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## **Keeping Faith: The Potential Role of a Chaplain to Address the Spiritual Needs of Maltreated Children and Advise Child Abuse Multi-Disciplinary Teams**

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ARTICLE

KEEPING FAITH: THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF A CHAPLAIN TO  
ADDRESS THE SPIRITUAL NEEDS OF MALTREATED CHILDREN  
AND ADVISE CHILD ABUSE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAMS\*

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*“Why did God let me suffer the agonies of [child abuse]? Why did God not intervene when I cried out to him night after night for relief? I have imagined at times my guardian angel pulling on God’s sleeve and saying ‘Don’t you hear little Wesley? Don’t you see his pitiful tears? Can’t you do something to deliver him from this monstrous evil?’”*

*—Dr. Wess Stafford<sup>1</sup>*

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\* This article was originally published as *Chaplains for Children: Twelve Potential Roles for a Theologian on the MDT*, 3(6) CENTERPIECE 1 (2013). This revised article includes additional research supporting the proposed reforms as well as the illustration of the Julie Valentine Center, a Children’s Advocacy Center in Greenville, South Carolina, who put the original recommendations into practice.

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1. WESS STAFFORD, TOO SMALL TO IGNORE: WHY THE LEAST OF THESE MATTER MOST 158 (2007).

## I. INTRODUCTION

A seven-year-old girl discloses in a forensic interview<sup>2</sup> that her father has been sexually molesting her. After the details are provided, the interviewer says, “We’ve asked you a lot of questions, do you have any questions for us?” The girl twirls her hair, looks at the floor and asks, “Am I still a virgin in God’s eyes?”<sup>3</sup>

An adolescent girl walks into the courtroom with the prosecutor and is struck by the sight of both of her ministers and half a dozen church elders in the gallery. Aware the spectators are not present in support of her but rather the father who sodomized her, the child tugs on the prosecutor’s suit coat and whispers in his ear, “Does this mean that God is against me too?”<sup>4</sup>

A social worker shows a mother the pictures of the bruises on her son’s buttocks and asks her to explain the injuries. The mother tears up and says, “I didn’t know I was hitting him that hard. I wish I didn’t have to hit my little boy, but my pastor says that two years old is the time to start spanking.<sup>5</sup> I have no choice. After all, it’s in the Bible, right?”<sup>6</sup>

Two men inform a pastor that when they were little boys a man in their church sexually molested them repeatedly for several years. The perpetrator is now in his 80’s but is still active in the church and lives in a residential neighborhood with a park across the street. The pastor makes a mandated report to law enforcement,<sup>7</sup> but the detective explains the case is too old for

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2. “A forensic interview of a child is a developmentally sensitive and legally sound method of gathering factual information regarding allegations of abuse or exposure to violence. This interview is conducted by a competently trained, neutral professional utilizing research and practice-informed techniques as part of a larger investigative process.” Chris Newlin et al., OJJDP JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN 3 (Sept. 2015), <https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/248749.pdf>.

3. This scenario is based on a case for which one of the authors was consulted. This anecdote is also discussed in Victor Vieth & Pete Singer, *Wounded Souls: The Need for Child Protection Professionals and Faith Leaders to Recognize and Respond to the Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse*, 45(4) MITCHELL HAMLIN L. REV. 1213 (2019).

4. This scenario is based on a case one of the authors prosecuted.

5. In the United States, the corporal punishment of children spikes dramatically at the age of two, with most children this age receiving blows from their parents. David Finkelhor et al., *Corporal Punishment: Current Rates from a National Survey*, 28 J. OF CHILD & FAM. STUD. 1991, 1993 (2019).

6. This scenario is a modification of a case study used in Victor I. Vieth, *From Sticks to Flowers: Guidelines for Child Protection Professionals Working with Parents Using Scripture to Justify Corporal Punishment*, 40 WM. MITCHELL L. REV. 907, 911–14 (2014).

7. For a summary of state laws requiring clergy to report a case of child abuse to the authorities, see Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Clergy as Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect*, CHILD. BUREAU, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/laws-policies/statutes/clergymandated/> (last updated April 2019).

the government to act. Frightened a wolf may be in his flock, the pastor asks the law enforcement officer, “What do I do now?”<sup>8</sup>

A Lutheran woman in her 40’s is in therapy for years of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse from her father. “I like you, and you’ve helped me a lot,” the woman tells her counselor, “but this is a waste of time. There is no hope for me; I’m doomed to hell.” When asked to explain, the woman tells the therapist that in her faith tradition children are not allowed to take Holy Communion until they are confirmed, typically around the age of thirteen.<sup>9</sup> The reason for this is concern that if not properly prepared, a child may consume the body and blood of Christ in a careless manner and thus drink to his or her judgment.<sup>10</sup> For years, the woman’s father told her he would stop molesting her when she started to take communion because he wouldn’t hurt her when Christ was in her. On the night before her first communion, her father again raped her. After the assault, the child asked if this was the last time since she would be taking the body and blood of Christ in the morning. In response, her father laughed vilely and explained he only said that to keep her quiet and that the abuse would continue so long as he desired her. Filled with anger, the child spit in the communion cup when it was passed to her the next morning, and when she chewed the bread she thought to herself, “I hate you God, and I’ll be pooping you into my toilet later today and flushing you out of my life.” Decades later, she is tormented by her conduct that morning and is certain that hell is her destiny. Not trained in theology, much less Lutheran theology, the therapist is at a loss of how to respond.<sup>11</sup>

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8. Although some of the facts are changed, this case is also rooted in a case for which one of the authors was consulted.

9. For a detailed explanation of Lutheran teachings and beliefs on the sacrament of communion, *see generally* HERMANN SASSE, *THIS IS MY BODY: LUTHER’S CONTENTION FOR THE REAL PRESENCE IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR* (2001); GAYLIN R. SCHMELING, *GOD’S GIFT TO YOU* (2001); Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *THE BOOK OF CONCORD: THE CONFESSIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH*, 377–480 (Robert Kolb & Timothy J. Wengert eds., 2000); Gordon A. Jensen, *The Sacrament of the Altar*, 31 *LUTHERAN Q.* 1 (2017).

10. This concern is rooted in language from the Apostle Paul also in which he contends it is possible to use the sacrament in an “unworthy manner” which could lead to damnation. To this end, he emphasizes the importance of “discerning the body” and instructs each Christian to “examine himself” prior to taking the sacrament. Specifically, Paul writes:

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 *Corinthians* 11:27–29 (English Standard Version).

11. This scenario is based on a case for which an author was consulted.

These five scenarios, all rooted in actual cases, illustrate the variety of contexts in which religious or spiritual questions arise in the context of child abuse cases, and why it is that faith and child protection professionals often need the expertise of one another in order to aid a child or adult survivor, or to prevent abuse within a faith setting. To this end, this article outlines research documenting the need for faith and child protection collaborations and proposes twelve potential roles for a chaplain or theologian working in a Children's Advocacy Center (CAC)<sup>12</sup> or as a member of a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) responsible for addressing maltreatment.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, the article discusses the use of a chaplain at the Julie Valentine Center (JVC), a CAC located in Greenville, South Carolina. The authors believe the use of a chaplain at the CAC in Greenville is a promising practice that is worthy of replication.

## II. RESEARCH AND PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE ROLE OF A CAC OR MDT CHAPLAIN

There is significant support in peer-reviewed literature for the need to address the spiritual impact of child abuse and neglect and to develop effective collaborations between faith and child protection communities. This work is also consistent with the desire to be culturally competent when working with religious communities and children.

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12. Children's Advocacy Centers are child friendly houses or other buildings which conduct forensic interviews of children who may have been abused and provide medical, mental health, and victim services. CACs also typically engage in prevention programming and other work to raise community awareness of child maltreatment. As of this writing, there are over 800 CACs in the United States, most of them accredited by the National Children's Alliance. To learn more about the current number of CACs and their work, visit the website of the National Children's Alliance at: <https://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/> (last visited February 10, 2020). See also *Standards for Accredited Members 2017 Edition*, NAT'L CHILD. ALL., <http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/NCA-Standards-for-Accredited-Members-2017.pdf> (last visited February 10, 2020). For additional information about the history of the CAC movement, see Nancy Chandler, *Children's Advocacy Centers: Making a Difference One Child at a Time*, 28 *HAMLIN J. PUB. L. & POL'Y* 315 (2006).

13. In cases of child abuse, there is an investigative MDT which consists of law enforcement officers, child protection workers, prosecutors, and forensic interviewers often working at a CAC. There is also a broader MDT that provides ongoing case review which may include medical and mental health professionals, victim advocates and, as suggested in this paper, a faith leader. See *infra* notes 32–41 and accompanying text. For a history of the development of child protection MDTs, see Antonio Chisea & Donald C. Bross, *Multidisciplinary Child Protection Teams*, in *CHADWICK'S CHILD MALTREATMENT: CULTURES AT RISK AND ROLE OF PROFESSIONALS* 419 (David L. Chadwick, et al., eds., 4th ed. 2014).

A. *The Frequency with Which Abused Children Raise Spiritual Questions Supports the Involvement of Spiritual Leaders*

In a qualitative study of thirty-nine forensic interviewers from twenty-two states who had conducted more than 42,000 forensic interviews, researchers noted that most of the interviewers had encountered children raising spiritual or religious questions during the forensic interview or interview process.<sup>14</sup> The study revealed instances of religion being used to harm children, such as the use of prayer or forgiveness to replace formal interventions as illustrated with this example:

[The siblings] told their parents that one of the elders was sexually abusing both of them. . . . They brought the children forward, prayed, the whole congregation prayed, they told the children that they had to forgive the perpetrator. The perpetrator confessed and said that, you know, he was sorry and it would never happen again. Then it happened again, of course.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, the study also revealed instances of faith communities helping abused children by reporting crimes to the authorities and supporting children and their families seeking services through a CAC.<sup>16</sup> In some instances a child's religious beliefs aided them in telling the truth about their trauma. According to one forensic interviewer:

They'll initially deny anything happened, and then say, "Well . . . I need to tell you this . . . it's the right thing to do in my faith" and they'll talk about their faith and they'll tell us if something happened. And so, it's been my experience that a lot of kids have disclosed, maybe because of their religion.<sup>17</sup>

Whether religion was functioning to hurt, hinder, or help a child, the frequency with which these issues arise in forensic interviews supports the value of a well-trained chaplain or other faith leader who can assist the CAC or MDT in addressing the religious aspects of a case.

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14. Amy C. Tishelman & Lisa A. Fontes, *Religion in Child Sexual Abuse Forensic Interviews*, 63 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 120, 121–22 (2017).

15. *Id.* at 124.

16. *Id.* at 123–24.

17. *Id.* at 125.

B. *The Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse Supports the Involvement of Spiritual Leaders*

In a review of thirty-four studies reporting on a total of 19,090 adult survivors of child maltreatment, scholars noted that most studies found abuse damaged the faith of children, often by damaging the victim's view of and relationship with God.<sup>18</sup> Recognizing the importance of spirituality to many maltreated children and adult survivors, the American Psychological Association has published two treatises to assist mental health professionals in addressing the impact of abuse, neglect, or other trauma.<sup>19</sup> Since one aspect of this intervention may involve addressing the use and misuse of sacred texts important to an abuse victim,<sup>20</sup> a chaplain or other faith leader may play a critical role in advising mental health professionals or other members of an MDT or CAC.

For instance, in the case example in which an adult survivor was convinced she was going to hell because she spit in the communion cup and spoke irreverently against the body of Christ,<sup>21</sup> a Lutheran pastor, trained in trauma informed care, worked with the mental health provider in using sacred texts to alleviate the victim's fear. One text used in this pastoral care was the crucifixion of Jesus in which the Lord forgave the Roman soldiers torturing his body to death.<sup>22</sup> If Christ could forgive these soldiers for what they did to his body, the pastor suggested, there must also be forgiveness to a survivor who spit in a communion cup. As this example makes clear, many maltreated children raise profoundly important spiritual questions necessitating the

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18. Specifically, fourteen studies showed a decline in religiousness or spirituality, twelve studies showed both a decline and growth in spirituality, and seven studies noted that spirituality can moderate the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms. Donald F. Walker et al., *Changes in Personal Religion/Spirituality During and After Childhood Abuse: A Review and Synthesis*, 1 PSYCHOL. TRAUMA: THEORY, PRAC. & POL'Y 130 (2009). See also Amy Russell, *The Spiritual Impact of Child Abuse and Exploitation: What the Research Tells Us*, 45 CURRENTS THEOLOGY & MISSION 14 (2018). For a discussion of using traditional trauma therapies to address the spiritual impact of abuse, see Donald F. Walker, *Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents*, 41 PROF. PSYCHOL.: RES. & PRAC. 174 (2010).

19. See SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOTHERAPY (Donald F. Walker & William L. Hathaway, eds., 2013); See also SPIRITUALLY ORIENTED PSYCHOTHERAPY FOR TRAUMA (Donald Walker et al. eds., 2015).

20. See generally Donald F. Walker et al., *Sacred Texts*, in SPIRITUAL INTERVENTIONS IN CHILD AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHOTHERAPY 155 (Donald F. Walker & William L. Hathaway eds., 2013); Donald F. Walker & Heather L. Quagliana, *Integrating Scripture with Parent Training in Behavioral Interventions*, 26 J. PSYCHOL. & CHRISTIANITY 122 (2007).

21. See *supra* note 11 and accompanying text.

22. Luke 23:34.



intervention of a trauma-informed professional fluent in or at least sensitive to the child's faith tradition.

C. *Spiritual Leaders May Benefit Child Abuse Victims by Developing a Healthy Spirituality*

Although child abuse often impairs a child's spirituality, a significant body of research also documents that a healthy sense of spirituality or religiosity is a buffer or source of resiliency that may aid a victim in coping with abuse or mitigating the impact of trauma.<sup>23</sup> Research from Johns Hopkins has found that, even without meaningful professional intervention, spirituality may mitigate the medical and mental health aspects associated with child abuse.<sup>24</sup> Although not directly focused on victims of child abuse, there is also a large body of research finding that a healthy sense of spirituality can have a positive impact on our medical health.<sup>25</sup>

This body of research also suggests the potential benefit to child abuse victims of having a chaplain serving as part of a CAC or MDT. In summarizing this research, Casey Gwinn and Chan Hellman conclude:

The research around religious and spiritual coping shows strong and convincing relationships between psychological adjustment and physical health following trauma. Spirituality provides a belief system and sense of divine connectedness that helps give meaning to the traumatic experience and has shown over and over to aid in the recovery process.<sup>26</sup>

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23. See Thema Bryant-Davis et al., *Religiosity, Spirituality, and Trauma Recovery in the Lives of Children and Adolescents*, 43 *PROF. PSYCHOL.: RES. & PRAC.* 306 (2012); Terry L. Gall, *Spirituality and Coping with Life Stress Among Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 30 *CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT* 829 (2006); Terry L. Gall et al., *Spirituality and the Current Adjustment of Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse*, 46 *J. FOR SCI. STUDY RELIGION* 101 (2007); Jungmeen Kim, *The Protective Effects of Religiosity on Maladjustment Among Maltreated and Nonmaltreated Children*, 32 *CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT* 711 (2008).

24. Katie G. Reinhert et al., *The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors*, 9 *J. CHILD & ADOLESCENT TRAUMA* 231 (2016).

25. See HAROLD G. KOENIG ET AL., *HANDBOOK OF RELIGION AND HEALTH* (2nd ed. 2012).

26. CASEY GWINN & CHAN HELLMAN, *HOPE RISING: HOW THE SCIENCE OF HOPE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE* 180 (2019).

D. *A Chaplain May Assist a CAC or MDT in Meeting Cultural Competency Standards*

One of the standards of accreditation for Children's Advocacy Centers in the United States is cultural competency. Specifically, these standards state:

Cultural competency is a fundamental component of the CAC philosophy . . . . To effectively meet clients' needs, the CAC and MDT must be willing and able to understand the clients' worldviews, adapt practices as needed, and offer assistance in a manner in which it can be utilized. Striving towards cultural competence is an important and ongoing endeavor and an integral part of a CAC's operations and service delivery.<sup>27</sup>

These accreditation standards specifically reference religion as one of the worldviews that CACs must take into consideration and respond to respectfully.<sup>28</sup> This is done by being "proactive" in "culturally competent planning and outreach" so that "children and families of all backgrounds feel welcomed, valued, and respected by staff, MDT members, and volunteers."<sup>29</sup> A chaplain or other faith leader fluent in the religious tradition of children and families intersecting with a CAC can aid in meeting these standards for cultural sensitivity and can take a leadership role in outreach to local faith communities served by a CAC or MDT.

As a simple illustration, there is research suggesting the potential utility of having a child promise to tell the truth as part of a forensic interview.<sup>30</sup> However, some Christian children are raised in a faith tradition that takes literal an admonition of Jesus to "let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'" because "whatever is more than these is from the evil one."<sup>31</sup> Such a child may be apprehensive about promising to tell the truth or even taking an oath in court. A chaplain may assist the MDT in recognizing issues such as this.

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27. NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITED MEMBERS 17 (2017).

28. *Id.*

29. *Id.*

30. Newlin et al., *supra* note 2, at 8.

31. *Matthew* 5:37 (New King James Version).

### III. THE HISTORIC ROLE OF THE MDT IN CHILD ABUSE CASES IS BROAD ENOUGH TO INCLUDE A CHAPLAIN OR OTHER FAITH LEADER

It is widely accepted as best practice to respond to cases of child abuse as part of a multi-disciplinary team.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the manual for the National Center for the Prosecution of Child Abuse<sup>33</sup> states that, “successful prosecution of child abuse requires different practices than those used to respond to other types of crime. One of the major differences is the critical role that information from a variety of individuals and agencies . . . plays in building strong child abuse cases.”<sup>34</sup> Generally speaking, there are two multi-disciplinary teams.

First, there is the core investigative team typically consisting of law enforcement, child protective services, and the prosecutor’s office.<sup>35</sup> This team responds to an initial report of abuse and arranges forensic interviews, medical examinations, mental health referrals, search warrants, perpetrator interrogations, and other investigative functions.

Second, there is a broader “service planning,” or case review, team that discusses the ongoing needs of a maltreated child and his or her family.<sup>36</sup> The team typically consists of “professionals providing therapeutic and other support services,” including medical professionals, CPS workers, mental health practitioners, victim-witness advocates, and school guidance counselors or social workers.<sup>37</sup>

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32. The National Children’s Alliance, which accredits all Children’s Advocacy Centers in the United States, finds that a “functioning and effective multidisciplinary team (MDT) is the foundation of a Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC).” NATIONAL CHILDREN’S ALLIANCE, STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITED MEMBERS 2 (2017).

33. The National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse (NCPCA) was a program of the National District Attorneys Association which was eventually disbanded. For an overview of the previous work of NCPCA, see Robin V. Delany-Shabazz & Victor Vieth, *The National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse*, OJJDP FACT SHEET (2001), <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200133.pdf>. However, many of the programs initiated by NCPCA have continued. For example, the Zero Abuse Project, a 501(3)(c) with offices in Virginia, Minnesota, and Indiana, continues to operate national and state forensic interview training programs initiated by NCPCA. These programs were called *Finding Words* and *ChildFirst*. For an overview of these and other forensic interview training programs, and their role in child protection history, see Kathleen C. Faller, K.C., *Forty Years of Forensic Interviewing of Children Suspected of Sexual Abuse, 1974-2014: Historical Benchmarks*, 4 SOCIAL SCI. 34–65 (2015).

34. AMERICAN PROSECUTORS RESEARCH INSTITUTE, INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF CHILD ABUSE xxxvii (3d ed. 2004).

35. *Id.* at xlv.

36. *Id.*

37. *Id.*

This list, though, is not definitive. Most states allow case review teams to include other members of the community.<sup>38</sup> In some instances, MDTs have utilized theologians as part of the case review team.<sup>39</sup> This may happen because a faith-based school is represented on the team or because a particular faith leader is well connected with community resources.

Even when a theologian is not part of a local school or is not well connected with a community, he or she may bring other benefits to an MDT. As previously noted, researchers have discovered that a number of MDTs already reach out to faith leaders when children raise spiritual questions.<sup>40</sup> In the United States, MDTs often function as part of a CAC. The National Children's Alliance, which accredits CACs, has promulgated standards for the proper function of an MDT to meet the needs of maltreated children served in these centers.<sup>41</sup>

Considering the research about the intersection of religion/spirituality and child abuse, as well as the scope and purpose of MDTs, there are at least twelve potential roles for a theologian on a child maltreatment multi-disciplinary team or as part of a CAC.

#### IV. TWELVE POTENTIAL ROLES FOR A CHAPLAIN OR THEOLOGIAN ON THE MDT

##### A. *Investigative Consultant on Institutional Abuse Within a Religious Setting*

Zero Abuse Project (previously the National Child Protection Training Center) has published investigative tips for those assessing sexual or physical abuse practiced or condoned in the name of religion.<sup>42</sup> As part of this process, an investigator may want to explore the theological dynamics present in a particular congregation that may lead the institution to protect an offender more than a victim. In doing this, the investigator may want to consult a

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38. *Id.*

39. One of the authors (Vieth) had a theologian as part of a case review team during his time as a prosecutor in Cottonwood County, Minnesota. See Victor I. Vieth, *In My Neighbor's House: A Proposal to Address Child Abuse in Rural America*, 22 HAMLIN L. REV. 143, 179–80 (1998) (noting the importance, particularly in many rural communities, of involving the faith community in addressing child abuse at multiple levels).

40. See *supra* notes 19–21 and accompanying text.

41. See NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITED MEMBERS 12–15 (2017).

42. See Victor I. Vieth & Basyle Tchividjian, *When the Child Abuser has a Bible: Investigating Child Maltreatment Sanctioned or Condoned by a Religious Leader*, 2(12) CENTERPIECE (2010); see also Stephen A. Kent, *Religious Justifications for Child Sexual Abuse in Cults and Alternative Religions*, 3 INT'L J. CULTIC STUD. 49 (2012).

theologian<sup>43</sup> or other expert about a particular faith tradition whose teachings or conduct have played a role in the maltreatment.

In one congregation, for example, the church musicians played emotional music while the pastor urged parishioners to publicly confess their sins. One man stood up and tearfully disclosed sexually abusing all his children. The pastor then asked the children to confess their role in the sexual activity. After hearing the “confession” of the children, the pastor announced that victims and offender alike were forgiven and there was no need for anyone to discuss it outside the congregation. Indeed, the pastor explained that anyone discussing the matter outside the congregation would lose the grace of God and be condemned eternally.<sup>44</sup>

In a report of child sexual abuse within the Baptist community, the Southern Baptist Convention offered several examples in which twisted theological constructs were used to minimize a victim’s outcry and to keep him or her silent. Consider, for example, the SBC’s description of the experiences of Abigail, a student sexually assaulted at a faith-based college:

Abigail was a student at a Southern Baptist institution of higher education when she was raped on campus by a male student. When Abigail went to the administration to report the heinous crime and seek help, she was forced to meet with male leadership from the school. Through sobs, Abigail detailed the attack and explained that she had been anally raped. The school leader told Abigail that what happened was not in fact rape, because it was not a vaginal penetration. The leader explained that anal rape isn’t rape at all so Abigail had nothing to worry about and had no need to report the incident to the police. He said, “Don’t worry, he didn’t take anything from you. Your future husband will still think you are a virgin.” Abigail was told not to tell her pastor or anyone else as they wouldn’t understand. Abigail walked out of the leader’s office broken and confused, truly believing that she had not been raped.<sup>45</sup>

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43. Theology is the “[s]ayings, accounts, teachings, and theories (logia) concerning God (theos). Theology is a belief, conception, or study of God.” HOWARD W. STONE & JAMES O. DUKE, *HOW TO THINK THEOLOGICALLY* 8 (3rd ed. 2013).

44. This is a case for which an author was consulted.

45. CARING WELL: A REPORT FROM THE SBC SEXUAL ABUSE ADVISORY GROUP 17, <https://caringwell.com/report/> (last visited Jan. 24, 2020).

In any case of child abuse, the investigators turn to experts to sort through difficult dynamics.<sup>46</sup> When the dynamics involve twisted theological constructs that may impair a child victim from talking to the police out of fear of going to hell or because they were not really a rape victim in the eyes of God, it may be wise to consult a theologian who can help the officer in understanding the dynamics present in the church and propose approaches that may alleviate the victim's fears about disclosure. Where is this pastor or other faith leader's theological views rooted? Is the code of silence he or she is pronouncing rooted in scripture, in a church council, an article of faith, or is it simply something the pastor or faith leader is making up? Understanding the answer to these questions may assist the investigators not only in speaking with the victims but also the offender and the pastor.

B. *Consultant to the Mental Health Professionals Working with Victims*

Ninety-three percent of convicted sex offenders describe themselves as religious.<sup>47</sup> Sex offenders who have the most victims, the youngest victims, and who appear to get away with abuse for the longest period of time before being caught tend to be the offenders most active in their respective congregations and who grew up in their particular church.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of these offenders use religious or spiritual themes in the abuse of their victims. For example, an offender may point to a child's biological reaction to sexual touching and comment "You had an erection, just like me. You enjoy the sexual contact as much as I do, and you are as much to blame as me."<sup>49</sup>

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46. One survivor of abuse writes, "One sad truth I've learned over the years is that the church doesn't like messy. The church prefers a neat, victorious story, tied up with a cliché bow, full of manufactured piety and pasted on 'joy.' Seldom is there room for questions, wrestling, anguish, grief or bewilderment because that somehow connotes that those harmed are not 'walking in faith.'" MARY DEMUTH, *WE TOO: HOW THE CHURCH CAN RESPOND REDEMPTIVELY TO THE SEXUAL ABUSE CRISIS* 27 (2019).

47. GENE G. ABEL & NORA HARLOW, *THE STOP CHILD MOLESTATION BOOK: WHAT ORDINARY PEOPLE CAN DO IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES TO SAVE THREE MILLION CHILDREN* 39 (2001).

48. Donna Eshuys & Stephen Smallbone, *Religious Affiliations Among Adult Sexual Offenders*, 18 *SEX ABUSE* 279, 282, 284 (2006).

49. See Victor I. Vieth, *When Faith Hurts: Overcoming Spirituality-Based Blocks and Problems Before, During, and After the Forensic Interview (revised and expanded)*, 2(10) *CENTERPIECE* 1, 2 (2010) (review of the various ways offenders incorporate a religion into abusing children).

As previously discussed,<sup>50</sup> victims not only suffer physical and emotional damage but also suffer significant spiritual injuries.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, research consistently shows that abuse victims “who maintained some connection to their personal faith (even if it was damaged as a result of abuse) experienced better mental health outcomes compared to adult survivors of abuse who did not.”<sup>52</sup> In order to maintain this connection to faith, though, the MDT may need to assist the victim in addressing his or her spiritual questions. In one faith setting, for example, a child molester told his victim that he was abusing her because her breasts were the most developed.<sup>53</sup> As a result, the child struggled spiritually. If God knows all things, then surely God knew that in developing her breasts early she would be targeted by this offender. If this is true, is God to blame for the abuse? Did God have some purpose in allowing this suffering?<sup>54</sup>

Survivors may have engaged in drug and alcohol usage, committed delinquent or other criminal offenses, or suffered from mental health or behavioral disorders. In one instance, a survivor committed criminal vehicular homicide while under the influence of meth—a drug he said he used to self-medicate from the emotional pain of childhood trauma.<sup>55</sup> Although many of these victims come to realize that adverse childhood experiences contributed to their behaviors,<sup>56</sup> they also believe their conduct was wrong or “sinful.” How, these victims ask, will God sort through all of this when evaluating their lives?

Although there are clear mental health aspects to questions such as these, there are also spiritual dimensions beyond the expertise of many mental health professionals. In a national study of more than 400 clinical psychologists, only one-third professed competence in addressing spiritual

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50. See *supra* notes 9–11 and accompanying text.

51. See Barbara R. McLaughlin, *Devastated Spirituality: The Impact of Clergy Sexual Abuse on the Survivor's Relationship with God*, 1(2) SEXUAL ADDICTION & COMPULSIVITY (1994).

52. Victor I. Vieth, Basyle J. Tchividjian, Donald F. Walker & Katlin R. Knodel, *Child Abuse and the Church: A Call for Prevention, Treatment and Training*, 40(4) J. PSYCHOL. & THEOLOGY 323, 330 (2012); see also Shondrah Tarrezz Nash & Latonya Hesterberg, *Biblical Framings of and Responses to Spousal Violence in the Narratives of Abused Christian Women*, 15(3) VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN 340 (2009).

53. This is a case for which one of the authors (Vieth) was consulted.

54. This is a case for which NCPTC was consulted.

55. This is a case for which NCPTC was consulted.

56. Vincent J. Felitti & Robert F. Anda, *The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications for Healthcare*, in THE IMPACT OF EARLY LIFE TRAUMA ON HEALTH AND DISEASE: THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC 77 (Ruth Lanius et al. eds., 2010).

issues raised by clients and only 5% had training on this issue.<sup>57</sup> When this is the case, the team can benefit from having a pool of theologians well trained on child abuse that can assist the team in directly or indirectly responding to a child's spiritual injuries.<sup>58</sup> Unless and until the spiritual questions are addressed, many survivors will not be able to cope physically or emotionally.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to assisting mental health providers in understanding and responding to the spiritual impact of child abuse, a chaplain can proactively educate faith leaders about mental health services that meet evidence based criteria and how to coordinate spiritual care with mental health providers.<sup>60</sup> The chaplain can also provide local clergy with valuable resources, such as the American Psychiatric Association's guide for faith leaders, in understanding and addressing the mental health needs of their parishioners.<sup>61</sup>

### C. *Clergy as Support Person*

Research shows that the presence of a support person helps children to respond to direct and cross examination questions in court.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, some state legislatures have codified this into law and a "substantial body of case law approves of such support."<sup>63</sup> To better understand the simple compassion in permitting the child victim a support person, Professor John Myers poses the following scenario:

Imagine five-year-old Susie, about to enter the hospital  
for the first time. Susie is scheduled to undergo an unfamiliar

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57. Edward P. Shafranske & H. Newton Malony, *Clinical Psychologists' Religious and Spiritual Orientations and their Practice of Psychotherapy*, 27(1) *PSYCHOTHERAPY* 72, 75, 77 (1990).

58. As an example of a theological framework in which a theologian could address the spiritual needs and questions of both victims and perpetrators, see Victor I. Vieth, *What Would Walther Do? Applying Law and Gospel to Victims and Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse*, 40(4) *J. PSYCHOL. & THEOLOGY* 257 (2012).

59. See generally Donald F. Walker et al., *Addressing Religious and Spiritual Issues in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents*, 41(2) *PROF. PSYCHOL.: RES. & PRAC.* 174 (2010).

60. See generally Pete Singer, *Coordinating Pastoral Care of Survivors with Mental Health Providers*, 45(3) *CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION* 31 (2018).

61. See AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION FOUNDATION, *MENTAL HEALTH GUIDE FOR FAITH LEADERS* (2016).

62. JOHN E.B. MYERS, *MYERS ON EVIDENCE IN CHILD, DOMESTIC AND ELDER ABUSE CASES* 159 (2005) (citing Goodman et al., *Testifying in Crim. Ct.*, 57 *MONOGRAPHS OF THE SOC'Y FOR RESEARCH IN CHILD DEV.* 1, 1992).

63. *Id.* at 157.



and painful medical procedure. Mother drives Susie to the hospital, stops in the parking lot, opens the car door, and says “Okay, honey, run along into the hospital and find the doctor. I’ll be back in a couple of hours to pick you up. Bye.” Mother drives off, leaving little Susie standing all alone outside the hospital. Preposterous you say? Mother won’t do that. She’ll walk Susie into the hospital and remain at her side to provide comfort, reassurance, and support.<sup>64</sup>

Just as it would be cruel to deny a child a support person during a difficult medical procedure, Myers’ argues it is equally cruel to deny a support person to a child testifying in a case of child abuse.<sup>65</sup> Specifically, Myers writes, “At the hospital, emotional support is part of treatment, and parents are partners in therapy. At the courthouse, however, the tradition has been different. The child must go it alone.”<sup>66</sup> If a child has been told that he or she is condemned or will otherwise suffer repercussions in speaking about abuse committed in the name of God, the child may benefit from having a trusted theologian in the courtroom as a reminder that God is not upset with her—but rather the person who molested or otherwise mistreated her. In one case, for example, an abused child walked into a crowded courtroom only to have numerous church elders and ministers present in support of the father accused of molesting her. Upon witnessing this spectacle, the child openly wondered if God was also opposed to her.<sup>67</sup> In cases such as this, a theologian or chaplain supporting the child may make a significant difference in the court process and perhaps throughout the child’s life.<sup>68</sup>

D. *Providing Child Protection Professionals with Additional Resources*

Many social service agencies are financially strapped and lack human resources. In addressing this need, many faith communities are willing to help. For example, Care in Action is a coalition of churches and other faith-based organizations that provides child protection professionals with additional resources to meet the needs of children and families impacted by

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64. *Id.*

65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. This is a case from the experience of one of the authors.

68. The child abuse victim who asked if she was a virgin in God’s eyes also asked the prosecutor in her case to pray with her shortly before they walked into the courtroom. See Newlin et al., *supra* note 2 and accompanying text.

abuse.<sup>69</sup> Based in Minnesota, the organization has an “adopt a social worker” program.<sup>70</sup> Under this program, social workers tell the organization of unmet needs of a family, such as an abused child’s desire to play little league baseball, and the organization works to address those needs.<sup>71</sup> A similar program operates in the state of South Carolina.<sup>72</sup> The literature includes other examples of creative faith and child protection collaborations.<sup>73</sup> In an era of limited resources for child welfare, these examples attest to the need and efficacy of developing collaborations between faith and child protection communities.

#### E. *Prevention*

If it is true that most sex offenders are religious,<sup>74</sup> it is elementary that many will operate inside a faith setting. Thus, it is critical to aid faith leaders in developing child protection policies to keep children as safe as possible,<sup>75</sup> to manage any convicted sex offenders who may be part of a congregation,<sup>76</sup> and to implement personal safety or other education programs.<sup>77</sup> A chaplain

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69. CARE IN ACTION MINNESOTA, <https://www.careinactionmn.org> (last visited Jan. 16, 2020); see also Vieth & Singer, *supra* note 3, at 1230–33.

70. CARE IN ACTION MINNESOTA, *supra* note 69.

71. See *id.*

72. See HALOS, [www.charlestonhalos.org](http://www.charlestonhalos.org) (last visited Jan. 16, 2020) (information about the South Carolina project).

73. See, e.g., David Anderson, *The Church and Child Protection: The Safe Families Story*, 38 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 612 (2014). In Hawai’i County, the local Children’s Justice Center delivers training and information about current research to engage faith leaders and provide materials that can be proactively shared with the community through this monthly meeting. This is an initiative that one author (Tiapula) of this article is personally familiar with. As an example of how faith leaders can bridge the gap between religious leaders and MDTs, Dr. Manuel Rauchholz, a faith leader working to address child trafficking, arranged for a meeting between local MDT members and church vicars on the island of Tol in the Federated States of Micronesia to discuss child sexual abuse and human trafficking. Although initially reluctant to receive education from a woman, the church leaders were persuaded by Dr. Rauchholz to proceed with the meeting. This is also a case with which author Tiapula is familiar.

74. ABEL & HARLOW, *supra* note 47, at 13.

75. DEEPAK REJU, ON GUARD: PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO CHILD ABUSE AT CHURCH (2014); BASYLE TCHIVIDJIAN & SHIRA M. BERKOVITS, THE CHILD SAFEGUARDING POL’Y GUIDE FOR CHURCHES AND MINISTRIES 5 (2017); Shira M. Berkovits, *Preventing Abuse in Christian Organizations That Serve Youth: Ten Policies to Create Safer Environments*, 45 CURRENTS MISSION & THEOLOGY 20, 20 (2018).

76. Victor I. Vieth, *Suffer the Children: Developing Effective Church Policies on Child Maltreatment*, JACOB’S HOPE (Jacob Wetterling Res. Ctr., Saint Paul, Minn.), June 2011, at 6 (discussing and proposing policies for managing a sex offender in the congregation).

77. Alison Feigh, *In the Footsteps of Mary and Joseph: The Role of Adult and Child Education in the Prevention of Abuse*, 45 CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION 23, 23 (2018).

can take a leadership role in connecting faith communities to appropriate resources to accomplish these goals. A properly trained CAC chaplain or MDT faith leader can also assist the religious community in understanding cognitive dissonance, a human reaction that may cause us to ignore obvious indicators of abuse because we have known a particular faith leader all our lives and it is simply too painful to conclude he or she could be a child abuser.<sup>78</sup>

With respect to physical abuse, many parents who inflict violence on their children do so in the name of religion.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, it is critical to engage theologians in taking a leadership role in speaking out about maltreatment within faith settings and challenging the religious dogmas that contribute to physical abuse<sup>80</sup> or in any way blame children for their victimization.<sup>81</sup> Having one or more trusted theologians serve as part of the broader case review team can aid in developing these men and women into leaders more fully equipped to address the spiritual needs of maltreated children, and to reform local religious communities.

As one example of the potential benefit of this model, consider the following points. There is a large and growing body of research showing that corporal punishment is the least effective form of discipline and elevates the risks for poorer medical and mental health outcomes, as well as the risk of physical abuse.<sup>82</sup> Even so, many conservative Protestants remain committed to the practice irrespective of their educational attainment.<sup>83</sup> However, two studies from Pepperdine University have found that when conservative Protestants are educated about the research *and* receive a workshop

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78. Shira M. Berkovits, *Institutional Abuse in the Jewish Community*, 50 TRADITION 11, 12–15 (2017).

79. See generally Bette L. Bottoms et al., *Religion-Related Child Physical Abuse: Characteristics and Psychological Outcomes*, 8 J. AGGRESSION, MALTREATMENT & TRAUMA 87 (2003) (noting the role religious beliefs can play in physical violence directed toward children); Christina M. Rodriguez & Ryan C. Henderson, *Who Sparing the Rod? Religious Orientation, Social Conformity, and Child Abuse Potential*, 34 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 84 (2010) (noting the association between attitudes toward corporal punishment and the potential to inflict child physical abuse).

80. WILLIAM J. WEBB, *CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN THE BIBLE* (2011) (theologian author challenging centuries of belief that the Bible requires parents to inflict physical violence on their children as a means of discipline).

81. See Vieth, *supra* note 58.

82. Elizabeth T. Gershoff & Andrew Grogan-Kaylor, *Spanking and Child Outcomes: Old Controversies and New Meta-Analyses*, 30 J. FAM. PSYCHOL. 453, 453–69 (2016).

83. John P. Hoffmann et al., *Conservative Protestantism and Attitudes Toward Corporal Punishment, 1986–2014*, 63 SOC. SCI. RES. 81, 81 (2017).

presenting alternative views of scriptural passages<sup>84</sup> (often used to justify hitting children as a means of discipline), favorable attitudes toward this practice decline markedly.<sup>85</sup>

It is possible to use sacred texts to engage faith leaders and remind them of the critical importance of caring for children, a tenet found in most of the world's faith traditions.<sup>86</sup> Once engaged theologically, it is easier to engage them in child abuse prevention policies and programming consistent with their views of God.<sup>87</sup>

#### F. *Addressing the Vicarious Trauma of MDT Members*

Most hospitals<sup>88</sup> and police departments<sup>89</sup> have chaplains able to address the spiritual needs of professionals who have seen death or experienced a lifetime of children recounting incidents of abuse.<sup>90</sup> Although these chaplains

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84. *Working With Parents & Caregivers Who Use Scripture to Justify Corporal Punishment*, ACAD. ON VIOLENCE & ABUSE 3, [https://www.avahealth.org/file\\_download/inline/7a31512c-b972-4d03-941a-d8e9248b77cb](https://www.avahealth.org/file_download/inline/7a31512c-b972-4d03-941a-d8e9248b77cb) (last visited Mar. 18, 2020); see, e.g., Victor I. Vieth, *Augustine, Luther and Solomon: Providing Pastoral Guidance to Parents on the Corporal Punishment of Children*, 44 CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION 25 (2017); Victor I. Vieth, *Working with Molly: A Culturally Sensitive Approach to Parents Using Corporal Punishment Because of Their Religious Beliefs*, 31 APSAC ADVISOR 52, 53 (2019).

85. Cindy Miller-Perrin & Robin Perrin, *Changing Attitudes About Spanking Among Conservative Christians Using Interventions That Focus on Empirical Research Evidence and Progressive Biblical Interpretations*, 71 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 69, 69 (2017); Robin Perrin et al., *Changing Attitudes About Spanking Using Alternative Biblical Interpretations*, 41 INT'L J. BEHAV. DEV. 514, 514 (2017).

86. See CHILDREN AND CHILDHOOD IN WORLD RELIGIONS (Don S. Browning & Marcia J. Bunge eds., 2009) (an overview of what the sacred texts of various world religions have to say about children).

87. Malia Robinson & Stephen Hanmer, *Engaging Religious Communities to Protect Children from Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation*, 38 CHILD ABUSE & NEGLECT 600, 602 (2014) ("When efforts are grounded in the protective aspects of religious beliefs and practices in a community, they can be particularly effective in preventing and responding to child abuse and neglect."). See VICTOR I. VIETH, ON THIS ROCK (2018), for an example of how sacred texts can be used to engage the Christian community.

88. Since 2002, the percentage of hospitals providing spiritual care has increased from 53 to 70 percent. Stacy Weiner, *Is There a Chaplain in the House? Hospitals Integrate Spiritual Care*, AAMC (Nov. 20, 2017), <https://www.aamc.org/news-insights/there-chaplain-house-hospitals-integrate-spiritual-care>.

89. See, e.g., INT'L CONF. POLICE CHAPLAINS, <http://www.icpc4cops.org> (last visited Jan. 21, 2020).

90. There are also chaplains for the military, *Army Chaplain Corps*, U.S. ARMY, <http://www.goarmy.com/chaplain.html> (last visited Jan. 21, 2020); fire departments, FED'N FIRE CHAPLAINS, <http://ffc.wildapricot.org> (last visited Jan. 21, 2020); and even businesses, CORP. CHAPLAINS AM., <http://www.chaplain.org/> (last visited Jan. 21, 2020).

may need some additional training on the unique issue of vicarious trauma resulting from working as a child protection professional,<sup>91</sup> they can be of significant assistance in addressing the emotional well-being of some team members.<sup>92</sup> In one instance, a law enforcement officer specializing in child abuse wondered why God did not allow him and his wife to have children but allowed so many abusive parents to have a child.<sup>93</sup> Questions such as these may need the aid of a professional counselor but may also require the expertise of a theologian sensitive to the officer's faith.

In a course for child protection professionals, a law enforcement officer with more than 30 years of experience told her colleagues she no longer "felt" anything when confronted with the imagery of sexual abuse or exploitation and was otherwise "numb" at work and home. Within hours of leaving the course, the officer was admitted to the hospital with significant health concerns.<sup>94</sup> This is another example in which the availability of a chaplain may have been valuable to a child protection professional grappling with the emotional toll of working in this field.

#### G. *Consulting on Culturally Sensitive Child Placements*

In most states, child protection workers are required to consider a child's cultural background, including religious affiliation, when placing the child out of home or in selecting services.<sup>95</sup> A theologian or other religious expert on the case review team may be helpful in determining culturally appropriate placements or services. The theologian would work to not only educate workers but also serve as a bridge or conduit with the foster family. Even within similar cultures and religions, there are varying practices. As discussed, child abuse has many religious connotations and it is imperative that the foster family be adequately assessed and educated about the

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91. See generally Amy Russell, *Vicarious Trauma in Child Sexual Abuse Prosecutors*, CTR. PIECE (Nat'l Child Prot. Ctr., Winona, Minn.), 2010, at 1 (discussing a study on vicarious trauma among prosecutors of child sexual abuse cases and proposing recommendations for practice).

92. See FRANK NEWPORT, *GOD IS ALIVE AND WELL* 47–71 (2012) (an overview of research discussing the correlation between spirituality and physical and emotional well-being).

93. This is a case for which one of the authors was consulted.

94. This is a case with which author Tiapula is personally familiar.

95. See, e.g., FLA. STAT. § 409.175(5)(b)(12) (2019) (stating requirement to safeguard the "cultural, religious, and ethnic values of a child"); MICH. COMP. LAWS § 722.23(b) (2011) (citing as one factor in determining custody the ability of the parties to continue "raising of the child in his or her religion or creed"); MONT. CODE ANN. § 41-3-101(1)(f) (2019) (stating it is the public policy of Montana to "ensure that whenever removal of a child from the home is necessary, the child is entitled to maintain ethnic, cultural, and religious heritage whenever appropriate").

emotional and spiritual needs of the child to avoid exacerbating the child's trauma symptoms. Additionally, other service providers may have a limited understanding of the cultural aspects in which the child was raised and therefore use intervention techniques that can be viewed by the child or foster family as insensitive, thereby failing to engage them in needed services.<sup>96</sup> Theologians are in a unique role to assist the child, team, foster family, and other providers in making the often-necessary transition to foster care and treatment services.

#### H. *Empowering Victims to Disclose*

There is a large and growing body of research showing that religion is often used to justify maltreatment and to keep the child from disclosing abuse.<sup>97</sup> The child may feel guilty that he or she is sinful because of a biological reaction to touching or because the offender or another church leader told the victim he or she was equally to blame. In one instance, a child sexually assaulted by an elder was told by her pastor that if she did not cry out, the Bible does not consider her to be a victim of sexual abuse.<sup>98</sup>

Jack Schaap, a protestant pastor in Indiana, molested a teenage girl in three states and boldly used religious themes in suggesting to the girl that the abuse was pleasing to God. In one letter to the victim, Schaap claimed:

You opened your heart wide to me—you made me more than a Pastor/Rescuer—you made me your friend your confidant, your beloved.

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96. See, e.g., David R. Hodge, *Developing Cultural Competency with Evangelical Christians*, 85 *FAMILIES IN SOC'Y* 251, 251–52 (2004).

97. See generally MARIE KEENAN, *CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH* (2012) (a detailed analysis of sexual abuse within the Catholic church which includes interviews with priests who molested children and finds that a number of systemic factors within the church contributed to widespread and longstanding abuse within this faith community); PAUL A. OFFIT, *BAD FAITH: WHEN RELIGIOUS BELIEF UNDERMINES MODERN MEDICINE* 32 (2015) (noting the influence of religious sects on withholding life-saving medical care from children); Andrew S. Denney et al., *Child Sexual Abuse in Protestant Christian Congregations: A Descriptive Analysis of Offense and Offender Characteristics*, *RELIGIONS*, Jan. 2018, at 1; Victor I. Vieth, *When Faith Hurts: Overcoming Spirituality-Based Blocks and Problems Before, During, and After the Forensic Interview (Revised and Expanded)*, *CTR. PIECE* (Nat'l Child Prot. Ctr., Winona, Minn.), 2010, at 1.

98. Alan B. Goldberg et al., *Compassion or Cover-Up? Teen Victim Claims Rape; Forced Confession in Church*, *ABC NEWS* (Apr. 5, 2011, 8:34 AM), <https://abcnews.go.com/2020/teen-rape-victim-forced-confess-church/story?id=13299135>.

... In our “fantasy talk,” you have affectionately spoken of being “my wife.” That is exactly what Christ desires for us. He wants to marry us + [sic] become eternal lovers!

I tried to craftily catch your heart . . . . Thank you for the privilege of helping a struggling teenager.

....

... [Y]ou have such a wonderful life ahead of you. I must be careful not to spoil that with any of my selfish fantasy desires.

... When we get scared, Jesus sends His spirit to live within us.

... I must follow the example of Christ. I have espoused you to Him as a chaste virgin.<sup>99</sup>

When toxic theology such as this impairs a child’s ability to disclose, a theologian consulting the MDT could assist in three ways. First, the theologian may be able to offer insights into a particular church dynamic feeding these blocks and offer suggestions for overcoming the block while staying within the child’s cultural framework. Second, a theologian working with a qualified mental health professional, may assist a child to overcome these hurdles over the long term.<sup>100</sup> Third, theologians proactive in speaking publicly against toxic theology may find their messages reach victims, if only through the accessing of social media or other forums. When toxic theology is openly challenged in multiple venues,<sup>101</sup> the message may penetrate even the most closed communities.

#### I. *Empowering Offenders to Confess and Otherwise Hold Themselves Accountable*

A theologian on the MDT can take a leadership role in educating other faith leaders about the attraction many sex offenders have to churches and

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99. Gov’t Sentencing Memorandum at 10, *United States v. Schapp*, No. 2:12 CR 131 RL (N.D. Ind. Mar. 13, 2013).

100. See generally MARION BILICH ET AL., *SHARED GRACE: THERAPISTS AND CLERGY WORKING TOGETHER* (Routledge 2012) (2000); John C. Gonsiorek et al., *Ethical Challenges and Opportunities at the Edge: Incorporating Spirituality and Religion into Psychotherapy*, 40 *PROF. PSYCHOL.* 385 (2009).

101. See Troy Troftgruben, *Toxic Theology: A Pastoral Response to Bible Passages Often Used to Justify the Abuse of Children or Prevent Them from Seeking Care*, 45 *CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION* 56 (2018).

the frequency with which they manipulate both the clergy and the church.<sup>102</sup> In explaining his attraction to church, a convicted sex offender noted:

I consider church people easy to fool . . . they have a trust that comes from being Christians. . . . They tend to be better folks all around. And they seem to want to believe in the good that exists in all people. . . . I think they want to believe in people. And because of that, you can easily convince, with or without convincing words.<sup>103</sup>

Not only do sex offenders fool faith communities in cases of child abuse, they often seek comfort in the sacraments and other customs of religious circles. Consider, for instance, these words from a Catholic priest who had molested multiple children and soothed his conscience through confession:

After each abusive occurrence I felt full of guilt and at the earliest opportunity I sought to confess and receive absolution. While this was well intentioned there is a sense in which it was a mechanical process, but it effected a degree of relief and a feeling of a new beginning. There was always a resolution that it would not occur again . . . . With hindsight I can say that deep down I realized that I would not be able to keep that resolution. It seemed impossible for me to prevent my desires from overcoming my will. Long periods could elapse without abusive behavior . . . but eventually the urge for the pleasure took control of reason and in the heat of the moment all sense of morality of the activity went out the window.<sup>104</sup>

When properly educated about the cognitive distortions and other dynamics of child abusers, clergy may be less willing to forgive offenders without requiring the offender to take meaningful steps to address his or her crimes—such as turning himself into the police, accessing sex offender treatment, and informing his victim's medical provider about the harm he inflicted on a child's body.<sup>105</sup> There is a growing awareness in theological circles of the need

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102. See generally Donna Eshuys & Stephen Smallbone, *Religious Affiliations Among Adult Sexual Offenders*, 18 J. CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE 279 (2006).

103. ANNA C. SALTER, PREDATORS 29 (paperback ed. 2004) (alteration in original).

104. KEENAN, *supra* note 97, at 163.

105. For an overview of the impact of abuse or neglect on a child's medical and mental health, see Vincent J. Felitti & Robert F. Anda, *The Relationship of Adverse Childhood Experiences to Adult Medical Disease, Psychiatric Disorders and Sexual Behavior: Implications*



to show “tough love” to sex offenders.<sup>106</sup> This includes placing limits on the secrecy of the confessional,<sup>107</sup> and coordinating any pastoral care of offenders with that of sex offender treatment providers.<sup>108</sup>

As this awareness spreads, churches, synagogues, temples, and other faith communities may serve less as safe havens for offenders seeking to continue molestation, and more as institutions that hold offenders accountable to their victims and to society as a whole. Given the importance of religion to many offenders, this overdue reformation may increase the willingness of local child molesters to confess to the police and otherwise accept governmental punishments or other consequences.<sup>109</sup>

As an example of this potential benefit, consider this case scenario.<sup>110</sup> A Lutheran pastor was ministering to a fellow pastor in prison for sexually abusing adolescent and teenage girls in his church. Although the imprisoned pastor acknowledged he committed these crimes, he also espoused numerous cognitive distortions and toxic theological constructs justifying his violation of children. For instance, he said that his wife withheld herself sexually from him in violation of scripture<sup>111</sup> and that her “sin” necessarily forced him to

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*for Healthcare*, in *THE IMPACT OF EARLY LIFE TRAUMA ON HEALTH AND DISEASE: THE HIDDEN EPIDEMIC 77* (Ruth A. Lanius et al. eds., 2010).

106. See generally Victor I. Vieth, *Ministering to Adult Sex Offenders: Ten Lessons from Henry Gerecke*, 112 *WIS. LUTHERAN Q.* 208 (2015); Vieth, *supra* note 58.

107. Victor I. Vieth, *Child Abuse and the Lutheran Confessional: A Call to Elevate Christ's Teachings on Children Above Church Traditions*, 46 *CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION* 50, 54 (2019). A review of over 700 clergy-penitent privilege cases finds that clergy are themselves narrowing the scope of the privilege by finding exceptions that will allow them to protect children and others harmed by criminal acts. Christine P. Bartholomew, *Exorcising the Clergy Privilege*, 103 *VA. L. REV.* 1015, 1017 (2017).

108. Cory Jewell Jensen, *Understanding and Working with Adult Sex Offenders in the Church*, 45 *CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY & MISSION* 36, 37 (2018); Kelvin F. Mutter, *Fostering a Sense of Healthy Responsibility in the Abuser*, *THE LONG JOURNEY HOME: UNDERSTANDING AND MINISTERING TO THE SEXUALLY ABUSED* 262, 266 (Andrew J. Schmutzer ed., 2011).

109. See, e.g., Duke Carter, *Florida: Alachua County Pastor Arrested for Sexual Assault*, *CLERGY GONE WILD* (Mar. 25, 2013, 12:00 AM), <https://clergygonewild.com/sex-abuse/34-child-abuse/1986-florida-alachua-county-pastor-arrested-for-sexual-assault> (noting a pastor turned himself into the police and confessed to acts of child molestation).

110. This is a case for which one of the authors was consulted. See CARL FERDINAND WILHELM WALTHER, *LAW & GOSPEL: HOW TO READ AND APPLY THE BIBLE* (Charles P. Schaum et al. eds., Christian C. Tiews trans., 2010), to better understand the theological approach taken by the counseling pastor.

111. In his letter to the Corinthians, Apostle Paul instructs husbands and wives: “Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” *1 Corinthians* 7:5 (New International Version).

turn to girls in his church to fulfill his need for intimacy. Although the counseling pastor confronted these distortions,<sup>112</sup> the offender always had another scriptural passage or Bible story to minimize his conduct or pass the blame to others. Finally, the counseling pastor withheld communion from the offender, telling him that he could no longer in good faith assure him of salvation because there was no evidence of genuine repentance. This act of tough love softened the behavior and language of the offender to the point where he began to mouth the right words and cooperated more earnestly with his sex offender treatment provider. Although only the offender knows if his heart was changed, the outward changes resulted in the resumption of communion.

J. *Establishing Community Credibility*

When seeking help, families impacted by abuse often turn first to their faith leaders.<sup>113</sup> For example, members of a congregation are more likely to seek counseling from a member of the clergy than a clinician.<sup>114</sup> Simply stated, many congregants know and trust their spiritual leaders but are often wary of psychologists and other members of child protection MDTs.<sup>115</sup> Unfortunately, some faith leaders fuel this mistrust of secular professionals.<sup>116</sup> The distrust of mental health professionals is particularly problematic. In a 2013 survey of over 1,000 Americans, 48% of evangelical Christians agreed with the statement: “With just Bible study and prayer, ALONE, people with serious mental illness like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia could overcome mental illness.”<sup>117</sup> Although religious

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112. The counseling pastor pointed out that, in the Garden of Eden, God did not allow Adam to blame Eve or Eve to blame the snake for their sins but instead held each of them accountable. *Genesis* 3:13–19.

113. Victor I. Vieth, *Keeping the Faith: A Call for Collaboration Between the Faith and Child Protection Communities*, in 2 *MEDICAL, LEGAL, & SOCIAL SCI. ASPECTS OF CHILD SEXUAL EXPLOITATION* 947, 953 (Sharon W. Cooper et al., eds., 2005).

114. Ann A. Hohmann & David B. Larson, *Psychiatric Factors Predicting Use of Clergy, PSYCHOTHERAPY AND RELIGIOUS VALUES* 71, 75 (Everett L. Worthington, Jr. ed., 1993).

115. See Vieth, *supra* note 113.

116. See generally MARY PRIDE, *THE CHILD ABUSE INDUSTRY* (1st prtg. 1986) (the author, whose work was published by a Christian publishing house, argues the child protection system threatens every North American family).

117. John Peteet, *The Interface Between Religion/Spirituality and Mental Health*, AM. PSYCHIATRIC ASS’N, <https://www.psychiatry.org/File%20Library/Psychiatrists/Cultural-Competency/faith-mentalhealth-essay-peteet.pdf> (last visited Jan. 25, 2020).

involvement can be a source of resiliency<sup>118</sup> that mitigates the mental health consequences of child abuse, it does not reduce the consequences altogether.<sup>119</sup> Having a theologian on the MDT can send a message to the faith community that the child protection team and the services they provide are worthy of respect and use by families in need.

K. *Spokesperson in Explaining MDT Actions to the Faith Community*

The theologian on the MDT can assist other clergy in understanding MDT processes and decisions. In one instance, a pastor at a ministerial association meeting complained that a CPS worker removed a child from a family in his congregation.<sup>120</sup> The pastor angrily denounced the conduct, noting that several weeks had passed without any court hearing or sharing of information of the child's whereabouts with the parents.

The theologian on the MDT listened to the pastor's complaint and then calmly explained that state law required a court hearing within 48 hours of a child's removal and the court had to review the matter every seven days until a final decision was made. The theologian on the MDT suggested the distraught pastor request his parishioners to sign a release so that he could talk directly with social services and see for himself whether the parents' claims were truthful.

L. *Developing Ethical Responses to Maltreatment*

When Dietrich Bonhoeffer contemplated the study of theology, his father and other members of his family were wary of the usefulness of scholarship not rooted in science.<sup>121</sup> And yet, as the Third Reich consumed Germany and much of Europe, it was Bonhoeffer's ethical code, strongly rooted in religious concepts, which enabled him and others to resist Nazi savagery even to the point of losing their own lives.<sup>122</sup> Indeed, one of Bonhoeffer's most acclaimed works is a treatise on ethics exploring not simply when it may be appropriate to overthrow a government but also to lie or engage in other conduct often

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118. See e.g. Ernest N. Jouriles, et al., *Divine Spiritual Struggles and Psychological Adjustment Among Adolescents who have Been Sexually Abused*, PSYCHOLOGY OF VIOLENCE (2019), doi:10.1037/vio0000274.

119. Katia G. Reinert et al., *The Role of Religious Involvement in the Relationship Between Early Trauma and Health Outcomes Among Adult Survivors*, 9 J. OF CHILD & ADOL. TRAUMA 231 (2016).

120. This is an anecdote from an MDT one of the authors participated in as a prosecutor.

121. See ERIC METAXAS, BONHOEFFER 37–39 (2010).

122. See generally *id*; see also EDWIN ROBERTSON, BISHOP OF THE RESISTANCE (2000) (an example of ethical principles rooted in religion resulting in many other pockets of resistance to the Nazis).

viewed as unethical.<sup>123</sup> Many scholars<sup>124</sup> and both conservative and liberal political leaders<sup>125</sup> have noted the common ethical thread woven into the world's religions and the utility of this ethical code in shaping good behavior.

In commenting on the value of religion in promoting moral behavior and decisions, former President Barack Obama writes:

[W]hen we ignore the debate about what it means to be a good Christian or Muslim or Jew; when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about our obligations toward one another . . . others will fill the vacuum.

. . . [T]he discomfort of some progressives with any hint of religiosity has often inhibited us from effectively addressing issues in moral terms. . . . Scrub language of all religious content and we forfeit the imagery and terminology through which millions of Americans understand both their personal morality and social justice. . . . Of course organized religion doesn't have a monopoly on virtue . . . . But we should not avoid making such claims or appeals—or abandon any reference to our rich religious traditions—in order to avoid giving offense.<sup>126</sup>

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123. See generally DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *ETHICS* (Eberhard Bethge ed., Neville Horton Smith trans., Macmillan Publ'g Co., Inc. 13th prtg. 1978) (1949). See STEPHEN R. HAYNES, *THE BATTLE FOR BONHOEFFER* (2018) (a discussion of how Bonhoeffer's theology and ethical principles have been used and misused by left- and right-wing political operatives).

124. See, e.g., C.S. LEWIS, *THE ABOLITION OF MAN* (Harper Collins ed., Harper Collins 2001) (1944). C. S. Lewis notes,

This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to for brevity as 'the Tao.' Some of the accounts of it which I have quoted will seem, perhaps, to many of you merely quaint or even magical. But what is common to them all is something we cannot neglect. It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of things we are."

*Id.* at 18.

125. See RICHARD NIXON, *IN THE ARENA* 98 (1990) (noting the value of religion in changing the hearts of those who make political or other decisions); see also BARACK OBAMA, *THE AUDACITY OF HOPE* 195–226 (2006) (detailing the important role of religion in U.S. culture and cautioning against limiting religious language in public life since this is how many people express their core values and beliefs).

126. OBAMA, *supra* note 125, at 214.

When MDTs fall apart or fail to perform optimally, it is usually not because of the lack of resources but because one or more members of the team values his or her own agency, or even him or herself, as more important than a child whose life is swaying in the balance. In one case, for example, a team declined to do a courtesy interview of a sexual abuse victim because the law enforcement agency did not like the demanding nature of the request made from another state.<sup>127</sup> Thinking such as this, thinking that is far removed from anything close to placing the child above all other considerations, may be inhibited if a member of the team was repeatedly assigned the task of questioning whether particular conduct is moral—a role ideally suited for many theologians.

In noting that Fred Rogers, of the PBS children’s television show *Mister Rogers Neighborhood*, both cared about traumatized children<sup>128</sup> and was an ordained minister, a child abuse prosecutor lamented “if only Mister Rogers were a part of our case review team—suddenly we would always put the children first.”<sup>129</sup> Although clergy do not have a monopoly on virtue, the study of theology addresses the subject of right versus wrong, moral versus immoral and can analyze ethical conundrums at a deeper level than simply

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127. This is a case for which one of the authors was consulted.

128. In the aftermath of a school shooting in Connecticut, many parents were reminded of the words Mr. Rogers uttered in helping children cope with trauma: “When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’ . . . To this day, especially in times of ‘disaster,’ I remember my mother’s words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers—so many caring people in this world.” *Mr. Rogers Photo, Words of Advice Go Viral in Wake of Shootings*, TODAY ENT. (Dec. 17, 2012, 11:08 AM), [http://todayentertainment.today.com/\\_news/2012/12/17/15969444-mr-rogers-photo-words-of-advice-go-viral-in-wake-of-shootings?lite](http://todayentertainment.today.com/_news/2012/12/17/15969444-mr-rogers-photo-words-of-advice-go-viral-in-wake-of-shootings?lite).

129. This is an anecdote a child abuse prosecutor shared with one of the authors. See AMY HOLLINGSWORTH, *THE SIMPLE FAITH OF MISTER ROGERS* (2005), for more about the ethical and spiritual views of Fred Rogers. In an address to the American Academy of Child Psychiatry, Rogers emphasized the importance of instilling values in children at an early age: “It’s easy to convince people that children need to learn the alphabet and numbers. . . . How do we help people to realize that what matters even more than the superimposition of adult symbols is how a person’s inner life finally puts together the alphabet and numbers of his outer life? What really matters is whether he uses the alphabet for the declaration of war or description of a sunrise—his numbers for the final count at Buchenwald or the specifics of a brand-new bridge.” MAXWELL KING, *THE GOOD NEIGHBOR: THE LIFE AND WORK OF FRED ROGERS* 247–8 (2018). George Washington believed chaplains should not only provide spiritual care to soldiers but also advise military officers on morality. TIM TOWNSEND, *MISSION AT NUREMBERG* 81 (2014).

analyzing what is permissible by law or a particular profession's ethical code.<sup>130</sup>

#### V. THE NATION'S FIRST CAC CHAPLAIN

After the publication of a 2013 version of this paper,<sup>131</sup> Reverend Carrie Nettles attended a *Chaplains for Children* conference sponsored by the National Child Protection Training Center (now Zero Abuse Project). Rev. Nettles worked with Shauna Galloway-Williams, the executive director of the Julie Valentine Center, an accredited CAC in Greenville, South Carolina, in developing a job description for a CAC chaplain. The job description encompassed the twelve roles outlined in this paper and Nettles began her work in 2017.<sup>132</sup>

In national presentations on this work, Rev. Nettles describes a "typical" day may include receiving referrals from victim advocates, therapists, or directly from survivors.<sup>133</sup> She may have a presence in the CAC waiting area as a support person for children or families. Rev. Nettles provides direct services to victims, to their families, and to other MDT members seeking spiritual care. She participates in weekly rape crisis and MDT meetings and meets monthly with area faith leaders and quarterly with the local Sexual Assault Response Team. Rev. Nettles conducts workshops on a variety of child abuse topics to area faith leaders and helps organize an annual conference on child abuse for faith and child protection leaders so that each group can better understand the spiritual impact of trauma and learn to work together.<sup>134</sup>

Children and families are informed of the chaplaincy services and, since its implementation, several hundred children and adults have asked to see the chaplain. Some of the child and adult survivors who have reached out to the chaplain include:

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130. As one example, theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned an entire book on ethics, detailing how many prior ethical systems failed to rein in the terrors of his day and calling on deeper, higher principles to guide society. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, *ETHICS* (Eberhard Bethge ed., Neville Horton Smith trans., Macmillan Publ'g Co., Inc. 13th prtg. 1978) (1949).

131. Victor I. Vieth et al., *Chaplains for Children: Twelve Potential Roles for a Theologian on the MDT*, 3 CTR. PIECE 1 (2013).

132. *Julie Valentine Center Becomes the First Child Advocacy Center in the US to Add Chaplain to Its Staff*, GSABIZWIRE.COM (Jan. 17, 2017), <http://gsabizwire.com/julie-valentine-center-becomes-the-first-child-advocacy-center-in-the-us-to-add-chaplain-to-its-staff/>.

133. Shauna Galloway-Williams and Rev. Carrie Nettles, *Chaplains and CACs: Effective Collaborations to Address the Spiritual Impact of Abuse*, a PowerPoint presentation given at several national conferences (on file with the Zero Abuse Project).

134. *Id.*

- A thirty-year-old woman, who was active in church throughout her life, but was still searching for God.
- A fifty-year-old transgendered man, dragged when a teenager from the altar rail and thrown outside church, who was told he is “evil” and a “freak of nature.”
- A ten-year-old boy who wondered if he was going to heaven and, if so, what kind of heaven awaits a victim of abuse.
- A thirteen-year-old girl who was told she is a “reprobate” who is “abhorrent to God” after the victim’s caregiver caught her own intimate partner raping the child.<sup>135</sup>

Rev. Nettles operates as a chaplain, not a pastor, meaning she is ecumenical and meets the spiritual needs of the client who seeks her care and does not promote a particular faith tradition.<sup>136</sup> However, she can make referrals to trauma-informed faith leaders in the community who can provide ongoing pastoral support if a client wishes. The JVC chaplain also meets national chaplaincy standards including graduation from an accredited seminary or divinity school, completion of the requisite number of hours of pastoral clinical education, and board certification.<sup>137</sup> To this list, JVC recommends that a CAC chaplain have experience in child protection or addressing trauma in a children’s hospital, residential facility or related setting. Although the work of the JVC chaplain has not yet been researched, the authors believe it represents a promising practice. This model has been incorporated in at least two additional CACs<sup>138</sup> and could perhaps be easily replicated at hospital-based CACs that may already have access to chaplains that meet the standards recommended by JVC.

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135. *Id.*

136. *Standards of Practice for Professional Chaplains*, ASS’N PROF. CHAPLAINS, <http://www.professionalchaplains.org/content.asp?pl=200&sl=198&contentid=514> (last visited Jan. 25, 2020). George Washington believed chaplains should not only provide spiritual care to soldiers but also advise military officers on “morals, morale, and religion.” TOWNSEND, *supra* note 129. In 1775, the Continental Congress recognized chaplains as a distinct branch of the military, *id.* at 79, and in 1862, the United States Congress expanded the concept of chaplaincy to apply to all religious traditions, *id.* at 82. See *id.* at 75–93, for a history of military chaplains.

137. Shauna Galloway-Williams & Rev. Carrie Nettles, *Chaplains and CACs: Effective Collaborations to Address the Spiritual Impact of Abuse*, a PowerPoint presentation given at several national conferences (on file with the Zero Abuse Project).

138. Rev. David Shultz, the executive director of the Wesley House Community Center, Inc. in Meridian, Mississippi, provides chaplaincy services and Rev. Adam C. Shultz serves as a spiritual counselor for Project Horizon, a CAC in Lexington, Virginia.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Given the fact that many child abusers use religious themes in the abuse of children, and that this usage causes significant spiritual damage inhibiting the ability of the MDT to investigate abuse and the victim to heal, it is elementary that teams need to develop stronger connections to the faith community. These connections will be critical for MDTs serious in preventing abuse, in investigating difficult cases of abuse within a religious institution, or in addressing a victim's mental and physical health—both of which are often inextricably linked to the child's spiritual well-being. There is, though, so much more. A closer affiliation between CACs/MDTs and faith leaders can develop critical resources to assist children and families for whom faith is a source of resilience. A connection to theologians can help MDT members cope with vicarious trauma by addressing the most difficult questions arising in this work. Equally as important, theologians can serve as reminders that, whether we hold any religious views, the cause of children is the highest of all callings demanding the highest of all conduct.