

What happens if a congregation does not go through an intentional process of healing after clergy sexual misconduct?

The congregation is likely to suffer significant impairment to its community in the months and years to come. It doesn't work to gloss over or sidestep the healing process. It will probably experience some or all of these symptoms, which may persist for years:

- Misdirected anger at church staff, at district or conference staff members, at "after-pastors" (those who follow an offender), and at lay leadership.
- Reactivity in the form of making unwise or hasty decisions.
- Ongoing divisions within the congregation.
- Depression and malaise; people unwilling to expend energy on the day-to-day life of the congregation.
- Excessive preoccupation with caring for the offending pastor (and pastor's family) with less regard for other injured parties.
- Loss of members/income which does not resolve in the usual "recovery period" (6-12 months) for these losses.
- A climate of anxiety, gossip and conjecture resulting from understandable attempts to find out "what happened"?

- Conscious or unconscious embarrassment, leading to isolation from the surrounding community and from other congregations.
- "Sexualization" of the congregation, in which undue attention is given to matters of human sexuality.
- Congregational conflicts which symbolize the pain; for example, conflicts about the priority of children's ministries, about job/role descriptions, about the external appearance of the church building, about the newsletter, about worship practices, about "boundaries" like keys to the building, office hours, outreach, etc.
- Nostalgia and mourning about times past (an earlier era long before this recent problem emerged) or the idealization of a previous pastor.
- Suspicion about new ideas, new programs, new forms of ministry.
- Despair about the future of the congregation; and the resulting fear of making commitments or taking risks.

Adapted from guidelines written by Episcopal Bishop Chilton Knudsen in an undated article.