including elder team members, present at the sessions:

- "Part of being a shepherd is understanding the experiences of the flock and being a safe haven for difficult issues to be addressed."
- "Male and female are created in the image of God. A holistic approach to the body of Christ suggests all are equal contributors to and receivers of the grace and blessings in being in the body of Christ. ALL must recognize the love of Christ is without discrimination."
- "Jesus was absolutely concerned with the welfare and safety of women and generally about the wholeness of his people. Sexual abuse of any kind disrupts our wholeness and grieves God."
- "Understanding that men and women are equal in the body of Christ. Pain, emotional or physical, is capable of keeping one from experiencing the love God has, the fullness he has offered."

When the two elders on our team were not *both* present at a session, the following researcher notes indicated there was dissatisfaction with some past responses that leaders had had towards women with #MeToo experiences:

- "As men, elders are blinded from understanding a female perspective. Training may enlighten, inform, and encourage elders to be aware."
- "I'm not sure elders should lead it. Maybe they could 'authorize' the leaders who would be men and women. Somehow, they are seen as authorities so need to lead in some way."

- "[There need to be] conversations concerning female elders to minister to hurting female missional partners." (It is worth noting that some at OP are proposing female elders be allowed, though this does not seem likely in the near future.) These comments also showed an advocacy for egalitarianism—a need to see equality for women at OP. This equality could in turn have a positive impact on helping female targets of sexual harassment/abuse/violence.

In revisiting our NT theological rationale for this project, it is emphasized that Jesus compassionately draws near to women: "Jesus touches and is touched by those whom we would not expect to find in such proximity to Him." Among others, he "allows a sinful woman (Luke 7:39) and one with an issue of blood to touch him (Luke 8:44-47)," confirming Jesus's extraordinary care for an oft-neglected population and his intentionality in closing the gap between these hurting women and true healing.[14]

By implication, our data sets showed that church leadership should model this informed, appropriate physical affirmation for women who are #MeToo survivors. Elders should show fatherly compassion and demonstrate intentionally researched wisdom for those under their care.

These best-care practices from all our data angles can be woven into a training program design for elders responding to #MeToo experiences of church women. Applying and interpreting our triangulated data accurately would increase the likelihood of effective training design.

Finally, but most importantly, I evaluated this training program design as researcher through the lens of desired efficacy in responding to church-based #MeToo. In

14. Kroeger, *The IVP,* 562.

our seventy-two-year history at OP, there has been no such training designed, approved, or implemented. This fact gives the mere existence of a training design potential effectiveness. In turn, this potential could be a springboard for much needed healing and missional viability. As Graham Hill writes, "Restoring justice involves listening to the concerns and perspectives of others, even when they seem to address issues that don't directly affect us. It involves standing up for the rights and well-being of others-even if their well-being . . . seems only indirectly related to ours, and even when their well-being comes at our expense."[15]

In his seminal course on Christian leadership, Hill also expounded on the cycle of major church transitions, such as adopting a first-ever #MeToo training design for elders. Catalysts that ignite the change need a core group to light the fire. The training program design team thus became the "flame" for God's preferred future at OP. The progressive design team members have begun the "slow dissent" that starts second order change within adaptive church models informed by Cooperrider. The course of OP church history has been forever, positively altered by this design.

In the next chapter, conclusions and implications of this intervention will be explored.

15. Graham Joseph Hill, *Salt, Light, and a City, Second Edition: Ecclesiology for the Global Missional Community:* Volume 2*, Majority World Voices*. (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 184.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter 5 presented an analysis of the insider data gathered from the questionnaire that members of the training program design team completed after Session 6. Insights from the sessions were made available to all team members through a consistently updated, shared Google Doc. Additionally, using fire and police chaplaincy, pastoral care specialization, and advanced theological training, an "outsider" evaluation was made. Finally, as researcher, data triangulation was achieved utilizing theoretical and theological lens. Chapter 6 discusses research conclusions and implications for a training program design for elders responding to #MeToo experiences of adult females at OP.

Key Conclusions of This Intervention

Throughout the data set evaluation, there seemed to be differing opinions on what the elder role should be concerning church #MeToo experiences. This role definition and clarification, especially for the newer elders, might jumpstart the eventual #MeToo training. Therefore, elder roles should first be settled prior to learning new concepts in a training program.

During the team sessions, which included two elders, it became clear that all elders did not come into their role with uniform cultural background, theological training, or understanding of their role through Scripture. One of the elders on the team had been born into the C of C; the other elder was a convert to the C of C in young adulthood. The similarities and differences in how these two elders viewed #MeToo became known

during our team sessions and gave interesting insights into how elders may differ in their approach to #MeToo.

For example, since six out of ten OP elders did not grow up in the C of C, their exposure and expectations of the elder role may be different from those native to C of C. Additionally, some who *did* grow up in the C of C may have experienced traditional, even domineering models of elder behavior that still negatively color their perception of what an elder should do. These factors, in turn, could influence how an elder approaches #MeToo events of females.

In addition to interpretation of Scripture, various personal, professional, and religious experiences may be a factor in an elder's own perception of their role. Confusion may be compounded by the fact that discussion of sexuality seldom takes place in the church arena; thus, perceptions of such topics may filter through a lens that has been primarily shaped by secular streams. Those streams are fed by family background, education, politics, media, as well as other sources that may or may not align with Scriptures. A consistent, agreed-upon blueprint for elder qualifications and role requirements needs to be in place for both established and new elders. This step would help create needed common ground for addressing #MeToo.

During this research, it was also discovered that there was no plan/execution for comprehensive, intentional transfer of knowledge from existing elder groups to incoming elder groups. Although this may have been informed by perceived or mandated privacy/confidentiality guidelines, it is more likely that it remains an organizational/time issue. This fact that all elders may not be on the same page puts new elders at a distinct disadvantage when addressing sexual harassment/abuse/violence within the congregation.

Events that occurred before they came on board may still be unresolved, and also not officially known by all leaders.

Likewise, not all elders may know about ongoing offenders within the congregation. Some of those abusers may have successfully maintained a church profile that includes looking like a good family-oriented person, dedicated ministry volunteer/ leader, or friend. It is imperative that key information is sensitively and comprehensively transferred from existing elders to new elders. This transference of knowledge about church #MeToo directly impacts the efficiency of being able to handle a matter. As leaders unnecessarily wade through internal matters that could have been resolved prior, a suffering survivor is often wondering and waiting. Here, King's words come to mind again: "Justice delayed is justice denied." [1]

Additional Conclusions

1. The prayers beginning and ending each of our team sessions were essential to the vital content members were able to integrate into the training design. It should not be overlooked that the presence of the Holy Spirit should similarly be invited into all future presentations and training for the elders. Prayers need to be the essential bookends to this intervention, especially since there is often physical, psychological, and spiritual impact to survivors of church-based #MeToo.
2. For most members of the training design team, there was a clear incentive for the program design to prioritize the needs of the survivor. Although one team member consistently displayed more concern for the offender's spiritual care in the earlier sessions, it did not diminish the eventual unanimous conclusion that

1. Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 39.

past efforts at OP around handling #MeToo were often misdirected and needed to be reprioritized for the survivor. The imbalance manifested in extension of "grace" to the offender above addressing various complex needs of the survivor. This discussion implies that training should not assume there is consensus among elders and should directly orient the training focus towards survivor care.

3. Related to the disruption of the ongoing pandemic and the inherent stress of discontinuous change, the training design should include an evaluation of the overall preparedness of learners well in advance of the training event. For example, elders who shoulder burdens for the congregation are often depleted and battling their own personal and family challenges outside of church. During discontinuous change, it is essential for leaders to practice self-care, decompress from competing demands, and diffuse other volatile topics prior to tackling difficult aspects of service associated with #MeToo. As a therapeutic example, an elder retreat for refreshment, camaraderie, and spiritual encouragement could be planned prior to attempting #MeToo training.
4. The abstract concept of peace for the survivor was not tested in the laboratory of this intervention; however, there is great potential for future justice for the victims of sexual harassment/abuse/violence at OP. One conclusion drawn is that elders will have a harder time administering justice for survivors if they are close in some way to the offender. In our session discussions, we found that at least one offender was a faithful church volunteer and friend to an elder. It was clear there was still a significant barrier for the elder in deciding to apply church discipline to this friend. This elder eventually reconciled the fact that extending grace did not

preclude confrontation, dismissal from the church, and possible legal action. This breakthrough for the elder was profound and implied hopeful replication for other elders who might find themselves in similar situations. The training design should make room for serious dialogue and grappling with the reality that an offender might also be a friend.

5. Through our theological and theoretical lens there is new understanding of "neighbor" that humanizes and serves our intervention objective. Lukan Scripture framing this design is essential to our understanding and action towards a more globally relevant training program design. Acknowledging our "white myopia" and patriarchy as manifestations of Christendom will enable us to more fully address church based #MeToo. Notably, it became clear that the needs of women of color, as well as non-English-speaking females experiencing sexual harassment/abuse/violence are compelling and need to be addressed for the increasingly multi-ethnic context of OP.
6. The presentation on church-based domestic violence illuminated an area of #MeToo not initially considered in the training program design. This overview and question/answer follow-up unveiled a pervasive problem in our culture and statistically, within our church. (Later, the pandemic would prove to exacerbate existing tense conditions, and domestic violence would spike alarmingly during the necessitated confinement of the pandemic.) Research and consideration of this issue as related #MeToo phenomena was a key event of our team sessions and indicates much further study and attention should be given to this issue.

7. Although this aspect of the training design intervention implies much more study, there is a significant possibility that the targeting of female #MeToo survivors has correlation to the emerging egalitarian roles at OP. Interestingly, all of the female interviewees within this intervention also served as inaugural church leaders when women were allowed these roles. Does the fact that female survivors are in newly accessible prominent positions, formerly exclusively held by men, make these women more susceptible to church-based sexual harassment/abuse/violence? Examples from McKnight and Barringer's work strongly imply that female church leaders at Willow Creek mega church were not immune to #MeToo and were, in fact, some of the chief victims. As Judith Herman informs, sexual harassment/abuse/violence has significant correlation to power balance. This potential church-based #MeToo uptick may be an unexpected side effect of gender inclusion and warrants further research and consideration.
8. There is still considerable discomfort with openly discussing topics that have sexual connotations. This reality should be factored into any educational endeavor attempted with an all-male eldership at OP. (In addition to the elder team members, there was initial discomfort from the other male *and* female team members as they at first referred to sexual harassment/abuse/violence in more restrained terms.) The participant's comfort level can directly impact the efficacy of the training. My professional experience also implies that adult learners may subconsciously transfer their discomfort about #MeToo onto others, even a survivor, with negative, even damaging, effect. Adult training theory indicates that optimal learning takes place when audiences feel most comfortable. My

experience further implies that strategies, such as creating a climate of objectivity, trust, and nonjudgement are best achieved at this time for OP, with the assistance of a non-church-based consulting group (such as GRACE.org) who holds expertise advising on #MeToo incidents.

9. The case study based on a thirty-year-old OP incident was emotionally impactful and instructive but also held potential for a confidentiality breech. Though the survivor's current name and whereabouts were not known, the survivor's privacy would have been better honored with a fictional case. The case could be fictionalized and still be effective. As I looked back, it seemed the description of the victim could become an emotional distraction from the other transferrable insights towards our project's goals.
10. Elders' decisions at that time of the OP case we first examined in team sessions were made without benefit of tools and resources now available. The implied negative evaluation of the elder's response at that time of the incident seems anachronistic and possibly incomplete/unfair. In retrospect, this aspect of the case needs more balanced context, even though one of the original elders at the time who was a member of our design team, concurred they had made mistakes, and sanctioned our discussion and reflection upon this event for the goal of church improvement. A fictionalized case might also help mitigate the tendency to apply too broad a brush to past #MeToo events.
11. The unexpected intrusion of the global Covid-19 outbreak created both challenges and opportunities for our training design. With the necessitated utilization of Zoom for our final training design team sessions, it became clear that an alternate

to in-person training should be added to our design. The implication is that synchronous or asynchronous learning and hybrid methodologies should be explored and added to the training design. Additional implications were that elders were increasingly comfortable meeting online and, in some cases, might prefer training that did not require their physical presence. Initially designed to be in person, the future program would more likely have online and in person elements. For example, definitions, limitations, and delimitations could be reviewed at an elder's convenience online before the in-person sections of training were held in a physically present group session.

12. The training design did not include a long-term counseling dynamic for the survivor within the church. Although this attention to the victim might be needed, the church at this time does not have the professional expertise or staff capacity to attempt extended counselling sessions. Rather, a design should allow learners to better determine when a professional in the field of trauma/sexual offense is needed and fill in the gaps with follow up lay care by trained members of the proposed OP Compassionate Care Team. Similarly, a clear assessment of when to report an incident to law enforcement should be included in the training design.
13. In my adult training professional expertise, it was established that all adults come with strengths and contributions to the training event that should be honored and tapped into. Similarly, all adults come into training with some degree of anxiety—even strong apprehension—and it is incumbent upon the trainer(s) to consider this and employ learning strategies to mitigate anxiety in the design of the training.

14. The design benefited from ongoing discovery and publication of scholarly journals focused on care of church-based #MeToo survivors. The implication is that thoughtful consideration and ongoing exploration of such advances in best care practices should be paired with ongoing theological research and discovery by authoritative sources. For example, McKnight and Barringer's *A Church Called Tov* was published in 2020 after the initial start of this project but yielded great advances in theological perspective and practical examples that were helpful in the final phases of this project.

Additional readings during this project give further insights and implications for #MeToo leadership during times of transition**.**

Discontinuous Change

Roxburgh and Romanuk's work, *The Missional Leader,* presciently addresses the exacerbated challenges within the pandemic world in their book section, "Discontinuous Change is the New Norm."[2] This "new norm" is contrasted with continuous, or developmental, change that "develops out of what has gone before and therefore can be expected, anticipated, and managed."[3] The authors resonate with the times, "Discontinuous change is disruptive and unanticipated; it creates situations that challenge our assumptions . . . the organization has moved to a level of complexity that is beyond the teams' skills and ability."[4] The disruptive and unanticipated features of the pandemic

2. Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk. *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 9.

3. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 8–9.

4. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 9.

align with discontinuous change. With additional insight, Roxburgh and Romanuk state that "leaders suddenly find that the skills and capacities in which they were trained are of little use in addressing a new situation and environment."[5]

On this related theme, Van Gelder in *The Ministry of the Missional Church* builds a bridge, "Congregational leaders need to attend carefully to the dynamics of process when introducing change. Likewise, they need to help a congregational develop capacity to respond to changes."[6] What best practices could speak into this situation?

Positive Leadership Attributes

In seeking answers to our church based #MeToo challenges, my readings led to additional expanded themes including: nonanxious presence, listening, and self-care. These themes will be expanded upon below.

Nonanxious Presence

Family systems theory holds insights for OP leaders given our challenges at hand. This theory, which was discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, sheds light on some elders' past responses to #MeToo experiences of females at OP. Could misguided responses be understood, in part, as emotional reaction from multiple losses? For some elders, whose past focus centered around protecting and preserving the reputation of the church, confronting the evil of #MeToo within the congregation challenges their abilities, spirituality, and perceived role as protector. A double bind exists for elders;

5. Roxburgh, *The Missional Leader*, 9.

6. Craig Van gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007),154.

acknowledging the existence and pain of women experiencing #MeToo may simultaneously splinter the image of being a good Christian leader.

This fracturing can be informed by the concept of "nonanxious presence." Such leaderly calm aligns with scriptural teaching about anxiety (Phil 4:6) as well as related posture of Christ-like humility (Phil 4:5-11). Is it possible that anxiety is reduced by an enhanced outlook of humility? Could elders revisit their past decisions non-anxiously and align with a true self-emptying that would, in turn, create healing and hope for not only survivors but themselves? This path would require vulnerability, setting aside bruised egos, church appearances, and perceived religious "rightness" for the benefit of the survivor. Further, could this self-effacing leadership change the dynamics of loss for all involved?

Friedman describes this sacrificial, nonanxious presence of a leader as having "the capacity . . . to contain their own anxiety regarding congregational matters."[7] Peter Steinke expands on this theme in *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times*: "In effect, the anxious leader leaves the congregation without real leadership."[8] Are survivors of #MeToo crisis experiencing their pain and attempted resolution 'without real leadership?' If so, how could elders course-correct?

Steinke recommends productive actions that leaders like elders can employ such as keeping, "calm for the purpose of reflection and conversation; observe what is

7. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 208.

8. Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times—Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Lanham, MD: Bowman & Littlefield, 2006), 34.

happening, especially with oneself; maintain a clear sense of direction."[9] Could these actions be part of the path to healing at OP?

Finally, Steinke advises, "The nonanxious presence involves engagement, being there and taking the heat, if need be, witnessing the pain, and yet not fighting fire with fire."[10] What will it look like for #MeToo resolution to lean into these leadership principles? How can our training program design use these principles to help elders navigate the rapids of #MeToo?

Mercifully, God promises to give us strength and direction to overcome defeat by leaning into the Holy Spirit as Ruth Haley Barton, author of *Pursuing God's Will Together* emphasizes. Barton asks, "What will I lay aside or leave behind so that I will be open to new gifts of grace or new expressions of ministry?"[11] How could #MeToo training influence elders to "lay aside" in order to heal the relationship with survivors still in the church?

As a result of such questions, I have been re-dedicating myself to the spiritual disciplines of solitude, Scripture reading, and prayer. Affirming this, Barton writes, "The habit of spirituality precedes the discipline of discernment."[12] From my reflection, staying humble, nonanxious and prayerful are the first steps in resolving our #MeToo challenges. Additionally, Steinke implies that intentional listening to survivors in our

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9. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, 34-35.

10. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, 36.

11. Ruth Haley Barton, *Pursuing God's Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups* (InterVarsity Press, 2012),190.

12. Barton, *Pursuing God's*, 57.

context is beneficial: "Leadership often thought to be about action, is more about interaction."[13]

Listening

The Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–47), as outlined in Chapter 3 of this thesis, explores the meaning of neighbor and revolves on the axis of treating everyone with Jesus's acceptance and mercy. These actions are in keeping with the practice of listening. Research for this intervention suggests that by listening to congregant's stories before we make changes (on top of the inherent changes in a pandemic), we can make church transitions more smoothly. This fact is especially relevant for #MeToo survivors. The art of truly listening to those women who have experienced sexual harassment/abuse/violence takes courage. Leadership also takes a calm assurance and a real desire to communicate with our congregants—activities that have been difficult for some elders who are introverted, unequipped, or may view their role as an authoritarian one.

Elders must approach survivors with warmth and trust that survivors are telling the truth. This less-intimidating approach allows authentic sharing of #MeToo events. (This does become difficult, of course, when the survivor is understandably sad, scared, angry, or in shock.)

Initiated proactively by elders, these conversations can be deposits into an emotional bank account that will pay huge dividends in the future. If dialogue on diverse topics is already in place with an elder, it could be less complex to report a #MeToo event to that elder. A bridge of trust will have already been built. As Barton affirms, "We bind

13. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, 34.

ourselves to each other in times of strength so that in moments of weakness we do not become unbound."[14]

On this theme of listening, Barton further shares,

> The process of establishing core values and principles that will shape our life together must include allowing individuals to talk about the values important to them and to let the group tell stories about important corporate values and how they became important. John English calls this activity 'sharing our personal and communal graced history . . . taking time to remember in this fashion has the possibility to powerfully integrate what was given in the past with what is being given in the present and what we are seeking in the future.'[15]

Scott Cormode also supports this idea of focusing on people's stories and listening before addressing major pivotal events at church so that when we speak as leaders, we give "a word from the Lord."[16] This "word from the Lord" serves to help people make sense of their experiences in an appropriate spiritual frame. Cormode continues this theme, explaining, "people are not going to easily change the stories they tell themselves to make sense of their worlds. So, we have to get them to pay attention to new details and help them to cultivate different expectations."[17]

Similarly, VanGelder adds that "failing to adequately prepare the congregation for the change being introduced . . . greatly compounded this sense of disruption."[18] With our proposed #MeToo training design, might it be helpful to set aside time to listen to the stories of the survivors prior to making policy on sexual harassment/abuse/violence?

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14. Barton, *Pursuing God's*, 157.

15. Barton, *Pursuing God's*, 95.

16. Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 65.

17. Cormode, *Making Spiritual,* 64-65.

18. Van Gelder, *The Ministry,* 154.

What would it look like to create a space to mourn the losses of the survivors and their families? How could these congregational preparations help resolve #MeToo challenges?

An idea that emerged with this research is to allow congregants to safely process events of the elders' past response to #MeToo experiences of women at OP. This aligns with the biblical practice of lament and could be a healing ceremony. This processing may require some to re-assess their C of C traditions but also, more importantly, their own feelings of uncertainty and fear. Additionally, at loss is a cherished (though naïve) view of church that never has #MeToo within its walls. This processing could also be part of the leader's own self-care discipline—being sure to recognize and address experiences and feelings exacerbated by the confronted realities.

Continuing this theme, Stephen Smith adjures that going forward without this advised processing time can be dangerous: "There is no time to decompress, no time to adjust, no time to get grounded in the new realities."[19] Smith adds wisdom in dealing with leaders who need adjustment time so they can in turn help survivors.

Guiding our congregants in adjusting to new and difficult realities, allowing space to listen to stories, and non-anxiously and humbly providing spiritual interpretation could relieve unhealthy dynamics at church. Additionally, these actions could facilitate healing for the losses of #MeToo survivors and their impacted families.

Self-Care

Key readings underscore lessons for leaders practicing their own self-care. Barton advocates for self-care as a discipline for spiritual leaders and reminds us, "Living within

19. Stephen Smith, *Inside Job: Doing the Work Within the Work* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 141.

our limits means living within the finiteness of who we are as individuals and as a community."[20] In *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership,* using the story of Moses, Barton shares signs that a leader is reaching their limits. Some of these signs include: "Irritability or Hypersensitivity; Compulsive overworking; Emotional numbness; Escapist behaviors; Slippage in our spiritual practices."[21]

These characteristics have been exacerbated during the stressful demands on elders during the pandemic. What would it look like for elders to attend to these self-care warning signs? How would this self-care reap benefits for elders as well as the congregation at this time, including survivors of #MeToo? Prophetically, Barton concludes, "When we refuse to live within our limits, we wear out ourselves and those who lead with us. We compromise the quality of our relationships with God and the people around us. We compromise our effectiveness in doing those things we have been called to do."[22]

Drawing on OT Scripture, we note how Moses is reprimanded by Aaron after he shoulders too much responsibility for the clamoring Israelites. In the NT, Jesus regularly prioritizes alone time asking God for wisdom, even when he is being hounded by the devil. Christian leadership can be lonely and stressful and all the more, it turns out, during a pandemic. As leaders necessarily address more pressing or palatable church business, not only our own #MeToo victims but a suffering pandemic world of survivors

20. Ruth Hayley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, IVP Books, 2008), 104.

21. Barton, *Strengthening the Soul,* 104.

22. Barton, *Strengthening the Soul*, 34.

is wondering and waiting if God even cares. Without proper policy and #MeToo response from elders, we are effectively asking victims to wait while we concentrate on other matters. Can we set aside our own loss and reactivity in exchange for the productive self-emptying humility, nonanxious presence, people-focused listening, and self-care that will fuel us for empathy for those who need healing from church-based #MeToo?

Conclusion

I end this research with enduring hope and confidence in our elders as new insights and actions concerning responding to #MeToo experiences of women at OP are taking place because of this intervention. I applaud these efforts and look forward to a new day for survivors of sexual harassment/abuse/violence even through the discontinuous changes we are experiencing now in a pandemic.

As a result of this project, I have been reminded of the devoted academic and leader-supporters of this intervention, encouragement of family and friends, and the courageous survivors who have spoken out to achieve potential healing for us all. I have also been honored by new recognition of my own role as catalyst, optimist, and witness to this positive change. At the time of this writing, a team of elders is moving forward with our team's recommendation to enlist an outside consulting group to assess and assist in our #MeToo policy going forward.

Wilkerson's "old house" opening analogy suggests rich potential for the recognition and resolution of the systemic evil manifested in church-based sexual harassment, abuse, and violence. Unmasked in the global #MeToo movement of 2017, these abuses from which the church is not immune give renewed incentive for confrontation and restoration.

The body of Christ with its inherent beauty calls forth our best efforts to not only recognize the fissures in our congregational dwelling, but to address them. With church-based sexual harassment/abuse/violence, we must tear out the rot of our "old house" and shore up the foundations, beams, and ceilings with a clear read of Scripture, dedicated listening and learning, and Spirit-empowered will to act. Our esteemed architecture will endure only if we do the challenging work of repair. God's "old house" has Jesus Christ as its foundation, and it is eminently worth the saving.

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APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885

December 20, 2019

Jana Unruh
Department of Marriage and Family
Abilene Christian University

Dear Jana,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled
"Designing a Program to Train Elders to Respond to #MeToo Experiences of Adult Females at OP Church",

(IRB#)is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects as:
☑ Non-research, and
☐ Non-human research
Based on:
Quality Improvement in which all participants are expected to benefit, all receive at least standard treatment, and the purpose is to evaluate process change in order to immediately implement program improvements.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

OP Women's #MeToo Survey

July 26, 2018

#MeToo Survey Questions

- ***Do you believe females attending OP have been impacted by the #MeToo movement?*** YES NO
- ***If you answered 'YES' – Please circle all that apply:***
  a. Females attending OP believe knowing about the #MeToo movement is helpful in relating to and/or evangelizing non-believers.
  b. Females attending OP know family and/or friends that have experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual abuse and/or sexual violence in situations outside of OP/OP-related events (such as work, neighborhood, dating, domestic, other religious environments, etc.)
  c. Females attending OP know family and/or friends that have experienced sexual harassment and abuse at OP and/or OP-related events.
  d. Females attending OP have *themselves* experienced sexual harassment/abuse/violence in situations outside of OP/ OP-related events. (such as work, neighborhood, dating, domestic, other religious environments, etc.)
  e. Females attending OP have *themselves* experienced sexual harassment and abuse at OP and/or OP-related events.
  f. Other (Please describe)

- ***Which OP/church-related settings would be appropriate for talking about the #MeToo movement? Please circle all that apply:***
  a. Sunday morning worship assembly
  b. Male and Female Joint Class
  c. Females-Only Class
  d. Male and Female Joint Group
  e. Females-Only Group
  f. Male and Female Joint Special Event
  g. Females-Only Special Event
  h. OP/church related events are not appropriate settings for #MeToo discourse.
  i. Other (Please describe)

4. Do you believe most females attending OP know the policy for sexual harassment and abuse at OP and/or OP-related events? YES NO

5. ***What questions do you have about policies at OP concerning sexual harassment/sexual abuse/sexual violence?*** (Please describe)

Please indicate the answers to each question that best describe you (Optional):

Gender: M F

Approximate years attending OP:
Less than 1 yr. 1-5 yrs. 6-10 yrs. 11-15 yrs. 16-25 yrs. 26-40 yrs. 41-55 yrs. 56+ yrs.

Age: 16-20 21-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90+

Relationship Status: Widow Single Married Other

Religious affiliation(s) prior to attending OP?:

APPENDIX C

OP Women's #MeToo Survey Results

Survey findings include:

OP females have experienced incidents of sexual harassment and/or spectrum events (abuse, violence) outside of OP (Seventeen of twenty respondents indicated 'YES')

OP females have experienced incidents of sexual harassment and/or spectrum events (abuse, violence) **at** OP and/or OP-related events. (Five of twenty respondents indicated 'YES')

OP has no consistent, well-communicated, trauma-informed policy for incidents of #MeToo perpetrated upon adult females who attend OP and/or OP-related events. (Sixteen of twenty respondents indicated 'YES')

Comments from the survey respondents concerning OP policy about #MeToo included:

"Is there protocol/steps in action to protect the girls/women in our church?" (from a woman between twenty-one to twenty-nine years old who has attended OP between one and five years)

"How can we access these policies?" (from a woman between sixteen to twenty-five years old who has attended OP over sixteen years)

"I don't remember ever hearing about such policies in any setting" (from a woman between seventy to seventy-nine years old who has attended OP an undisclosed number of years)

APPENDIX D

Field Note-Taking Protocol

1. Each week, record the participants that show up for the session. In session one, be sure to note demographic observations such as sex, race, age, years of attendance at OP.

2. Notes will be recorded in a 2-column format. The note-taker will record all observations on the left column. The Primary Investigator will record observations in the right column immediately following the session.

3. The notes are comprehensive with key themes recorded even if not all verbiage is verbatim, with the name of the speaker, the key idea of their words, and observations about voice tone, emotional cues, body language or other non-verbal communication.

4. Particular attention should be paid to mention of participants best practices that they employ as professionals or have encountered from outside research during this intervention process. Additionally, #MeToo incidences/interventions/personal experiences shared during the sessions should be recorded as they are additional relevant data supporting the need for this intervention.

5. At the end of the session, the notes will be made and secured by the Primary Investigator (PI). Sample Note Template: Field Notes and PI Observations

Field Notes	**PI Observations**

APPENDIX E

Design Team Questionnaire

1. ***How does the designed training program inform and/or expand on how elders understand "#MeToo" occurrences at OP?*** (Please describe)

2. ***According to the designed training program, why must elders lead the church concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities?*** (Please describe)

3. ***Which reasons given in answers to question #2 will most strongly incentivize elders to lead concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities?*** (Please describe)

4. ***According to the designed training program, what new best-practices will be given for elders to lead the church concerning #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities? What new resources will be given? What new tools will be given?*** (Please describe)

5. ***What further questions do you believe leaders will have about response to #MeToo experiences of women at OP/OP-related activities?*** (Please describe)

APPENDIX F

Design Team Consent Form

Introduction: Hi _____. My name is Jana Unruh. I am a student in the Graduate School of Theology at Abilene Christian University and am working on a DMin project. My primary advisor's name is Dr. Lisa Powell and she can be reached at lisa.powell@acu.edu or 325-674-2092. You may contact Dr. Powell with any questions you may have.

Purpose: The goal of my project is to design a program to train elders to respond to #Me Too experiences of adult females at OP.

Procedure: If you consent, you will be asked both written and oral questions concerning OP and OP events as well as your impressions of #MeToo related church responses.

Time Required: The six sessions will take 1.5 hours each with potential additional time for the purposes of your individual research and report of your time.

Recording: All six sessions will be recorded with an audio recording device. Then, the interview will be transcribed by the Primary Investigator (Jana Unruh) and secured.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You can choose not to participate. If you chose to do so, you may refrain from answering any of the questions asked.

Risks: There are no known risks to these recorded sessions. If you feel any anxiety about this, please let me know immediately.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you individually. However, since the content of the sessions will be used as information to design a program to train elders to respond to #MeToo experiences of adult females at OP, you may be providing potential healing for those impacted by #MeToo. You may receive benefits longitudinally through the increased effectiveness of OP's future response to #MeToo experiences of adult females.

Confidentiality: Your name will be kept confidential in the reporting.

Sharing the Results: The results of this project will be written in a formal documentation. It will include my field notes, but your name will be removed. Additionally, your responses to questionnaires will be coded for final DMin thesis. The report and field notes will be shared with Religion Division faculty at Abilene Christian University and will be published with the approval and completion of the DMin project. The report will be shared with OP elders.

Publication: This work will be published.

Before you sign:

"By signing below, you are agreeing to audiotaped design team sessions for this DMin project at OP. Be sure that any questions you may have are answered to your satisfaction. If you agree to participate in this project, a copy of this document will be given to you."

Participant's Signature_____ Date _____

*Printed Name*_____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

APPENDIX G

Training Program Design

Objectives

- Understand theological rationale for responding to sexual harassment/abuse/violence (#MeToo) experiences of adult females at OP
- Review of language/definitions for #MeToo (this is covered in pre-course work)
- Understanding OP history of #MeToo (only fictional names/other agreed upon confidentiality standards)
- Review of developing a culture of trust (this is covered in pre-course work)
- Understanding survivor dynamics (this is covered in pre-course work but will be re-iterated)
- Listening to survivors
- Supporting survivors
- Progress with outside consulting group
- Making referrals/Overview of best practices (this is covered in pre-course work but will be re-iterated)
- Areas for further development/policy

Facilitator/training design team responsibilities prior to training event

- Work with elders to secure the optimal training date 4-6 months prior to event
- Reserve the training space 4-6 months in advance of the training event through official church coordinator
- Determine budget if needed/gain approval 12 weeks prior to training session

- Order copies of the handbook for “Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused” 12 weeks prior to the training session
- Copies of Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused” distributed to elders 8 weeks in advance of training event
- Determine training privacy standards needed in advance/communicate to elders for feedback 8 weeks in advance
- Discuss any additional confidentiality/privacy issues and guidelines for protection of survivors/offenders during the sessions 8 weeks in advance. (Convey that no names will be used during the training session, rather examples of situations will be referenced through Case Studies and fictional names.) Resolve any outstanding issues. Run final guidelines past church administrator and communicate to all participants 6 weeks in advance
- Consult with elders/Discuss whether to record sessions/give participants decision and communicate 6 weeks in advance
- Designate a technology point man dedicated to monitoring all tech aspects(checking mic, projection system, running video’s, lighting issues, Zoom meeting setup/recording as needed, referring, or responding to Chat Room comments/questions during the training event as needed) 6 weeks in advance
- Gather participant emails and send out Zoom invites well in advance as needed. Confirm the invitations were received. Resolve any issues as needed prior to training event
- Create elder training certificates (check name spellings)and have signed 4 weeks prior to training event
- Purchase small fidget spinners/stress balls/modelling clay to distribute on training tables 4 weeks prior to training event for hands-on activities/stress relief
- Gather white copy paper, markers, white butcher block paper, tape, easels, and toy building blocks from media center 4 weeks prior to training event
- Reserve microphone and do a sound check during the pre-training run through/Address any issues 4 weeks prior to training event and week of the training event
- Make sure screen and projector in the fellowship hall work 4 weeks prior to training event to allow time for repairs if needed

- Send out finalized training agenda for elders and confirm pre-course work complete 2 weeks in advance

Pre-Course work for facilitator(s)/training design team

- Pray specifically for this training, elders, and survivors/families impacted by sexual harassment/abuse/violence at our church
- Read/Review Chapter 1 from prior elder/staff book discussion, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture*
- Read Chapter 1/Watch video *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*
- Create three take-aways from your time on the design team that you would like addressed during the training and send to the trainer 4 weeks in advance of training session

Pre-Course work for Elders

- Pray specifically for this training, elders, and survivors/families impacted by sexual harassment/abuse/violence at our church
- Elders take/submit learning short learning styles poll (identifying style as kinesthetic, auditory, visual learners.) (Elders will be grouped according to the learning styles during training)
- Elders Read/Review Chapter 1 from elder/staff book, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture*
- Elders Read Chapter 1/Watch video *Becoming a Church That Cares Well for the Abused*
- Elders Create three questions you would like addressed during the training and send to the trainer one week in advance of training session.

Training preparation/room setup week of training event

- Set up podium in front of stage and small table and chair for facilitator(s)

- Set up a large, round table in the center of the room to hold snacks, drinks – easily accessible to all
- Set up four medium round tables with chairs (so that 3-4 break-out groups can comfortably sit) around the large, center table
- Set up two, large, rectangular tables for initial materials/team-building exercises against west wall
- Set up two large easels with fresh flip-chart paper on either side of the podium
- Technology point man test Zoom viewable session for those who cannot be physically present as previously determined. Situate equipment optimally to allow participants best training experience
- Gather and plug in extension cords to be used for laptops/other tech during training

Training Day Agenda

Welcome

- Led by Elder and facilitator
- Include rationale for training
- Touch on rich history of our congregation towards helping vulnerable populations.
- Brief agenda for the day
- Review of agreed upon confidentiality guidelines
- Point out snacks and drinks supplied and invite participants to enjoy throughout session

Opening Prayer Led by Elder

Brief Overview of Objectives for Training

- Understand theological rationale for responding to sexual harassment/abuse/violence (#MeToo) experiences of adult females at OP
- Review of language/definitions for #MeToo (this is covered in pre-course work)
- Understanding OP history of #MeToo (only fictional names/other agreed upon confidentiality standards)
- Review of developing a culture of trust (this is covered in pre-course work)
- Understanding survivor dynamics (this is covered in pre-course work but will be re-iterated)
- Listening to survivors
- Supporting survivors
- Progress with outside consulting group
- Making referrals/Overview of best practices (this is covered in pre-course work but will be re-iterated)
- Areas for further development/policy

Intro of Design Team/OP Professionals Who Helped with Training Design

Brief Review of Best Practices Presentations

- Trauma Informed Care
- A.C.E.s – Predisposition to incidents of abuse
- Learning about the intersections of sexual harassment/abuse/violence that often happen in domestic violence.
- "The Church can unwittingly be complicit in creating 'Power and Control' for abusers because of some traditions of church patriarchy."
- Family sexual harassment/abuse/violence is often overlooked but we found is another facet needing policy.

Brief History/Rationale of Project

- Elder Presentation/PowerPoint from 02/23/2021
- OP Elder Wall of Courage Activity (activity will affirm elder's past activities/positively frame action needed with #MeToo)
- (Jeopardy Game projected onto large screen. Elders will form two teams and briefly recount successful changes made throughout history of OP in Jeopardy game format using two game buzzers. The team with the most correct answers wins (small prizes given).

  Examples:

  - Decision to support missionaries in Liberia (What is J & B and sons?)
  - Decision to move church to new location (What is Antioch & 103rd?)
  - Decision to move church to current location (What is Pflumm & 119th?)
  - Decision for musical instruments to be used in worship (What is 2nd service banjo?)
  - Decision to include women in 2nd service worship (What is Reta giving communion meditation?)
  - Decision to include women in 1st service worship (What is Taylor preaching?)

Break -10 minutes

Theological Background

- Old Testament Background (Facilitated by male Elder/theologian)
- Scripture reading by pre-selected elders
- New Testament background (Female minister/design team member/theologian)
- Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan
- Scriptural egalitarian rationale
- Scripture reading by pre-selected elders
- Elder/training team Q & A session
- Understanding OP history of #MeToo (only fictional names/other agreed confidentiality standards)
    1. "After #MeToo Event" – unanimous elder support in 2017
    2. OP Women's Survey – anonymous/voluntary survey of random sampling OP women in 2018
- Discussion

Break -15 minutes

Brief Video – A Day in the life of female church goers (shows how females constantly do 'safety checks' as compared to males)

- Female/Male preselected participants use flip charts on easels to write out their 'safety checks' for a typical day
- Brief unpacking: questions/comments responded to by female facilitator(s)/training team
- Understand language/definitions for #MeToo
- Discussion/Q & A

Case Study – "The House Has Been Robbed" (Case Study to reflect on survivors using 'Good Samaritan' parable)

- Reading of case study by preselected elder
- Small groups of elders break out and work together to resolve elements of case study (that help to underscore issues related to #MeToo from survivor perspective)

- Group discussion by table
- Report findings back to the larger group
- Group discussion/final comments of entire group

Break - 15 minutes

Developing a Culture of Trust

- Stats from business sector/Navex Global showing reporting trends going down does not necessarily indicate fewer incidents of #MeToo; rather, may mean there is not a climate of trust within the organization
- Larger group discussion using principles from pre-course work

Listening to Victims

- Lighter video on listening skills for typical male/female
- Brief Video on survivor listening/trauma informed care practices
- Considerations for best listening environment
- Designate trained, small group of elders, plus trained female resource/victim advocate
- Have discussion in a neutral setting to reduce anxiety
- Consider having a socially distanced setting, such as Zoom
- Resist 'tribunal' scenario whereby victim feels intimidated trying to convey information to large group of men (this can be traumatizing for survivors, even if done via Zoom)
- Brief Video and/or Reading of OP Survivor testimonial
- Facilitator recap of principles in *A Church Called Tov*
- Large group discussion/Elder participants relate principles that resonate with them from their pre-course work

Break - 15 minutes

- Brief Review of "Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused."
- Stats from OP Women's Survey/large group Q&A

- Assume they are sharing truth (Give the benefit of the doubt from recent sermon series/Randy Harris conference at OP)
- Understand it takes a great deal of courage to come forward to the elders
- Assume survivors may (right or wrong) be: afraid, shame-filled, confused, angry, silent
- Ask elders to recount the most courageous thing they have witnessed/done themselves in the church context (think about preplanning this) and share this with their small group
- Ask elders to reflect on the most humiliating thing that has happened to them;(these will not be shared with the small group, but will serve as a tool to better understand how survivors may experience sexual harassment/abuse/violence)

Break - 10 minutes

- Report on Progress with outside consulting group (elders on this team)
- Making referrals/Overview of desired best practices (counselor)

Discussion of Areas for further development/policy

- Care Team of trained volunteers/professionals
    1. Recruitment
    2. Training (initial and ongoing)
- Clearly communicated responsibilities/time frames for Care Team members
- Frequent/Clear communications to the congregation about Care Team
- Current reporting system
    1. Multiple reporting formats with varying degrees of efficacy
    2. Needed understanding for those being reported to, of their roles/responsibilities
    3. No clear process once report is made

4. No clear time frames for resolution
5. No consistent check-ins with survivors/survivor's family
6. No consistent process for offenders/offender's family
7. No consistent path to communicate with congregation about offender if designated
8. No clearly communicated ethics/legal considerations
9. Improved reporting system
10. Easily accessible (24/7, Consider phone app, website, designated Care Team members)
11. Confidential
12. Informs reporter of process/time frames/contacts for additional concerns
13. Available for female survivors and those who report on behalf /eventually for male survivors
14. Legal considerations/reports as applicable/clearly explained and timeframes for process
15. Consistent check-in with reporter (so they may give consent to further process as well as have report resolved in a timely manner ("Justice delayed is Justice denied" principle)
16. Financial support for survivor (may cover counselling, other expenses related to event)

Survivor Support Case Study (Elder participants will work with their small groups to write action steps needed to support the survivor. (Optional exercise is for each small group to use building blocks to create a model of how reporting should work)They will draw from the principles from their pre-course work, training content, and discussion)

- Church Communications – clearly, comprehensively, and updated regularly for all (especially new) members
- From Pulpit
- From Official Church news/emails/mail outs
- Posted prominently in the church building in various locations
- On Church website
- On Social media

Q & A

Closing Comments (Designated elder(s)/facilitator/training team)

Closing Prayer (Led by elder/survivor)

APPENDIX H

The Outside Expert Training Evaluation

Dr. John Knox

I have been in pastoral ministry for thirty-four years. In addition to those responsibilities, I have served as a police and fire chaplain for thirty-two years. Sexual assaults and various expressions of sexual harassment have been repeated themes in both arenas of my ministry experience. I have ministered to countless crime victims, who were sexually violated by people who were perceived as trustworthy. Church has not proven to be a safe place for such victims. Therefore, Jana Unruh's courageous and thorough research is timely and desperately needed. Training church leaders to respond to #MeToo experiences of adult females maintains the potential to change the present culture of local churches.

I recall sitting in an undergraduate psychology course at a Christian University in 1982 when the professor revealed statistics regarding childhood victims of sexual assault. My internal reaction was immediate. I dismissed the statistics as being completely unapplicable to children and adults who are a part of a church. In my twenty-year-old mind, such conduct simply did not occur in a church setting.

In my estimation as a professional, there are five key areas that Unruh's research is especially impactful. She notes the unique challenges of responding to #MeToo experiences in a church context. The culture of the church is unique. Such distinctive cultural characteristics create challenging hurdles to overcome.

The church views itself as a haven from the worldly intrusion of sexual harassment, but Unruh duly notes that such self-perception is nothing more than faux harmony. Victims have no idea how to function in a family system steeped in denial, as they anticipate being on the receiving end of gossip or retaliation. She further notes the dichotomy of church life. The church is known for its capacity to express love and care but acts of sexual harassment are also ignored. Unruh promotes the legitimate goal of the church serving as a role model to the world in the comfort and healing of victims.

This research also notes that the culture of a church enables toxic secret keeping. She notes that stigmatization of sins of a sexual nature promote secret keeping. The seminal work of Edwin Friedman was referenced extensively in this context. I would add to Unruh's conclusions that such secret keeping inhibits criminal actions from being thoroughly investigated. Even the failure to report in some cases can be classified as a criminal action.

A repeated theme in this work is the inconsistent application of biblical ideals in a church context. There are numerous such references in Unruh's work. She uses language such as "over-looking" and "under-listening" in reference to female survivors of #MeToo. Male perpetrators of sexual misconduct are given the privilege of a public forum in a church meeting. Females were not allowed the same forum. The inconsistencies are destructive. She points out the inconsistent applications of God's characteristics of mercy, love, and justice. Unruh uses the phrase "selective outpourings of grace" to describe such practices. My experience in pastoral ministry tells me that consistency and fairness are objectives that church leaders must aspire to in the quest to be guided by the strongest Christian ethic possible.

The second area of consideration is the value of this project thesis in terms of its far-reaching implications for future ministry. The inconsistent responses of church leaders to victims of sexual harassment are well developed in this work. Elders interviewed readily admitted a lack of personal experience and training in this area of ministry. Unruh expresses the need for future research that will address the confusion and miscommunication that all too frequently accompanies #MeToo. More specifically, this piece makes appropriate application of the Parable of the Good Samaritan. One quote that stands out to me is as follows: "Is the sexually harassed or abused female in our church context our neighbor? If so, what is our commitment and concern and care for this unfortunate 'neighbor?' How extravagantly will we choose to care for those who have been victimized?"

This project also provides the impetus for further ministry training on behalf of church leaders. The elder training in this effort includes cultivating awareness of trauma-related concepts. There are excellent trauma-based care resources available that church leaders can use. This project could serve as a catalyst for such additional training. Unruh is correct in pointing out that "Acknowledging the pain of those who are sexually victimized and conveying that we can listen to hard things is the beginning of our care." Additional training in Family Systems Theory would also be an asset to church leaders. Family Systems Theory especially applies to ministry efforts in this area. Unruh states that a "recurring theme of secrets and their ramifications" emerged during the execution of the project.

Domestic violence is another common, but frequently under-reported behavior in church settings. Family violence is clearly a criminal act, and thus cannot be ignored. I

think it is fitting that Unruh notes “Another gauge of the effectiveness of the training design, is the inclusion of domestic violence as an aspect of church-based #MeToo training.” A present reality worthy of additional research is revealed in this disturbing reference: “Abusive men often use patriarchy as a shield for their sins.”

Dealing with the multicultural composition of most American urban areas is also referenced in this effort. She points out that most members of her training team and all elders but two are Caucasian and English speaking. How does the church address #MeToo concerns of those who do not speak English? And how does the church serve immigrants in such circumstances? This too serves as impetus for further ministry interventions.

An interesting outcome of this research is the fact that a movement in the larger cultural setting has the capacity to shape ministry in the church. This is a third area of analysis. The #MeToo Movement has provided the church with language and compelling testimony. As a rule, the church resists being shaped or influenced by the prevailing culture. In this case, the church is benefiting from the pioneering efforts of courageous individuals.

A fourth highlight of this research is the introduction of pertinent vocabulary that must be added to the repertoire of church leaders. Elders and other church leaders should have an appreciation for the identity of the ‘hero-enabler.’ Such strong advocates reflect the inconsistent behavior among church members that is well substantiated in this project thesis. Unruh states that “The hero-enabler theoretically aligns with #MeToo advocacy.” “Their misdirected or incomplete interventions may inadvertently enable abusers.” My

suggestion would be further training exclusively in this area. Again, there is a propensity to unknowingly hide immoral or criminal behavior by such hero-enabling.

A second key term that is worthy of further exploration is 'conflicted-survivor.' In a chilling statement, it is noted that "#MeToo survivors have been conditioned by numerous factors to accept behaviors of sexual harassment, abuse, violence as normal." Transforming the culture of the church remains the ongoing challenge.

A fifth and final area of exploration regarding this research involves the ministry context of the intervention. The culture of the OP church is described with sufficient attention given to detail in this project thesis. The church clearly supports full egalitarian worship roles for females. However, such a mindset is not fully supported by the entire membership. Unruh makes this statement: "By inference, those at OP who do not support full egalitarian worship roles for females, would also be less likely to support advocacy of human rights, like #MeToo for women regarding their victimization within the church setting." Inference is a good word choice. I am not convinced the inference is correct. I would likely view church members that hold a more conservative viewpoint regarding worship roles as being innocent until proven guilty. Another possibility is that Christians across the theological spectrum regarding worship viewpoints are equally guilty of victimizing women who have been on the receiving end of heinous sexual harassment. Therefore, this represents a call for additional research. It would be a compelling experience to conduct this same ministry intervention in a church that is even more conservative theologically than OP.

I am privileged to read this compelling ministry intervention following decades of service in the church and in a law enforcement context. Serving crime victims has been a

core component of the latter experience. As I read the ministry efforts entailed in this research, the names and faces of victims I have served over a period of three decades reappeared. The church can no longer ignore criminal and unethical behaviors directed toward the most vulnerable among us. The church cannot be a place for exploitation of any kind. Jana Unruh includes this very fitting reference in her research: “The wash-rinse-repeat cycle of sexual harassment/abuse/violence therefore continues for victims, while offenders enjoy their uninterrupted church life.” This research effort has now provided the impetus for that cycle to be circumvented in the life of the church.

BRIEF VITA

Jana Huffman Unruh was born in Altamont, Kansas, on December 29, 1960. She graduated from the University of Kansas with a Bachelor of Science degree in computer science in 1984. She worked in the corporate technology education development sector for telecommunications organization Sprint/T-Mobile, entering Pepperdine University in 2006 where she completed a Master of Science degree in ministry in 2008. In 2016, she entered Abilene Christian University, completing equivalency requirements for a Master of Divinity degree. In 2019, she began the Doctor of Ministry program at Abilene Christian University. She has served in hospital chaplaincy with Advent Health, served on the board of Christian Family Services of Kansas City, and currently leads REFRESH ministry in Overland Park, Kansas.