

Reflection

MARIE MARSHALL FORTUNE

I wrote *Sexual Violence: The Unmentionable Sin* while I was temporarily unemployed, the result of tenuous funding for non-profits working on violence against women in the early '80s. But I am thankful for the time I had to write. What I felt was needed then, and now, was a book directed to clergy about sexual violence. What I didn't anticipate then was that this book would also be of use to survivors who often struggle with religious concerns. *Sexual Violence* has remained in print for twenty years. I am in the process of revising and updating it. But the basic approach that I suggest for clergy in response to sexual violence remains the same now as then.

In addressing the "Role of the Minister," I wanted to challenge and encourage clergy to be prepared (i.e., to get trained) and to collaborate with secular community resources in order to be part of the team of support that a victim/survivor or perpetrator needs. It has always been my expectation that clergy serve an important role as a "generalist" in response to sexual or domestic violence. This means that they should be trained in the basics (identification and assessment) and how to make good referrals and work cooperatively with secular helpers. In addition, they should offer their expertise in the area of pastoral or religious concerns to support healing for victims and accountability for perpetrators. All of this presupposes a setting in which there are multiple resources. The problem is that in some rural areas, the local pastor may be the only resource. So he or she unfortunately may have to shoulder the whole responsibility for support and intervention.

The issues surrounding confidentiality and mandatory reporting continue to be challenges. The experience of child sexual abuse in the Roman Catholic Church points up the harm when there is confusion or avoidance of appropriate reporting. There is always the need for further training on confidentiality and pastoral response.

The fundamental approach for clergy (training, clarity of role, and collaboration) continues to be a needed and valuable aspect of the overall response to sexual violence in our society. My colleague, Judy Beals, summarized it well in an editorial discussing the crisis in the Roman Catholic Church:

The turning point in every social justice movement occurs when the authentic leadership of survivors is met with the genuine commitments of our most powerful social institutions. The result, inevitably, is the strengthening of existing systems that work and the continual development of new innovations, protections, and partnerships that we have yet to even imagine. If there is any silver lining to the recent tragic events [Boston Diocese disclosure of child sexual abuse by priests], it is the opportunity to channel public outrage into lasting structures and commitments that will rid society of sexual violence. If we fail to do this, the shame is ours.

Those of us who work within religious institutions continue to challenge ourselves and our colleagues to take appropriate leadership to change our society's response to sexual violence.