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The Morning After: A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Process of Repair and Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

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The Morning After:
A Phenomenological Approach to Understanding the Process of Repair and
Reconciliation in the Aftermath of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

by

Damion Quaye

A Dissertation Presented to the
Halmos College of Arts and Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
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This dissertation was submitted by Damion Quaye under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the Halmos College of Arts and Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

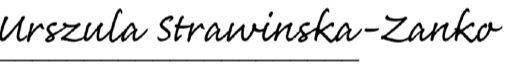
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Joyce Quaye, who taught me the value of hard-work, stubbornness, and perseverance. It is also dedicated to my wife, Chandra who empowers me to continue my academic pursuits. Finally, my children and grandchild are my heart. Damion Jr., Kiah, Christian, Trinity, Eden, and Sarai, thanks for allowing me the time to write. Without all of you, I would not have been able to complete this work.

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Abstract

American religious institutions are expected to be free from the unsettling behaviors found in secular institutions. However, scandals in churches have revealed a difficult truth; the people who operate these faith institutions are just as flawed as those who do not. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the damage caused by clergy sexual misconduct. Congregations, families, religious organizations, and the concept of the Christian church suffer because of clergy sexual misconduct. There are significant barriers to repair and reconciliation. Cases of clergy sexual misconduct in the Roman Catholic Church have received much of the attention, but the problem is bigger than one denomination. This study explored the problem of clergy sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church. It contributes to the field of conflict analysis and resolution by exploring the relationships between victims, the accused, and the church system. Six research participants were asked open-ended questions. Responses were explored through the lens of historic research about sexual misconduct, power, and closed systems. Raven's dissection of power enabled a more thorough analysis of the relationship dynamics between clergy and congregant. Bush and Folger's transformative theory of conflict demonstrates the complexity of these relationships. Finally, the United Methodist Church's policies regarding clergy sexual misconduct were explored through document analysis. The key findings included four themes. Fear, failed systems, fairness, and crisis minimization emerged as significant factors influencing how participants experienced the phenomenon.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the mid-1800s, Henry Ward Beecher was described as “the greatest preacher in America.” He had acquired both notoriety and fame as pastor of Plymouth Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York (Fortune, 1999). He used his prestige to help the causes he felt were worthy of his attention. He assisted the Underground Railroad, organized events to promote the end of slavery, and even allowed anti-slavery activists the opportunity to speak at his church (Plymouth Church, 2015). It is difficult to imagine the emotions church members felt in 1872 when Beecher’s relationship with Elizabeth Tilton was first exposed (Fortune, 1999). Tilton was not only a member of Plymouth Congregational Church, but she was also married to Theodore Tilton, one of Beecher’s closest friends (Fortune, 1999).

Examples of sexual impropriety in the church have become part of typical conversations about Christian religious organizations in the United States. In the 21st century, it is not as surprising as it was in the 1800s to hear tales of preachers involved in sex scandals and congregations forced to adjust. The combination of child abuse scandals in the Catholic Church, incest scandals in the Mormon faith, and adulterous affairs in the mega-churches have fostered an atmosphere of low expectations when it comes to sexual misconduct in religious organizations. However, the lack of surprise has not translated into a form of acceptance. The American public continues to be frustrated by the diminishing moral character of our nation’s religious leaders. According to a poll conducted by the Gallup organization in 2013, less than 50% of Americans believe clergy have ‘very high’ or ‘high’ ethical standards (Packard, 2015). In 1985, the same organization conducted a similar poll and 67% of respondents believed that clergy had

very high ethical standards (Packard, 2015). The declining trust in clergy is one of the reasons many parishioners are leaving churches all across America. According to The Gospel Coalition, Catholic churches and mainline Protestant denominations are in a state of steady decline towards extinction (Carter, 2015).

The Problem

It is fair to note that churches across the United States of America are experiencing a decline in membership for a host of reasons. Steve McSwain, Ambassador to the Council on the Parliament for the World's Religions, says that technology, demographics, religious pluralism, and competition have all contributed to the persistent decline of American church membership across denominations (McSwain, 2014). Clergy sexual misconduct is not single-handedly destroying the church; however, it is tarnishing the image of the church in a significant way. McSwain argues that clergy abuse and the corresponding cover-up by church leadership is probably driving people away from congregations at a faster rate than all the other reasons combined (McSwain, 2014). Furthermore, this type of abuse impacts congregations for years after the abuse has occurred. This persistent congregational impact is the main reason it is critical to gain some understanding of this form of abuse and specifically what has been done to address the problem.

Clergy sexual misconduct has impacted congregations across denominational divides in churches all across the United States of America. Despite the reach of this problem, most of the discussion about it has been limited in scope and focus. The Roman Catholic Church has been the centerpiece for accusations, investigations, critiques, and analysis. One study suggests that clergy in the Roman Catholic Church have been guilty

of avoiding the issues surrounding clergy sexual misconduct and using positive reappraisal to address unavoidable instances. Positive reappraisal involves cognitively reframing events in more positive ways (Compliment, 1997). Protestant denominations have largely escaped the scrutiny of the public and the critical eyes of researchers. Insurance companies that provide liability coverage for many issues facing the Protestant church, including lawsuits developing from cases of sexual misconduct, offer some insight into the depth of the problem. Despite reports from various insurance companies suggesting that there is a significant problem with sexual misconduct in the Protestant church, most of the attention continues to focus on Catholicism. Some argue that this is because it is difficult to gather data about the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the diverse environment of the Protestant church (The Associated Press, 2007).

Despite this difficulty, several researchers have explored varied aspects of sexual misconduct in the church. Elinor Fowler wrote about the effect of clergy sexual misconduct on those individuals in the clergyperson's inner circle (Fowler, 1996). David Samelson explored the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct on the decline in membership in the United Methodist Church (Samelson, 1999). Some researchers have taken a more specific approach like Corey Schlosser-Hall, who focused on a scandal at one specific protestant church in 1997. Schlosser-Hall conducted a case study of Westminster Presbyterian Church where the pastor and associate pastor resigned after they were discovered to be having a sexual affair with one another (Schlosser-Hall, 2002).

While each of these researchers tackled key components of the problem of clergy misconduct, they did so with significant limitations. With the exception of Schlosser-

Hall, the research largely ignored social theories and focused instead on statistical data and theologically-based conclusions. For example, Samelson's work failed to address the conditions surrounding clergy sexual misconduct, the United Methodist Church's culpability in the misconduct, or even some theoretical justification for why the misconduct contributed to a decline in church membership.

This study seeks to add an exploration of the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct to the discussion. This study was designed to understand how this phenomenon impacts the members of the United Methodist Church regardless of the member's status, title, or position. In order to successfully explore this topic, this study investigated clergy sexual misconduct from multiple different perspectives.

The central question is: How should we understand the conflict between congregants and clergy offenders as well as the process of repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church? In order to answer this question, three secondary questions were also addressed:

1. How do parties experience the conflict between clergy and congregants in the aftermath of accusations of clergy sexual misconduct?
2. What constitutes the process for repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct?
3. Is the process for repair and reconciliation effective?

Additional follow-up questions were also explored during this research, including:

1. How do victims voice concerns when clergy have significant power?

2. Who advocates for the accusers or the possible abusers and through what process is the conflict explored?
3. How do congregants describe the process of dealing with sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church?
4. How do congregants understand the policies and procedures designed to address sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church?
5. What role does congregational context (ministers, members, or other church leadership) play in determining how congregants experience the process of dealing with sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church?
6. How do congregants feel about the process?
7. What, if anything, do congregants feel must change about the process?
8. What types of ongoing effects occur in congregations where clergy sexual misconduct has occurred?
9. How do these congregations achieve reconciliation with the denomination?

The Purpose

The purpose of this hermeneutical phenomenological study was to understand the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. The data basis was three victims of clergy sexual misconduct, one witness to clergy sexual misconduct, one administrator for the church who would be involved in the process of reporting and investigation, and one close friend to a clergyperson who was accused of this misconduct.

For this study, the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct were generally defined as the emotional, physical, and spiritual experiences of congregants in churches where

clergy sexual misconduct has occurred. Therefore the ‘purpose’ was explored through examining the personal experiences of congregants, exploring the resolution strategies of the United Methodist Church primarily through document analysis, and answering the aforementioned question: How should we understand the experience of repair and reconciliation for congregants who have endured the effects of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The aforementioned impacts of this phenomenon on congregants and communities in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church were primarily examined through interviews. This method of data collection allowed this researcher an opportunity for a more detailed exploration of perspectives. Victims of clergy sexual misconduct and congregants from the churches where clergy offenders were serving were interviewed to gain a greater understanding of their experiences with this form of abuse. However, personal accounts of these experiences only describe part of the story.

The policies and procedure that determine how church leadership responds to these events is another critical component of this research. Adequate research into the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct must include document analysis of the policies of the church. Therefore, some explorations of past, current, and potential policies pertaining to this experience were a significant element in this research as well.

Researcher Context

The United Methodist Church is arguably the largest mainline Protestant Denomination within the United States (Lipka, 2015). This fact, coupled with the connectional format of the United Methodist Church, make it a practical and appropriate

choice for examination. Currently, I am serving as a licensed local pastor of a United Methodist Church in North Carolina and I am progressing through the process for ordination. I take my position very seriously. Therefore, I am compelled to understand the values of the church and that includes its beliefs, policies, and procedures pertaining to sexual ethics and sexual misconduct among clergy members.

Based primarily on a thorough analysis of the data gathered, I am concerned that the United Methodist Church may not currently be handling instances of clergy sexual misconduct effectively. Instead, the policies of the church, and the way those policies have been implemented, may have magnified the impact of these events. It appears that victims, and congregations as a whole, continue to suffer because insufficient and improper steps have been taken to respond to instances of sexual misconduct involving clergy.

While I acknowledge that conclusions drawn about the experiences of those involved in the United Methodist Church cannot necessarily be applied to all Protestant denominations, common themes are likely present. Therefore, the value of this study will extend beyond the audience of the United Methodist Church to anyone trying to understand the impacts clergy sexual misconduct has on the congregants and the church community. Specifically, this study focuses on the inherent conflict between victims of clergy sexual misconduct, the clergy offenders themselves, and the congregations that are often challenged to house them both.

Theoretical Framework

Clergy sexual misconduct is not an isolated phenomenon. Instead, it is the result of social pressures, decision-making processes, and/or personal conclusions experienced

by the offenders. It is also the impetus for significant conflict between victims and offenders. Effective study of the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct requires some exploration of these connected micro-phenomenon as well as some analysis of this emerging conflict. This is where theoretical examination is most important. Chapter two of this dissertation will explore relevant theories in more detail, but a brief discussion of theoretical context can help introduce the research here.

The conflict between those who facilitate acts of clergy sexual misconduct and those who are victimized by those acts is a critical component of this study. Consequently, it is important to build a theoretical understanding of that conflict. The transformative theory of conflict provides a foundation for that understanding. Transformative theory argues that the most significant characteristic of conflict is that it drives people towards uncomfortable behavior and interactions (Bush & Folger, 2005). There are few interactions imaginable that are more uncomfortable than those between a victim of sexual misconduct and the people who facilitated the misconduct. The discomfort is likely magnified in cases where the abuser is a clergyperson who commands a significant measure of trust and who yields significant power.

Power is the most significant social pressure at work in the life of a clergyperson. The unique role of clergyperson has a correspondingly unique relationship with power. Raven (2008) helped to frame modern conversations about power when he introduced the bases of power. Coercive power, reward power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power each present a sense of how relationships influence the amount of power an individual has (Raven, 2008). While different professions may depend on multiple bases at different times, clergy depend constantly on all of them. Raven (2008) later introduced

the concept of informational power, which clergy also utilize. Since clergy maintain such a diverse portfolio of power, it is reasonable to expect congregants to sometimes feel disempowered in interpersonal interactions. This diminished sense of power is exacerbated by conflict (Bush & Folger, 2005). This power deficiency can become an obstacle to healing for victims of clergy sexual misconduct.

While power is a significant pressure, it is not the only one. The pressure church members feel to get the approval of a clergy member can contribute to a form of social exchange. Thibaut and Kelley suggest that friendship is promoted by a person's willingness and ability to provide something rewarding to another (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Church members might feel pressured to offer clergy a sense of confidentiality in regards to the acts of misconduct and this secrecy might foster an environment that is more favorable for these types of events to occur. These pressures help clergy wield a significant amount of power and can provide a significant opportunity for abuse. Too many clergypersons have taken advantage of this opportunity. They have been empowered to do so because of the trust congregants have in them.

Trust is another significant element of clergy sexual misconduct. Trust is best understood as a critical and foundational building block between the self and another (Lewis & Weigert, 2012). Relationships are constructed based, at least partly, on the level of trust one party has for another. How congregants trust clergypersons can influence the nature of their spiritual interactions. We define what is permissible and impermissible behavior in the relationship with the degree of trust in mind. These rules about permissibility help define the nature of our relationships. Trust becomes problematic when it is violated by those whose deviant, or otherwise inappropriate, behavior

undermines the nature of the relationship. Sexual misconduct is one form of deviant behavior clergy engage in that undermines the trust of congregants.

It is difficult to understand where the drive towards this type of misconduct originates. History suggests it is a persistent problem in the relationship between clergy and congregants. Freud's (1920) research introduces the notion of unconscious underlying motivations for sexual misconduct. He suggests that our childhood experiences and desires could help explain our adult sexual desires and tendencies (Freud, 1920). It is possible that the reason it is difficult to fully understand where this misconduct begins is that the offenders are also unaware of why they feel and act the way they do. However, understanding the impacts of this misconduct requires looking beyond the subconscious. It requires exploring the contributing social constructs and the impacts they have on potential offenders. It requires exploring the structure and systems that help to perpetuate the misconduct and may also have a hand in producing it.

The United Methodist Church may be such a system. If we understand the United Methodist Church to be an organization of many separate but interrelated and interdependent parts, then we understand it to be a system (Steinke, 2006). This system may contribute to clergy sexual misconduct because it can operate as if it were a closed system, while it is really open to the larger world. Closed systems are systems that are separated from the larger surrounding environment (Scott & Davis, 2007). As a closed system, the United Methodist Church might strive to protect its power, with little regard for the impact it may have on the larger world. If the United Methodist Church is an open system, then its failure to adequately address this misconduct may have implications for the communities that surround United Methodist Churches and the larger world (Scott &

Davis, 2007). It is important to note that conflict may exist between the needs of this system and the needs of congregations, communities, and individual victims of clergy sexual misconduct. Healing and restoration may require some kind of acknowledgment of flaws in the system.

Audience

The primary audience for this research is those concerned about the prevalence of sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church and the damage it causes to congregations, communities, and the Christian brand as a whole. The persistent impacts of clergy sexual misconduct create a perpetual conflict in the church. This conflict can devastate religious communities. Therefore, religious leaders, especially those involved in constructing church policies, should be interested in understanding these impacts. Additionally, lay-members within the United Methodist Church should be interested in understanding the shared experiences of the community. However, as I previously mentioned, the Christian community at large should find value in understanding the experiences of a large connectional Protestant church. This research, coupled with the existing supply of information about the Catholic Church, creates a formidable platform for discussing ways to address this problem across the Christian faith in a more effective manner than previously utilized.

A more global perspective might suggest that there is also value for anyone interested in addressing issues of sexual misconduct of any kind. This research can highlight the reach of this event into the lives of a community. It can begin to explain how the community at large, becomes victimized in the aftermath of these types of

offenses. It can also help us begin to develop more comprehensive and effective approaches to dealing with this type of abuse.

Relevance to Conflict Resolution Studies and Practices

Sexual misconduct naturally breeds conflict in interpersonal interactions. The conflict between an accused abuser and a victim can undermine both the prospect of effective collaboration and the nature of the environment in which these two parties interact. Effective collaboration typically requires forgiveness and that will be difficult as long as the conflict persists without any move towards reconciliation. Forgiveness can be misinterpreted as a full- pardon for the abuse. This can create an uncomfortable dynamic between the abuser and the victim and dismantle any attempts at progress (Moffett, 2005). In one sense this research will explore the dynamics of that conflict. However, there is another conflict to consider.

While approaches to address clergy sexual misconduct will likely include strategies that separate the accused abuser from the victim, congregations are often forced to reconcile and move forward. Either victims or accused abusers are challenged to move forward in a congregation where at least some of the people are aware of the allegations of sexual misconduct.

Given the complex nature of these acts of misconduct and the various contributing factors that may perpetuate them, it is not difficult to understand the challenges facing those interested in some form of resolution. Since clergy sexual misconduct often involves a crime and a victim, it is particularly difficult to discuss resolution strategies like mediation, negotiation, and arbitration. Despite that difficulty, it is important to examine strategies for moving forward in the church community.

Mediation seems to be the most natural fit for discussions of resolution in cases of clergy sexual misconduct. Arbitration presents a legalistic approach to a problem that is primarily a social and communal challenge. There are clearly legal issues to remedy, but this remedy will not likely promote significant healing for the community. Negotiation may be too simplistic for such a complex problem. While there are clearly issues that can be negotiated, the far more critical problems leave little room for negotiation. Those problems include spiritual understanding of the abuse, healing the distrust in the community, and caring for the victims.

While there are many forms of mediation, transformative mediation seems best designed to help the community heal while recognizing the continual impacts this type of event can have (Bush & Folger, 2005). The transformative theory of conflict suggests that people are sometimes frustrated because conflict leads them to treat others in a way they do not like (Bush & Folger, 2005). This is a central problem in the case of clergy sexual misconduct because clergy and church members are often left in some form of lasting relationship despite the misconduct. Currently, clergy members are not necessarily dismissed or reassigned because of an offense in the United Methodist Church (The United Methodist Church, 2016). This means victims who remain affiliated with the church will likely experience some lasting interaction with the clergy offenders. If the relationship will be lasting, then understanding how to avoid perpetual mistreatment of the other parties involved is critical.

The field of conflict analysis and resolution will benefit from this research because it will draw attention to both the internal and external conflict that exists in these victimized congregations. This attention may spark the additional research required to

develop comprehensive policies and resolution strategies for these types of offenses in the future.

Definitions of Key Terms

Before we can adequately discuss the components of this research, it is important to adopt a common understanding of several key terms. The terms are listed here with a brief definition for the purposes of this proposal and the corresponding study.

1. Protestant – A Christian who practices a form of western Christianity that has no formal connection to the Roman Catholic Pope (The United Methodist Church, 2016).
2. Connectional – The United Methodist Church is connectional because the churches are all interconnected through a network of linking conferences (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
3. Congregant – Any person who is a part of a church congregation (Merriam Webster)
4. Sexual misconduct – Unwanted sexual behaviors by a layperson or a clergyperson (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
5. Sexual harassment – A form of sexual misconduct where unwanted sexual behavior alter the workplace environment (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
6. Sexualized behavior – Behavior that communicates sexual interest (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
7. Clergy – Those people who have the authority to lead religious activities (Merriam Webster)

8. The General Conference of The United Methodist Church – An international body of 1000 delegates who meet to make decisions about the policies of the United Methodist Church (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
9. Lay members – A person who has been baptized and confirmed as a member of The United Methodist Church (The United Methodist Church, 2012).

Summary

The preceding chapter provides background information, definitions, and a basic framework for this research into clergy sexual misconduct. The following chapters expand on these concepts. In chapter 2, the literature about clergy sexual misconduct is explored in order to provide a foundation for this study. In chapter 3, the specific details of how research will be conducted are explained. Those details include the justification for a hermeneutical phenomenological study of this topic and the specific procedures this researcher followed when engaging participants and analyzing the data. Chapter 4 is where the findings of this study are provided. The findings include reflections from the participants and analysis from the researcher. Finally, chapter 5 includes discussions about this study, including reflections on the limitations of it, and conclusions derived from this researcher's interpretation of the data.

The impacts of clergy sexual misconduct are significant and devastating. For several years, research surrounding this issue has focused almost exclusively on the Catholic Church. We need a broader view of the problem. It is important to understand how protestant denominations handle these types of offenses. It is important to understand the damage done to individuals and congregations who face this problem. It is important because more than 41% of the United States population describe themselves as

protestant (PEW Research Center, 2014). We cannot continue to ignore the potential for harm to such a large number of Americans. This research is a starting point for the multitude of investigations and inquiries that are needed in this field to help provide some sense of peace to victims of clergy sexual misconduct.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

While a specific study of sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church is uncommon, the topic of sexual misconduct in the church is not new to literature or research. Theorists and reporters have explored and described sexual misconduct in the church for decades. Religious organizations have drafted policies and procedures to address these types of offenses. Though these investigations may not specifically describe misconduct in the United Methodist Church, they have undoubtedly contributed to the construction of policies in the United Methodist Church and they also provide a foundation for this research.

In 1996, the United Methodist Church adopted a resolution regarding the sexual misconduct of ministers (The United Methodist Church, 2012). The resolution includes definitions of key terms, including sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, and sexualized behavior (The United Methodist Church, 2012). The church defined the terms as follows:

Table 1

Key Terms Defined

Sexual Misconduct	It is a continuum of behaviors that involve sexuality or gender-related issues. It includes sexual abuse, child abuse, rape, assault, verbal comments, uninvited/undesired touching, pornography, stalking, or misuse of the pastoral position by using sexualized content to take advantage of anyone (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
Sexual Harassment	It is a form of sexual misconduct that involves unwanted sexual (or gender-directed) behavior that is severe enough to alter the condition of employment resulting in a hostile environment (The United Methodist Church, 2012).
Sexualized Behavior	It is behavior that signals sexual interest or content (The United Methodist Church, 2012).

In 1988, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church committed to eliminating all sexual misconduct in the church, which includes sexual harassment and sexualized behavior (The United Methodist Church, 2012). As part of this objective, in 2012, the United Methodist Church recommended that churches use a response team to address cases of sexual misconduct by ministerial leaders. The conference recommends that these teams be trained and deployed whenever cases of sexual misconduct arise (The United Methodist Church, 2012).

Historically, the United Methodist Church has struggled to address issues related to sexuality. Despite being formed in the late 1960s, the United Methodist Church has been largely shielded from the sexual revolution. The General Conference did not adopt most resolutions regarding sexuality until some time after the year 2000 (The United Methodist Church, 2012). This is a reflection of the larger conflict between religious institutions and issues of sexuality.

Contextual Framework

This conflict is neither new nor unique to the United Methodist Church or the United States. The Catholic Church in Spain triggered the deaths of thousands of priests believed guilty of sexual misconduct (Mitchell, 1998). Mitchell (1998) argues that leftist leaders organized the slaughter of priests and nuns beginning in 1936 at the start of the Spanish Civil War. He concludes that the Catholic Church in Spain failed to act despite a keen awareness of the numerous acts of sexual abuse perpetrated by priests and nuns in the region. This failure to act is what triggered the mass killings. Mitchell (1998) assigns indirect responsibility for the killings to the Spanish church. It was easier to let the killings continue than to struggle through some process of reconciliation and recovery.

Part of the challenge this subject presents is that there is little agreement about what causes sexual misconduct, and the absence of definitive causes makes prescribing solutions more difficult.

A common explanation explored by many theorists is the idea of mental disorder. It is described in various ways but, generally, theorists suggest that some form of mental illness (physical or psychological) is the catalyst for these types of actions. Some argue that the dysfunction causes clergy members, particularly those in popular and powerful church settings, to become overtly narcissistic, which allows them to justify any type of inappropriate behavior (Francis P. C., 1997). Others suggest that the design of religious requirements, like the celibacy requirement for priests, may produce pressures that drive individuals towards deviant behavior (Sipe, 1995).

Some suggest a simpler explanation. Pastors are human. Clergy who commit acts of sexual misconduct are not mystical creatures. They are men and women who are tempted and give in to human desires. Clergy are not immune to these types of temptations and are often not less susceptible to giving in to them (Bell & Grenz, 2001). Interestingly, some research suggests that clergy who engage in sexual misconduct are not all the same. The motivations for misconduct can stem from different personality types and personal goals. Some clergypersons are predators, seeking to use their power in order to perpetrate abuse. Some clergypersons are needy individuals who inadvertently build inappropriate relationships to satisfy their neediness. Some clergypersons are simply prone to falling in love. Since most of their interactions occur in a church environment, the pool of potential lovers there is significant (Bell & Grenz, 2001).

Despite the prevalence of these explanations, little scientific support has been produced for any of them. With little hope of adequately explaining the reasons this abuse occurs, the focus naturally shifts to general suggestions about what can be done to promote healing in the aftermath of these events.

Historically, the United Methodist Church, like many other churches, has sought out solutions that seek to manage the damaged relationships rather than terminate them (The United Methodist Church, 2012). This philosophy may contribute to perpetuating the damage of one offense on a congregation. Knowing that the offenders continue to be a part of the system, even if they are removed from the immediate congregation, may contribute to a perpetual discomfort among members and especially among victims. Tschan (2014) argues that institutions must treat sexual misconduct as an attack on its members and take whatever steps are necessary to reestablish a sense of care for the victims.

It is important to note that sexual misconduct is both an interpersonal and intrapersonal event. The damage to relationships is no more or less important than the damage to the psyche for victims and offenders. Therefore, treatment plans should address the real logistical problem in the relationship as well as the less obvious psychological issues (Songy, 2003). It is critical to explore and investigate viable theories about what causes this type of abuse and to tailor solutions to address the harms those theories help predict.

Expectations of Spiritual Leaders

It is impossible to explore the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct without paying a significant amount of attention to the unique requirements and expectations of the role

of a spiritual leader. The United Methodist Church defines clergy as those religious leaders who are ordained to perform specialized functions (The United Methodist Church, 2016). The specialized nature of the role endows clergy with powers that are unique and significant. The clergy's power is unique because it is associated with a divine source. Congregants often view clergy as emissaries of God (Scmitz, 2010). This makes it incredibly difficult for those who are committed to a particular faith to view the acts of clergy with a critical eye. When congregants are reluctant to challenge clergy, it is difficult to set boundaries on the clergyperson's power. Therefore, research designed to explore the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct is not fully synonymous with research into sexual misconduct by other types of authority figures.

Forgiveness

Another unique characteristic of clergy sexual misconduct is the persistent pressure to forgive. Both victims and other congregation members are likely to face both internal and external pressures to forgive clergy members for their misconduct. The pressure stems from the acknowledgment of human weakness. The pressures are fortified by each individual's own desire to be forgiven. Congregants often come to clergy to acknowledge their human failures. They often come seeking a path to forgiveness. Sometimes they are looking for the forgiveness of God. Sometimes they are looking to forgive themselves. In most cases, they are looking for the clergy member to offer some kind of forgiveness. Some argue that it would be hypocritical for congregants to refuse forgiveness to clergy while depending on clergy to facilitate forgiveness for the congregant (Irons & Roberts, 1995). Even while congregations are still facing the immediate aftermath of revelations about clergy sexual misconduct, pressure to seek

reconciliation or to offer forgiveness can emerge. These pressures are both premature and inappropriate. While the possibility for reconciliation or forgiveness may exist, it can only come after offenders have experienced significant treatment and victims found a path towards healing (Hopkins, 1995).

The misguided pressure to forgive may stem from a misunderstanding of exactly what is involved in forgiving this type of trauma. Stoop and Masteller (1996) provide a six-step guide for the process:

1. Recognize that an injury has occurred.
2. Name your emotional experiences.
3. Express your emotions in a cathartic way (especially your hurt and anger).
4. Create boundaries and determine how to protect yourself.
5. Set aside the debt you feel is owed to you.
6. Decide what reconciliation might look like and determine its potential.

Under circumstances without the emotional weight of a sexual trauma, this would be a difficult six-step process. Progressing through these steps while wrestling with the emotional damage caused by some cases of clergy sexual misconduct is even more challenging.

It is also important to note that forgiveness and reconciliation are not the same thing. They are related but not the same and they can have unique impacts on victims. Theorists define forgiveness as a process where a person's response to those who have caused them harm becomes more positive and less negative. Reconciliation is defined as the process of restoring a damaged relationship (McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Forgiveness primarily serves to release internal pressure. It is a critical step in

healing. While victims should not be pressured into forgiveness, it is a critical tool for moving beyond the trauma. Reconciliation is not. Reconciliation is helpful for maintaining relationships, but it is not always reasonably possible (Stoop D. , 2011).

Theoretical Framework

As the earlier pages of this dissertation suggest, clergy sexual misconduct is a complicated phenomenon. If we expand our frame of analysis to examine all the theories that are relevant to these types of offenses, we may complicate the research even further. For this reason, it is important to focus our attention on those theoretical concepts that are relevant to the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct on congregations. This literature review is organized around those concepts: power, fear, trust, sexual deviance, and organizational systems.

A review of the literature surrounding these concepts and their connection with clergy sexual misconduct begins with a detailed and targeted search through research databases related to religion and conflict. A broad search of ProQuest's religion database using the keywords "clergy sexual misconduct" or "clergy sexual assault" produced 206 articles. When the search parameters were refined to include only peer-reviewed articles focused on protestant churches, the number of results dwindled to 23. After examining those articles closely, several were eliminated because they dealt with issues beyond the scope of this research (Pedophilia and Catholicism were the excluding factors). The remaining 17 articles addressed some key considerations to help frame this research. Those considerations include analysis of the system that enables clergy sexual abuse, the psychological impacts on victims, the spiritual needs of those who have experience with this phenomenon, and the abuse of power it entails.

In the following paragraphs, the literature that identifies these considerations is explored. It is helpful to remain attentive to the connections that exist between each of these concepts and how they interact with the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct. Clergypersons have unique access to power. This power is a byproduct of the intimacy that is inherent in a relationship between a person and their spiritual leader. It can cause significant fear for those who challenge the parameters of this relationship. This relationship is defined by the congregants' trust in the leadership and the guidance of the clergyperson. When a clergyperson abuses his or her power, he or she dismantles the bonds of trust that have been built. The reasons for this abuse are often unclear, but one common catalyst for abuse of power among clergy persons is sexual desire. When clergypersons experience this type of desire they may feel embarrassed as religious leaders. They may also feel trapped in a system that does not allow them to express their true feelings. Human needs theory argues that some systems are incompatible with certain human needs (Burton, 1998). Ironically, it is this same system that might shield them from the consequences of their misconduct.

Clergy Access to Power

Perhaps the most significant force that enables clergy members to commit acts of abuse is power. It defines many of the interactions between clergy and congregant by granting the clergy person a significant measure of authority and limiting the congregant's freedom to challenge the clergy person. Max Weber (1918) makes a compelling argument about legitimate domination. He asserts that real domination requires a level of compliance, or more directly, the individuals being dominated must possess a desire to obey (Weber, *The types of legitimate domination*, 2010). One of the

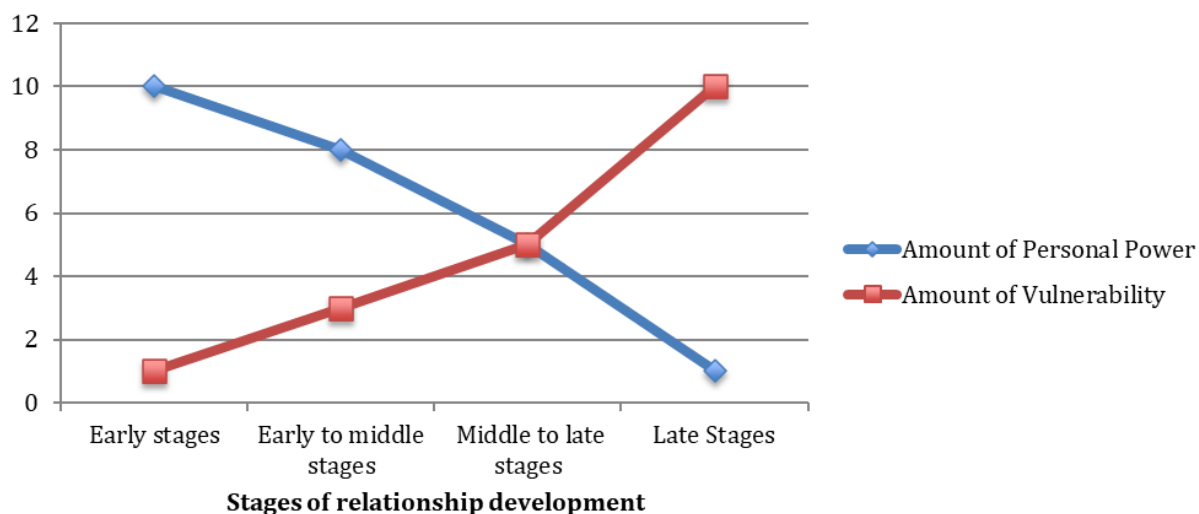
more challenging characteristics of clergy sexual misconduct is that victims have often willingly sacrificed power to the clergyperson before the abuse occurs.

Some people do not easily cede power. If it is ceded, it is often done because the person is trading their power for something that they perceive has more value. It is intentional and done with a measured sense of the risk that is being taken (Benyei, 2014). People have often decided that whatever they are lacking cannot be gained without sacrificing some measure of their power.

The literature suggests that individuals or entities that control the resources that other individuals or entities need or want are powerful. Therefore, power can be defined as control of what people need (Wilmot & Hocker, 2013). Clergypersons are perceived to control spiritual knowledge. Individuals who feel they need this knowledge can empower clergypersons and simultaneously disempower him or her. In addition to spiritual knowledge, clergypersons can also often offer congregants a sense of freedom and security. The freedom to be vulnerable and unload personal flaws, weaknesses, and challenges can be a strong motivator for some people to sacrifice a measure of their personal power. Clergypersons cultivate a certain kind of intimacy with congregants that can be healing or harmful (Robison, 2004). Congregants can sacrifice more and more power to clergypersons as they become more comfortable being vulnerable around the clergyperson. This vulnerability may grow naturally the more time the relationship exists (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Individual's Diminishing Power and Increasing Vulnerability



In order to be vulnerable, it is necessary to take the guards down (Benyei, 2014).

This creates a situation where individuals are more vulnerable around clergy than they are powerful and that can encourage abuse (Wilmot & Hocker, 2013). Intimacy and vulnerability can be misconstrued as sexual expression by the congregant or the clergyperson (Robison, 2004). This form of disempowerment can magnify conflict and perpetuate a negative conflict spiral. As the conflict grows and the individual congregant becomes more disempowered, the path toward repair becomes more complicated (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Another unique quality clergypersons possess is a diversity of power. The many different types of power are often referred to as the bases of power. They include coercive power, reward power, referent power, expert power, legitimate power, and informational power (Raven, 2008). While authority figures often possess multiple bases

of power at different moments in relationships, clergypersons can seemingly possess all of the bases of power simultaneously.

Max Weber (1947) defined power as the likelihood that an individual in a relationship would be able to execute her or his will despite opposition from other parties in the relationship. Power is accessed through acts of will; the powerful imposes his or her desires while the less powerful cedes control of the environment. Powerful individuals become intimidating and those they interact with become trapped in a situation that will not protect their interests.

Coercive power is power derived from some kind of threat (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). As spiritual leaders, clergypersons provide an implicit threat that disobedience and defiance would be a crime against God. Reward power is derived from the perception that you are the exclusive source of some desired reward (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). Clergy in the United Methodist Church reward congregants with the promise of life after death. Referent power depends on loyalty and friendship (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). We give a measure of power to those people we admire and care for. The nature of the interactions between clergy and congregants often produce intimate connections that help build feelings of admiration and care. Expert power is derived from the perception that you have a unique combination of knowledge and skills related to a particular topic (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). Clergy demonstrate this expertise through theological discussion and by providing congregants with practical ways to exercise spiritual concepts in their lives. Legitimate power exists when an individual believes that another individual should have power because of his or her position and the nature of their relationship (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). As

previously stated, congregants often surrender power to clergy because they perceive that the clergyperson should have a measure of authority.

This research explored the experiences of individuals living in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct and the significance of power could not be overlooked. It is a critical part of the analysis of what happened immediately after the event and what victims wrestle with for weeks, months, and sometimes years to come. It can dictate their behavior, attitude, and even contribute to their emotional experience.

Immobilizing Fear

While power is a common theme in the existing literature on clergy sexual misconduct, the literature does not always refer directly to fear or its debilitating qualities. However, literature about fear often points to shame and anxiety as the contributing factors that can limit or change an individual's behavior. These characteristics offer reference points for our examinations of those who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct. Understanding the shame and anxiety of those who experience clergy sexual misconduct, may clarify the role fear plays in this phenomenon.

Perhaps the natural response to conflict and confrontations, with clergypersons whom victims have ceded significant amounts of power to, is fear. We might describe it in many different ways, but the anxiety a victim of clergy sexual misconduct feels about what happens next is a form of fear. It is compounded by the fact that victims must make difficult choices about reporting these events, continuing, or terminating, the relationship with the offender, and even sharing the details with those whom they are closest to. Every decision seems to have a consequence. The conflict grows or diminishes based on what the victim does or says next. Human experience suggests that conflict often generates

pain. Since people consider clergypersons safe, victims will often avoid conflict with clergy to preserve that sense of safety (Benyei, 2014).

Another form of fear that manifests in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct is fear of expression. Many people perceive the church as a family. The expression of certain emotions like anger, or discomfort, can cause harm or shame for the family unit. It is natural for victims of clergy sexual misconduct to try to hide these detrimental emotional responses because they fear the harm it will cause their family (Benyei, 2014).

While emotional expression is personal, fear can also stem from more communal concerns. The congregation of a church has an image, accusations about the misconduct of a clergyperson in a given congregation can tarnish the image of the entire community. Victims must wrestle with the fear that their actions will cast the entire congregation in an unpleasant light (Benyei, 2014).

Each of these manifestations of fear can immobilize the victim. As these manifestations of fear become more intense, they can make it impossible for the victim to summon the necessary courage to confront the circumstance directly. They can magnify the victim's sense of vulnerability and make them feel even more powerless. As the clergyperson's power grows, the victim can become more fearful and the prospect of reporting the misconduct, terminating the relationship, or even sharing the details with loved ones, decreases.

Understanding the stories of those involved in incidents of clergy sexual misconduct will require understanding the thoughts, emotions, and actions of those individuals. Conclusions should not merely be drawn from what they do, but also what they do not do. It will be critical to explore the motivations that caused them to act or

seek action, and the motivations that were a barrier to constructive progress, accountability, or healing.

Misguided Trust

Closely related to the concept of power is the notion of trust. Referent power depends on an individual's ability to inspire other individuals to trust them (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). Congregants often view clergy with an abnormally elevated measure of trust. Victims trust clergypersons to be individuals with exemplary character and strong convictions (Weber, The types of legitimate domination, 2010). This trust creates a space where victims feel safe to let down their guard. Clergy are not often well understood by congregants. A shroud of privacy often limits how much congregants know about the passions and desires of clergy. Despite this reality, congregants often feel that clergypersons offer them a safe space to be vulnerable (Grenz & Bell, 2001). As a consequence, when clergy violate this safe space and undermine the individual's trust, a lasting psychological harm is caused. If victims cannot develop some minimal understanding of the misconduct or greater insight into the individual who perpetrated the misconduct, the conflict is likely to grow and it is not likely that they will find peace (Bush & Folger, 2005).

Not only do congregants trust clergy, but they also place a significant amount of trust in the church as an institution (for the purposes of this study, the institutional church refers to the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church). Congregants trust the church to protect them, but in cases of clergy sexual misconduct, protecting the victim may require harming the church. There is a tendency for churches, across denominations, to protect the institution even if it sometimes requires harming the

congregant (Cooper-White, 2012). The process of healing and reconciliation requires rebuilding trust in the institution of the church because this institution will facilitate many, if not all, or the strategies for repair and reconciliation in the future.

Congregants often expect clergypersons to maintain a moral and ethical code of behavior that surpasses their own. Congregants can trust clergy, and, by extension, the larger church because clergy would not behave in ways that are more corrupt and deviant than those the congregant would engage in. The fatal flaw of this perspective is that it ascribes extreme morality to clergypersons, whom the congregants never fully knew.

Sexual Deviance

This distorted perspective of clergy may be the byproduct of a misunderstanding of a clergyperson's humanity. It may be an attempt to define the clergyperson as more than human. Rediger (1990) argues that many people view clergy as the "third sex" (p. 1). This view suggests that clergy are immune to the temptations and sexual desires that the other genders experience, or at least, that clergypersons experience those desires differently. This view contributes to a distorted set of expectations about clergypersons and may assign clergy another kind of power or superiority. Clergypersons have the same types of sexual desires as everyone else. They have the same types of weaknesses. In fact, clergy are people too (Rediger, 1990). Clergy persons are not entitled to elevated levels of trust in sexual matters.

Understanding the System

While it is important to avoid shifting responsibility for clergy sexual misconduct away from the clergypersons who commit these offenses, it is also important to note the role the church system plays in perpetuating the problem. Meadows (2008) defines a

system as a set of interconnected parts that are organized to produce a set of behaviors. The United Methodist Church is a system. The argument could be made that all church organizations are based in a system.

General Systems Theory was introduced by biologist Ludwig Von Bertalanffy. He presents it as a way to conceptualize organized complexity when examining one piece of a whole is insufficient to fully explain a situation (Bertalanffy, 1968). In other words, some things are better understood as part of an interconnected group than as an event in isolation. The policies of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church that pertain to clergy sexual abuse is an example of some of those things.

The system in the United Methodist Church functions by organizing the responsibilities of clergy, staff, and church members to sustain the church and promote a specific mission. The United Methodist Church hierarchy is not traditional. There is not a central office or a single executive in charge of the church. Instead, it relies on groups to make decisions at the highest level (The United Methodist Church, 2013). Consider the hierarchy (See Figure 2).

Figure 2*Snapshot of United Methodist Church Hierarchy*

At key places in the hierarchy, the group, or conference, philosophy is relegated to the opinions of individuals. Bishops, district superintendents, and pastors (Bishops, district superintendents, and pastors are all clergy) all make decisions individually that influence how this system accomplishes its mission. This injection of individual decision-making can be a challenge as the church strive to achieve its mission, “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (The United Methodist Church, 2016).

The system works to produce this outcome through the commitment of the aforementioned clergy, staff, and church members. One consequence of this system’s heavy dependence on the decision of individuals is that it can endow clergy, the system’s

leaders, with a significant measure of power. Consequently, the system can cultivate an environment where abuse occurs. The system can also influence how abuse allegations are handled and how perpetrators are punished. However, the system may have the most significant impact on how victims report, cope with, and recover from the abuse.

Bertalanffy's (1968) work was designed to help the scientific community understand the links between various scientific disciplines and to help scientists understand that the information about how those disciplines work together is also relevant in understanding each independent discipline. For Bertalanffy, studying the system provided greater insight into understanding the system's parts. Later theorists have used Bertalanffy's work in various fields of study, outside of the biology, to explore how the interactions between disciplines, ideas, experiences, or other components, might provide additional information about the components themselves.

A critical component of research into clergy sexual misconduct is research into the church system. We cannot hope to fully understand the impacts of this type of misconduct on the individual congregant or the congregation at large without some grasp of how the system works. Systems research compels us to understand the interrelated nature of the entire system (Steinke, 2006). Each part of the system has an impact on the other parts of the system. The United Methodist Church is a system that operates according to the policies, behaviors, and attitudes of the people within the system.

Scott and Davis (2007) would describe the United Methodist Church as a rational system. Rational systems are closed systems where individuals operate in ways they deem most rational even when the objective is undesirable (Scott & Davis, 2007). Conflict occurs when any individual in the system behaves in a way that poses harm to

the other people in the system or violates the rules that govern the system. Clergy sexual misconduct is both harmful to the persons involved, and a violation of the rules, which govern the system.

Ironically, the system likely strives to protect the abuser in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct. Individuals within the system are forced to wrestle with personal concepts of morality and obligations to the system (Steinke, 2006). Holding offenders, who are part of the system, accountable may cause significant harm to how the system operates. This conflict between moral responsibility and obligations to the system illustrates a challenge that John Burton predicts in his expansion of Basic Human Needs theory (Burton, 1998).

Basic Human Needs

Abraham Maslow (1943) introduces the concept of basic human needs as a component of his Theory of Human Motivation. Maslow suggests that humans are motivated by a universal set of needs that include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs, in that order. He argues that humans become motivated to pursue a new category of needs only once the previous category of needs has been satisfied. For instance, an individual cannot be concerned with trying to achieve safety needs, like personal security, if that individual is struggling to satisfy physiological needs, which includes things like air and water.

Burton (1998) explores this concept further and suggests that there are times when our personal human needs conflict with the needs of the system we operate within. The hierarchy that determines which needs get priority is less clear when individual needs are set up against the needs of a system. This helps to explain why victims of clergy sexual

misconduct might not report the experience. There is an internal conflict between what the victim needs personally and what the system needs. The victim is forced to decide whether or not their need for safety and justice (justice is arguably a safety need because it depends on order, predictability, and control) (Maslow, 1943) is more important than the system's need for survival and peace.

Congregations that are a part of any denomination are unique because they are a system within a system. The larger system is the denomination. The smaller system is the individual church. The larger system has goals and objectives but so does the smaller system. While the larger system strives to fulfill a global mission, the smaller system serves that same mission as well as more local objectives. Congregations operate like family systems. They expect loyalty and strict adherence to the formal and informal rules (Benyei, 2014).

Healthy congregational systems function like a marriage, where clergy and congregations challenge each other to achieve common goals. The marriage disintegrates when either party lacks the power necessary to hold the other party accountable. The system begins to function like a parent-child relationship, where the parent dictates the rules and the child has little opportunity to voice his or her objections (Benyei, 2014). Those who commit acts of clergy sexual misconduct thrive, and avoid accountability, because of that silence.

Summary

Sexual misconduct is common in today's society. It should not really be surprising that it is common among clergy. The image of clergy has been constructed in such a way that people want to believe that clergypersons are immune to the temptations

that haunt other people. They are not. However, they are often protected from the consequences of their actions because of fear, obstacles in the system, a misguided sense of trust, and pressure to forgive. The result is that many stories of clergy sexual abuse are never told, and the ones that are told can be silenced by a community that is not equipped to respond.

Current Studies of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

There are several books, articles, theories, and philosophical strategies that discuss clergy sexual misconduct. Clergy Sexual Abuse (Renzetti & Yocum, 2013) and Sexual Misconduct and the Clergy (Ferro, 2005) introduce the problem of clergy sexual abuse as a prominent modern concern. They suggest that we can no longer treat this as a problem relegated to the Roman Catholic Church. “The Association Between Spiritual Well-Being And Clergy Sexual Misconduct” (Francis & Stacks, 2003) focuses on the causes of the misconduct. “Sexual Abuse Awareness And Training Course For Ministry; Toward A Program To Eradicate Ministry Misconduct For Healthier Churches In The Twenty-First Century” (Austin, 2014) focus on solutions and paths to move forwards after the abuse. Each of these works contributes an important piece to understanding clergy sexual misconduct.

Renzetti and Yocum (2013) invite a collection of authors together to divide clergy sexual misconduct into smaller pieces in order to present how significant the reach of this misconduct is for victims. While much of the book focuses on the catholic church and pedophilia, there is significant discussion of the psychological and criminal consequences of clergy sexual misconduct. This text lays a strong foundation for the importance of the research presented in this dissertation. Given the psychological and criminal

consequences of clergy sexual misconduct, it is important to understand how individuals move forward.

Sexual Misconduct and the Clergy (Ferro, 2005) is a research guide. It provides a valuable chronology of some of the more significant events related to clergy sexual misconduct and the associated laws. It illustrates how significant a problem clergy sexual misconduct has become and some of the ways it has been addressed. This helps define the scope of the problem, specifically, that the problem is larger than the Roman Catholic Church.

Francis and Stacks (2003) explore the relationship between spiritual wholeness and clergy sexual misconduct. The article is one of several that attempts to look for explanations or justifications for the inappropriate behavior of clergy. Most of these articles hope to prescribe solutions to this phenomenon by addressing the root causes of the behavior.

Austin (2014) provides a more direct approach. He claims to offer solutions to the crisis of sexual misconduct. His solutions hinge on the spiritual formation and self-care of the offenders prior to “acting out” in inappropriate ways. He concludes that solutions will need to be proactive, but they must be tailored to different contexts and different kinds of ministry settings.

The previous books and articles open a discussion into the general issues of clergy sexual misconduct, but other articles also lay the foundation for the specific research I have conducted here. The following articles introduce key concepts that help focus attention on the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct. Some of these articles focus on

samples significantly different from the one explored in this research, but the concepts explored remain valuable.

Kurtz, Rennebohm, Lucas, Carlile, & Thoburn (2017) explore the perspective of a clergyperson's spouse. The article outlines the systemic factors that may increase the risk that a clergyperson will act in an inappropriate way. While the article maintains a narrow focus on spouses of the accused, it introduces the concept of collateral damage caused by these acts of abuse. This collateral damage is precisely what makes repair and reconciliation difficult in the aftermath of sexual misconduct.

Gross-schaefer, Feldman, & Perkowitz (2011) compare and contrast the policies pertaining to clergy sexual misconduct in Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish religious organizations. The collection of policies is presented as an opportunity for religious institutions to build a stronger, more effective policy by using the best of multiple options available. This article fails to adequately address the unique religious context for these different organizations, but it highlights the importance of policy and the systems the policy operates in.

In "The Abuse of Power: A View of Sexual Misconduct in a Systemic approach to Pastoral Care", Robinson (2004) explores the power imbalance in the relationship between a clergy person and a layperson. Robinson suggests that clergy must be proactive about acknowledging and mitigating the power imbalance early in the relationship. The article focuses on how power is managed before an act of misconduct has occurred. However, the significant concepts of acknowledgment and mitigation are just as important in the aftermath of an abuse of power.

The Void in Current Studies of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

The value of these works is significant. Nevertheless, something is missing. Despite the numerous stories of abuse across denominational lines, most victims are silent. Hidden in their silence are not just the horrifying tales of misconduct but also the agonizing process of reconciliation, forgiveness, and separation. These are the moments that relate to conflict analysis and resolution.

This study describes the burdens congregants face in the aftermath of this type of abuse in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. Existing research focuses heavily on defining the abuse itself. This phenomenological study is an effective starting point for researchers who are beginning to explore the depth of the damage caused by clergy sexual misconduct.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Methodology Rationale

Clergy sexual misconduct is a recurring phenomenon. Understanding the impacts of the phenomenon requires a detailed exploration of it. This study focuses on understanding how people experience clergy sexual misconduct. These experiences are best explored qualitatively. It is important to explore the causes, feelings, impacts, and the aftermath of this phenomenon. The primary goal of this research was to understand the common details that link the experiences of individuals who have endured the effects of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church.

The field of qualitative research is diverse. It is important to focus our work by using an approach that will be appropriate and effective for this type of research. Creswell (2013) offers five different approaches to qualitative study. The first approach, narrative research, focuses on collecting stories of individual experiences. The second approach, phenomenology, focuses on the common experiences of a collection of individuals. A third approach, grounded theory seeks to develop a theoretical explanation of events or experiences. The fourth approach, ethnographic research, focuses on a closely connected group of study participants who develop similar patterns of behavior. Finally, the fifth approach, a case study, involves an in-depth examination of a single case (Creswell, 2013).

Phenomenology is the approach best suited for this type of study for two reasons. First, this research is concerned with the common experiences of individuals. This implies that more than one person's experience should be explored and that links between

experiences are important. Narrative research focuses on the stories of individuals and the lessons that can be derived from a close examination of those stories. Case study analysis is more concerned with connecting a specific case to a specific concept. Both approaches are less concerned with building links between the experiences to help create a more complete description of a phenomenon. The second reason phenomenology is appropriate is that this research focused on understanding experiences so that conclusions could be drawn. Grounded theory focuses on creating theory to explain events rather than merely understanding the entire experience. Ethnographic research focuses on the dynamics of a culture more than the experience the members have shared (Creswell, 2013).

Document analysis was a critical supplement to this phenomenological research. The policies, practices, and procedures of the United Methodist Church, as they pertain to clergy sexual misconduct, contribute to the experience of the victims. The experience of clergy sexual misconduct includes more than the act itself. It involves and includes the aftermath of the event, including the institutional response to the acts. While interviews revealed perspectives on how accusers experienced the church's response, written documents spell out the policies that drive that response. They also provide insight into how closely the actions taken in response to these claims of abuse follow institutional policies.

It is important to note that despite the value of document analysis in this research, the primary method of information gathering in this study was interviews and phenomenological analysis. Document analysis has limited value to this study because documents primarily focus on policies that may not match practices. Interviews and phenomenological analysis addressed practices rather than policies. It is the practices of

the United Methodist Church in response to clergy sexual misconduct that has the greatest impact on this phenomenon.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to research. It explores a given phenomenon by examining and analyzing the experiences of those who have lived through the phenomenon. It prioritizes experiential knowledge as a tool for understanding. Edmund Husserl originally introduced phenomenology in the early 20th century (Beyer, 2016). Husserl suggests that intentional focus on the overlooked structures at work in a phenomenon can help us derive uniquely unprejudiced meaning from them (Beyer, 2016). There are a few distinct phenomenological strategies. Transcendental phenomenology was Husserl's original concept. It involves suspending judgment or prejudice, in a process called reduction, in order to identify and understand the essence of an event (Kafle, 2011). Husserl argued that a researcher should suspend his or her own preconceptions, and experiences in order to analyze and interpret the gathered data accurately. Hermeneutical phenomenology, a concept introduced by Martin Heidegger involves the inclusion of personal opinions based on the premise that Husserl's suspension of judgment is not possible. Existential phenomenology might be considered a more extreme version of Hermeneutical phenomenology because it also suggests that Husserl's reduction is impossible but also that it may not be desired. Existential phenomenologists argue that there are aspects of the phenomenon that will not be revealed unless the researcher is fully engaged in the process. While each of these strategies has some merit, this study will be hermeneutical. The hermeneutical approach appreciates the merit of interpretive analysis of the descriptions provided. It seeks to find

the objective reality that lives beneath the subjective experiences of individuals (Kafle, 2011). It is this objective reality that can best inform society about the harms of clergy sexual misconduct. It can also become the foundation on which practical and objective responses, treatments, and penalties can be built.

Hermeneutical Phenomenology

Hermeneutics, the study of the methods and principles of interpretation, likely had its origin sometime in Greek antiquity. Martin Luther's use of it to promote an individual's direct access to biblical interpretation helped fortify it as a centerpiece of biblical study (Gjesdal, 2011). For centuries, hermeneutics have allowed theologians, and other scholars, to explore, interpret, and understand religious texts in unique ways. In this study, hermeneutics provides the filter, through which we can examine the religious environment and explore, interpret, and understand clergy sexual misconduct.

The term is Phenomenology is primarily concerned with exploring the essence of a given phenomenon (Kafle, 2011). It seeks to remove prejudice as researchers seek to describe the phenomenon in an unbiased way. Hermeneutical phenomenology suggests that the essence is more than the subjective experience that transcendental phenomenology hopes to find. The essence includes the combination of subjective description and the interpretation of those experiences (Kafle, 2011).

Husserl insisted that researchers bracket their personal experiences out of the research endeavor in order to more accurately understand the essence of the phenomenon. Heidegger suggested that researchers should instead acknowledge their implicit biases and offer them as explicit components of the research. Additionally, hermeneutical

phenomenology reminds us that there are many different perspectives to a phenomenon, including our own, and each one may be valid (Kafle, 2011).

Van Manen (1997) describes hermeneutical phenomenology as a journey toward the lived experience that hopes to achieve intentional analysis. The objective is not merely to understand and explain the phenomenon, but also to decipher some meaning. This research is designed to achieve that objective.

This research considered and conformed to the features of hermeneutical phenomenological research identified by Heidegger. Hermeneutical phenomenology resists the temptation to demand strict adherence to a method for the sake of having a method. It offers limited methodological or analytical requirements. Instead, it suggests six research components:

1. Commitment
2. Persistent orientation towards the research question
3. Limiting investigation to the phenomenon as it is lived
4. Describing the phenomenon in writing
5. Rewriting
6. Examining the components and the whole experience

(Kafle, 2011).

This research met those requirements throughout the research process. First, this research emphasized the phenomenon of repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct. Second, this research explored the phenomenon by conducting interviews with six individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. Third, this research explored both the subjective and objective experiences of those who have

experienced the phenomenon. The objective experiences included the logistical details about the instances of abuse including, time, location, and dates. Subjective experiences include feelings and descriptions of why parties believe the events took place. Fourth, this research involved interviews and document analysis as the primary modes of data collection. Fifth, during this research, data was analyzed in an effort to understand and describe what was experienced and how it was experienced. Finally, this research uncovered the essence of this phenomenon.

Hermeneutics and Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Hermeneutical phenomenology is an appropriate research method for clergy sexual misconduct because it respects the individual's experience. Rather than dictating an appropriate reaction to the experience, phenomenology encourages participants to share what they experienced and how they experienced it. Heidegger's hermeneutical approach allows the researcher's context to be incorporated into the conversation. The hermeneutical circle illustrates the value the researcher's perspective can offer.

The hermeneutic circle describes an interaction between the researcher's preconceived perspective and the data gathered during research. If we consider the essence of the phenomenon as the end goal of the research, then we can see the data gathered as a part of that end goal. As the researcher explores and analyzes those parts, he or she considers his or her preconceptions. The interaction between data and preconceptions changes the researcher's perception of the end goal and consequently changes the researcher's preconceptions as he or she analyzes the next "part" of data. This cycle continues until the data is fully analyzed and the researcher's perspective is fully incorporated (Fry, 2020).

Clergy sexual misconduct can be effectively understood through the use of the hermeneutic circle. This researcher can explore the experiences shared by participants through the lens of his preconceptions. As the participant's stories altered the researcher's preconceptions, he began to hear their experiences in a different way. Finally, this researcher learned to hear the essence of the participant's story and to recognize the limitations of his own perspective. This researcher could not understand the stories fully, without both the interactions with those who lived it and the notions he carried with him into the process.

The Research Process

After my research proposal was approved, I began an ambitious process to gather and interview participants as quickly as possible. First, I had to acquire approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). My proposal was held up in the review process for some reason that has never fully been explained. Once approval was secured, I began recruiting potential participants. Despite a number of roadblocks, I secured verbal agreements to interview 12 participants. Six of these participants eventually decided that they would not participate in the study. Most of the individuals who changed their minds explained that they were concerned or fearful about the ramifications of my research. Despite assuring them that this study was confidential, I was unable to alleviate their concerns. I began initially evaluating participants to ensure that they met my sampling criteria.

Sampling

This research was designed around interviews of at least six individuals about their experiences with clergy sexual misconduct. The desired sample could include men

or women from any adult age group. This research did not include victims under the age of 18. Child abuse is another serious form of clergy misconduct but it is beyond the scope of this research. The ideal target sample was individuals who had experienced clergy sexual misconduct no more than ten years prior to the date of the interview. The time constraint helped maximize the participant's opportunity for recall of critical factors. Race, ethnicity, and gender were not used as inclusion or exclusion criteria for potential participants.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is often referred to as judgmental sampling because it relies on the judgment of a researcher as part of the criteria for selecting participants in the sample. It is valuable in cases where the research requires a targeted approach to sampling (Lavrakas, 2008). In order to garner a more complete picture of the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct, the researcher initially intended to target participants who offered a diverse collection of perspectives of this phenomenon. In other words, the researcher intended to avoid a scenario where all participants shared the same general perspective. The findings of this study are strengthened by the inclusion of participants who experienced the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct as clergypersons, victims, and administrators in the church. In order to facilitate this diversity, the researcher contacted administrators at the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, in addition to using the recruitment methods identified in the following sections.

Five of the six participants in this study responded to the general requests for participants identified in the recruitment section below. The Office of the Bishop

provided an administrative representative who became the sixth. Other church administrators were among those who responded to the general request for participants, but none of them agreed to participate in the formal round of interviews.

Sample Size

Some might suggest that a sample of six participants is entirely too small. In most cases, they would be correct for a qualitative study that seeks to determine, among other things, the frequency and significance of an experience. Qualitative studies like this one seek to uncover the essence of an event, which may or may not be more easily attained with more participants. An article from the *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* suggests that three participants is a sufficient number of participants for phenomenological study (Englander, 2013). Others suggest the number should be between 5 and 25 (Creswell, 2013). The difficulty in isolating a specific number is that the goal is not statistical significance, but instead clarity and consistency in understanding. Given the cohesiveness and clarity of the data gathered during this process, this researcher is comfortable with conclusions drawn from these six participants.

Selection Criteria

Potential subjects who demonstrate significantly diminished mental capacity were excluded as participants. For the purposes of this study, subjects who have experienced clergy sexual misconduct with clergypersons who are not affiliated with the United Methodist Church were also excluded. Additionally, those who experienced clergy sexual misconduct, separated from the United Methodist Church, and who were not interested in reconciliation, were excluded. All other viable subjects were interviewed. The following

table depicts a complete list of the inclusion and exclusion criteria used for this study (See Table 2).

Table 2

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for This Study

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Individuals who attend a church in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. 2. Individuals who have experience (direct or indirect) with clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anyone who demonstrated diminished mental capacity 2. Anyone under the age of 18 3. Anyone with no experience (direct or indirect) with clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. 4. Anyone uninterested in repair or reconciliation of any kind.

Recruitment

The sensitive nature of this topic made it difficult to recruit individuals who are willing to share their stories. Before interviews began, I contacted a few United Methodist churches in the North Carolina Conference and had discussions with representatives from the office of the bishop of the north conference and other administrative leaders. The general consensus was that creating a public request, using church announcements, bulletin boards, and flyers to allow victims the freedom to contact me privately, if they were interested in sharing their stories, was the best strategy. Since the focus of this research is repair and reconciliation, individuals who were not the victims, but had first-hand knowledge of the events were also included in interviews.

Recruitment flyers were crafted to provide potential participants the freedom to determine whether or not they were interested in the study and the choice of whether or not to initiate contact with this researcher. Flyers included my name and a contact

number that was created exclusively for this study. Once a potential participant contacted this researcher, he or she was asked a series of yes or no questions to determine the participant's eligibility for the study, including age, and whether or not they attend a church in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. If potential participants were deemed eligible, then a preliminary phone interview was scheduled. During this preliminary interview, the full scope of the study was explained, verbal and written assurances of confidentiality were offered and an in-person interview was scheduled. The interviews occurred at one of two church locations in the North Carolina Conference. Both locations were used with the permission of the Pastors and Trustee board for those churches. Those locations were:

1. St. Matthews United Methodist Church in Fayetteville, NC
2. Avent Ferry United Methodist Church in Raleigh, NC

Interviews were conducted in the fellowship hall of each church. If participants requested a different location, the researcher made necessary adjustments.

Documents

Additionally, documents were collected from the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church that outline the policies of the conference. Discussions with leaders in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church revealed that programs addressing the problem of sexual misconduct may exist in the conference that are not part of official policy. Documentation on those programs was also reviewed.

Document Selection

I had hoped that the Office of the Bishop of the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church would provide key documents that would allow me to analyze

and assess the current policies for handling cases of clergy sexual misconduct.

Documents that outlined church policies and pointed to how those policies had been implemented in specific cases would provide the most helpful context for the experiences described by participants. While the bishop's office was not dismissive of my requests for documents, most of the assistance they provided came by way of referral. I was referred to The General Commission on the Status and the Role of Women and the commission's website. I was referred to the Director for Sexual Ethics and Advocacy. I was also referred to the 2016 edition of The Book of Discipline.

I explored all three options for documents that met the following criteria:

1. Each document needed to address how the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodists was handling, or supposed to handle, case of clergy sexual misconduct in the conference.
2. Each document needed to represent policies, ideas, and examples that were current and relevant to experiences of clergy sexual misconduct in the last ten years.

These criteria helped ensure that the document analysis included documents that related to the same experiences described by the sample of participants.

Data Collection

Data was gathered primarily from interviews (see Appendix A for full list of questions) and analysis of the aforementioned documents. The documents included, church policies, guidelines, and studies conducted by the church. The sensitive nature of this topic made collecting data particularly challenging. Even individuals who had initially offered full cooperation, later told me that they had no information that they were

permitted to share. After speaking with church leadership and receiving assurances that information would be available, I was confident that I would have access to significant pieces of information. This was not the case. One of the benefits of focusing this research on a specific conference within a large congregational Christian denomination is that it simplifies points of contact should problems arise. However, identifying key points of contact did not prove particularly helpful in gaining access to sensitive information. Since access to documents was limited, data collection for this study included all accessible documents from The General Commission on the Status and the Role of Women, the commission's website, the website for the Church's Sexual Ethics website, and the 2016 edition of The Book of Discipline that met the criteria identified above.

Phenomenology uses interviews as a key tool for gathering information. The researcher uses open-ended questions to create space for participants to describe their experiences. The interview structure was not rigidly confined to the questions the researcher planned to ask. Instead, this researcher made a purposeful attempt to use silence as a tool (Berko, Wolvin, & Wolvin, 2010). Visual cues or auditory stumbles sometimes suggested that the participant had more to say. Initially, this researcher would simply wait to determine if the participant would continue. If that seems unlikely, the researcher would sometimes ask probing follow-up questions that were not part of the original questionnaire.

Interview Questions

Interview questions were designed to help gather responses that would create a complete picture of how we should understand the experience of repair and reconciliation for congregants who have endured the effects of clergy sexual misconduct in the North

Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church? The interview questions use the term ‘abuse’ to describe the experiences of clergy sexual misconduct. The United Methodist Church defined sexual misconduct as unwanted sexual behaviors, which corresponds with the definition of sexual abuse. Additionally, the term ‘abuse’ can evoke an emotional response that is sometimes missing from discussions of misconduct. The interviews consisted entirely of open-ended interview questions designed to promote responses that detail the emotional and practical experiences of clergy sexual misconduct. Many questions focused on the concepts of repair and reconciliation specifically. These questions will be identified later in this dissertation along with the personal interpretations, challenges, and/or responses the researcher faced.

The initial interview questions were:

1. How did you first become involved with this congregation?
2. How long have you been a part of this congregation?
 - a. In what capacity? How has it changed over time?
3. Describe the feeling you remember experiencing in the immediate aftermath of this instance of misconduct?
4. Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?
 - a. How are you coping with this experience?
 - b. What might aid you in your coping process?
5. How do you feel church leadership handled the situation?
 - a. Why do you feel they handled it this way?
 - b. How do you think the decisions about what to do were made?
6. What feelings do you have about that process?

7. What do you feel the immediate impacts will be/were for the congregation?
8. What do you feel the long-term impacts will be?
9. How do you heal trust in church leadership after something like this occurs?
10. What types of conflict has this led to in the congregation?
11. What types of conflict has this led to for you internally/personally?
12. What else would you like to share about your experience of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church?

The questions were designed to draw descriptive details from the participants and provide an opportunity for each participant to expand on his or her answers.

Specific questions like, “Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse,” or “how do you heal trust in church leadership after something like this occurs?” challenged respondents to explore the essence of the event and begin to find meaning in the actions of the faith community. This meaning often acted as a catalyst for strong follow-up questions about reconciliation.

The researcher used active listening strategies to engage the participants when answers demanded further exploration. Paraphrasing answers to seek clarification was a significant tool to encourage participants to provide additional details. Mirroring the words of the participant or repeating the words as I heard them is an effective part of the active listening process (Berko et al., 2010).

Interviews were recorded to facilitate better analysis. While recordings were limited to audio only, the researcher also kept thorough written notes about any physical indicators that might help provide information about responses. All the recordings were

secured on a password-protected drive to provide additional security to confidential information. Notes were recorded under an alias to further secure the data gathered. Interview participants received a statement of confidentiality and consent (statement of confidentiality and consent is included as Appendix B) before interviews were conducted. At the conclusion of the research, recorded files and notes will be destroyed.

Data Analysis

Transcripts were typed and coded according to the procedures described by Moustakas and Creswell. Initially, it was important to bracket out personal experiences and biases that the researcher experienced during the interview process. Those experiences and biases were incorporated into this research through the use of my journal.

I am personally connected to this topic as a clergy member serving in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. While I have not experienced clergy sexual misconduct personally, I have experienced the congregation-wide impacts of these events on the Christian church. My reflections were identified in a separate journal, which is discussed further in the bracketing section of this study. While bracketing is used in transcendental phenomenology as a tool to separate out the preconceptions of the researcher, journaling was used in this study to track my reflections so that they could be explored during analysis as part of the hermeneutic circle.

Once transcripts were typed, it was important to identify significant statements in the interviews and other sources (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) describes the process for analysis of phenomenological data in transcripts with the following seven steps:

1. Listing – Every expression from the transcripts that might be described as relevant to the experience should be listed (Moustakas, 1994).
2. Reduction – The list should be carefully explored in order to eliminate those expressions that do not contain data that is valuable and necessary to understand the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
3. Clustering – Significant statements will be grouped into meaningful units to help identify themes throughout the data (Creswell, 2013).
4. Final Identification – Researchers will identify themes and other components of the list that are not compatible with the overall sentiment of the subject's transcripts (Moustakas, 1994).
5. Individual Textural Description – The conscious experience of the subject will be described including feelings, ideas, and examples (Moustakas, 1994).
6. Individual Structural Description – The phenomenon will be described in a way that highlights the underlying and precipitating factors that explain what happened (Moustakas, 1994).
7. Textural and Structural Description – Finally the textural and structural descriptions will be integrated into a statement that describes the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

The interviews were carefully analyzed, and several themes emerged. Those themes were used to formulate an understanding of the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct and the factors that contribute to that reality.

While the process Moustakas describes was originally formulated for transcendental phenomenological research, the principles pertaining to data analysis are

also effective in hermeneutical phenomenological research. Van Manen (1997) and Martinez (2014) describe the process of reduction and identification of themes for hermeneutical phenomenology. Moustakas provides a more detailed approach to achieve the objectives identified by Van Manen and Martinez.

Document Analysis

Unlike interview transcripts, gathered documents were not all similar in format or content. This meant documents were analyzed in a less consistent manner. While all documents were explored and highlighted to identify central concepts, some documents offered information based on research, while others offered information based on tradition. This distinction made it difficult to treat all documents the same. In general terms, the following process was used to explore the documents gathered:

1. The documents were collected and reviewed.
2. The documents were highlighted to find common points of focus.
3. The highlighted portions were sorted into categories.
4. The categories were used to identify where the information could be integrated into the findings identified in the following chapter of this study.

Bracketing/Reflexivity

Hermeneutic phenomenology includes a role for the researcher's preconceived attitudes and understandings (Van Manen, 1997). In an effort to include them in the analysis of my research, I added the following steps to the aforementioned analysis process.

1. Journaling- I recorded my general thoughts about the topic of clergy sexual misconduct before I begin interviews. I provided a foundation for my views based on my background and experiences. After interviews were conducted and before analysis began, I recorded changes in my perspective. I also recorded my reactions to the more significant responses from participants.
2. Thematic comparison and influence – I compared my journal to thematic observations from the subjects. I identified and referenced in my research, corresponding and conflicting themes.
3. Final Description – I sought to incorporate my thematic conclusions into the final description of the phenomenon. I noted the impact my thematic influences had on the final description.

Ethical Considerations

In addition to the challenges of data collection and analysis, this type of study faces a significant challenge to conducting interviews in a delicate way. Researchers must be mindful of the potential to cause harm during the interview process. It is important that subjects are allowed to maintain a certain measure of control during the interview process. While engagement and interaction may be necessary to facilitate answers focused on repair and reconciliation experiences, questions avoided steering subjects towards uncomfortable experiences. Instead, researchers asked open-ended questions that allowed subjects the freedom to find his or her way through the experience. This is important in order to help ensure that the subjects are not put at risk to an unreasonable degree (Nova Southeastern University, 2016).

To create a more comfortable space for participants to share their stories, the researcher agreed to only publish the facets of their stories that were necessary and to ensure that their identities were concealed. After interviews were conducted and transcripts were typed, the researcher analyzed the relevance of some conversations. The reduction phase of my analysis provided an opportunity to limit the inclusion of irrelevant data from this study. Each participant is referred to in this research using a pseudonym and a full account of the participant's experience is not included in this research.

Since this research deals with human subjects, it was important to gain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In order to help achieve that requirement, subjects were sought primarily on a volunteer basis and interviews occurred only after the researcher confirmed the subject's willingness to voluntarily participate. Once IRB approval was secured the process of gathering participants began. Interviews were conducted privately and records were secured as previously mentioned.

Research Implications

This research examined the process of reconciliation and repair that congregants experience in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct. The implications of this research for the field of conflict analysis and resolution are significant. First, this research helps describe the complexities of reconciliation in the aftermath of trauma. Second, this research explored the challenge of conflict resolution within the context of spirituality. Third, this research broached the question of power dynamics in reconciliation. Finally, this research explored the challenges of institutions and the procedures that govern the personal relationships those institutions are supposed to regulate.

Clergy sexual misconduct has been a significant issue in the 21st century. Despite the popularity of the topic, little attention has been paid to the devastating impact it has on individuals and congregations in the church. This research focused on one conference in the United Methodist Church, but it may be the catalyst that inspires future research surrounding the common experiences of those dealing with the aftermath of these types of offenses. Perhaps the research will also inspire churches, denominations, and other religious institutions to reexamine the policies and procedures that govern how they handle instances of clergy sexual misconduct.

Chapter 4: Findings

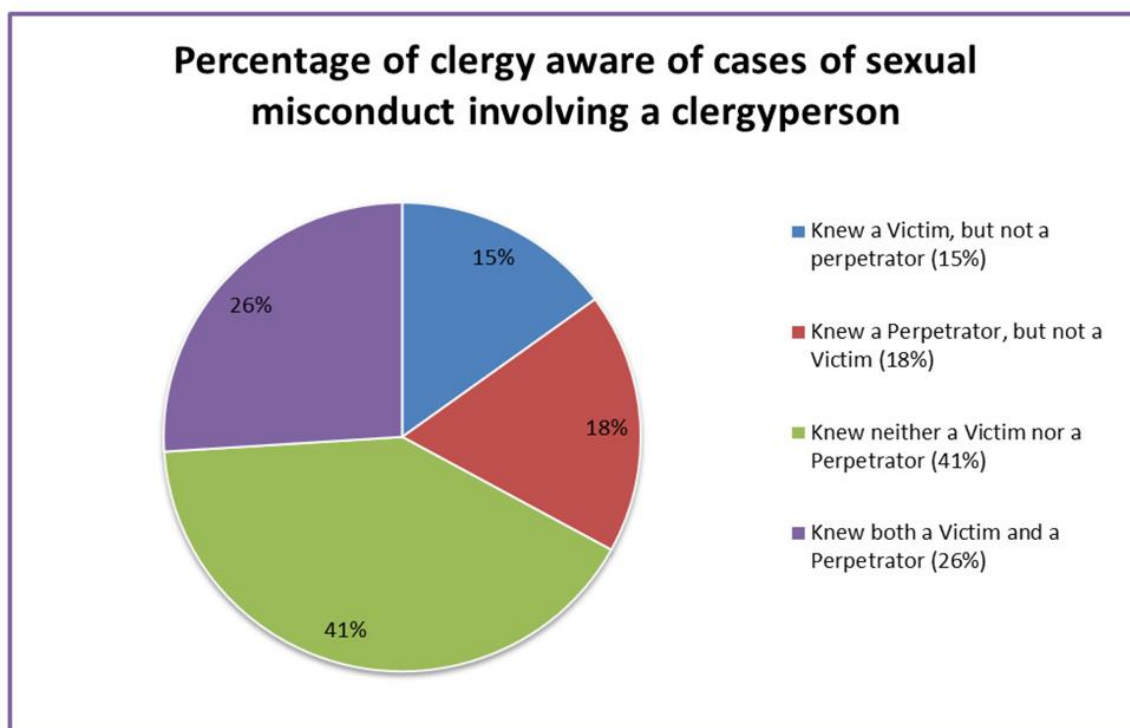
Summary

In May 2013 the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church released a document outlining the conference policy for sexual misconduct (North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2013). The document includes a clear explanation of a clergyperson's responsibilities as they relate to avoiding instances of sexual misconduct. It includes the definition of key terms related to sexual misconduct. It provides a theological foundation for equal treatment of persons. The document also describes procedures for reporting and responding to complaints of misconduct. The procedures include a process for submitting complaints and the use of specialized response teams to provide support to everyone affected by the allegations. Among the more significant statements in the document are these words, "The North Carolina Conference will not condone or tolerate instances of sexual or professional misconduct, and is committed to procedural justice and pastoral concern through a fair process of justice making for victims and survivors, real accountability for abusers, and healing for all parties" (North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2013).

While a thoughtful review of this document suggests a system has been built to facilitate care and support for those involved in reports of clergy sexual misconduct, discussions with those who have interacted with this system reveal a more difficult truth; the system has left some of those involved without justice, accountability or any sense of healing. While this study included the perspectives of six individuals, research conducted by the United Methodist Church reveals the true scope of this problem (See Figure 3).

Figure 3

Percent of Clergy Aware of Sexual Misconduct Involving Clergy



Note: From “Women By The Numbers: Is sexual misconduct still an issue in the UMC?” by General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, 2018.

<https://www.gcsrw.org/MonitoringHistory/WomenByTheNumbers/tabid/891/post/is-sexual-misconduct-still-an-issue-in-the-umc/Default.aspx>

As the figure depicts, nearly 60% of clergypersons who completed the United Methodist Church’s questionnaire either knew a perpetrator of clergy sexual misconduct, a victim of clergy sexual misconduct, or both. While the sample of six participants in this study is small, their stories reflect the stories of many others.

After interviewing six participants with different connections to clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, and exploring the unique details and perspectives they offered, it is easy to understand why this is such a difficult problem to remedy. While the participants in this study had a wide

range of differing perspectives about the trauma of clergy sexual misconduct, most of them agree that the current system has flaws, but few of them could offer any substantial way to improve it.

Currently, I am immersed in the ordination process for the United Methodist Church and have experienced conversations, meetings, and other informal interactions exploring different facets of the system that governs the United Methodist Church. While my experiences in the process are not a specified part of this study, my reflections about the church's response to instances of clergy sexual misconduct are partially informed by my personal experiences with the church. I maintained a journal throughout the data gathering and analysis phases of my research that includes my reflections about the current procedures for handling clergy sexual misconduct. My reflections were not very far removed from the sentiments expressed by the participants in this study. The greatest deviation was that I expressed a larger sense of disappointment than the participants. I was disappointed by the church's response. I was disappointed by the number of people who were unwilling to share their stories for this research. I was disappointed by the ineffectiveness of current strategies implemented by the church and my perception that there is a lack of urgency about these events.

After conducting six interviews, analyzing the transcripts, reviewing documentation from the church, and considering my own reflections, I identified four common major themes. First, fear was a dominant feature of most participants' account of the phenomenon. It informed how they experienced the event, what they expected in the aftermath, and how they believed the church could move forward. Second, the current process for providing care in the immediate and long-term aftermath of clergy sexual

misconduct could be described as a failed system. Third, fairness was a consideration that influenced what different participants wanted from the process. Finally, minimization describes the recurring notion that the problem was not significant enough to warrant attention.

The following paragraphs provide a detailed description of each of the aforementioned themes and samples of the data that contributed to each theme's identification. Anonymous (the names of the participants have been changed) examples are included from some of the subjects' interviews and the researcher's journal. These descriptions and examples paired with documentation from the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church about clergy sexual misconduct provide the foundation for structural and textural descriptions of this phenomenon. An example of this type of analysis is provided (See Table 3).

Table 3

Connection Between Interview Statements, Journal Reflections and Conference

Documentation

Interview Statements/reactions	Researcher Journal	Relevant Conference Documentation
Subject A: It's difficult not to worry that someone saw what he did. I don't know how I would continue in that church if they knew.	<p>The victimization seems ongoing. They need to report the event but they can't because they fear that the details will get out.</p> <p>The book of Discipline seems to contribute to that fear by giving the bishop or bishop's designee the power to disclose this information to the congregation for the</p>	As part of the complaint process, victims are required to write out the details of the event and according to the Book of Discipline, "the process may include sharing of information by the bishop or bishop's designee about the nature of the complaint."

purpose of promoting
healing in the
congregation.

Theme 1 – Immobilizing fear

One participant, Mary, argued that the most difficult part of the experience of clergy sexual misconduct happened after the abuse had ended when she realized that she was too afraid to act. She was not merely afraid of the abuser, but the congregation, the church as an institution, the whispers about her, the potential attacks on her character, and what it would mean for her future experience with the church. This is a description of what fear can do to victims of clergy sexual misconduct. Even when there are systems in place to address problems, fear can make it difficult to take action.

After an interview with a pastor, Carrie, who had been the victim of clergy sexual misconduct from another pastor, I reflected upon the challenge of making public allegations against someone in this type of environment. The following table includes some of my journal responses as I read the transcript of her interview (See Table 4).

Table 4

Carrie's Responses

Question	Carrie's response	Journal Reflection
Describe the feeling you remember feeling in the immediate aftermath of this instance of misconduct?	Mainly, I was concerned ...did anyone see? Did someone think I was a willing party? I felt Shame.	Perhaps the greatest injustice here is the perpetual victimization. Even as a victim, guilt and shame can dictate your immediate response.
Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?	I should've officially reported it. But I thought... what will they think. What will this mean for my ministry? So I did nothing.	Immobilizing fear is not merely a response to panic but it can be a thought out decision. People can be so afraid of the likely outcome that they choose inaction.

How are you coping with this experience?	I still think about it. I'm not sensitive. I have a strong faith. People with less faith might be affected more. I just accept that nothing can be done.	Another reason victims will not take action is that they fear that it is a wasted act. "Nothing can be done," are words that may illuminate another fear; the system designed to respond may be ineffective.
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Many authors offer perspectives on the impacts and types of fear. Dr. Daniel Lancaster (1995) writes about the four root fears. He identifies them as guilt, shame, rejection, and blame. He argues that personality type may contribute to determining which of these fears is most impactful for you. The fears that are the most impactful are the ones most likely to prevent us from acting. Each of these fears was identified by at least one of the interviewed participants as part of their experience with clergy sexual misconduct. While both Carrie and Mary describe how shame limited their response to the event, Jerry, Larry, and Harry were more impacted by the potential for blame to dismantle their reality.

Jerry is a pastor. Jerry is also a friend of a pastor who was accused of clergy sexual misconduct. His experience of the phenomenon is further removed than most of the other participants. Nevertheless, the conflict between the clergyperson and the congregation is a real source of trauma in Jerry's experience. The pastor who was accused was reassigned to another congregation and ultimately no charges were ever filed against him nor was the matter escalated through the process designed to address these matters in the United Methodist Church. Despite what some might see as minimal administrative consequences for the accused, Jerry says the system failed because "blame is all it takes" (See Table 5).

Table 5*Jerry's Response to System's Treatment of His Clergy Friend*

Question	Jerry's response	Journal Reflection
Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?	I don't think there was any abuse. In fact, I'm certain there wasn't. But all it takes is one accusation... one person blames. It's not right. Then they even want to blame someone like me... They want to say I knew what kind of person he was. I do. I know. And He is innocent. You shouldn't be able to just blame. Innocent or guilty doesn't matter. One person accusing another...	I recognize that this was a second-hand account of the misconduct, but despite the participant's anger, I'm not sure he believed that his friend was 'innocent' of improper acts. Instead, he seemed to harp on the limitations of the evidence.
How are you coping with this experience?	I'm mad about it frankly. My friend is hurt. I shouldn't even be talking to you...it's over now. The damage is done. This whole thing you're doing might be bringing it up all over again. We're still looking for blame. My friend's life was damaged. Those people [the accusers] were damaged and they blamed him for it. So now he's damaged. One person's blame is all it takes.	Jerry's use of the word blame was difficult for me to process. At first, he seemed to use it interchangeably with the word accusation but later I understood him to be portraying his friend as the victim. His friend was being blamed for the accuser's, perhaps unrelated, trauma. Jerry was the only participant to attack the study as a potential contributor to the problem. However, it is important to note that three potential participants did withdraw before their interviews citing similar concerns and one became so irate that he yelled at me and hung up the phone.

Larry's perspective was less angry than Jerry's, however, he was just as concerned about the process being fair for the accused. Larry is a man in his 70's who is currently a member of a United Methodist Church in the North Carolina conference. He described an instance of clergy sexual misconduct that he witnessed. It involved a woman he was dating, who was touched inappropriately by a pastor. He witnessed the inappropriate touching and discussed it with the young woman after the incident. It is important to note that Larry followed almost every answer about the misconduct with a qualification. It became clear that these qualifications also served as justifications for not taking any action (See Table 6).

Table 6

Larry's Reaction

Question	Larry's response	Journal Reflection
What types of conflict has this led to for you internally/personally?	I know she [the victim] felt like it was wrong, but honestly, it wasn't a big deal. This was a long while ago and you know... it wasn't a big deal. Maybe we should have told someone but really I didn't want to blame a guy for something so small. What if it was just a[n] accident	This was significant for me because he seemed to take ownership of his girlfriend's experience. The primary victim was his girlfriend and she was rendered silent by his fear that they might 'blame' an innocent person.

Harry was the most challenging interview. He is an official who works for the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. During the course of his interview, he both described his experience witnessing clergy misconduct and discussed the process for reporting these instances. In his position, he works on the frontlines of these types of complaints. He suggested that the conference might not really have a

problem with clergy sexual misconduct because so few cases ever reach his desk. He would be involved in the process very early. When the first phone calls are made to make allegations of misconduct, Harry would hear about them. For Harry, the fact that he hears about so few cases means not many instances are happening. He concedes that, “people may just not be reporting the cases,” but adds, “I can only address what I hear about, or according to the process, what is written down.”

Harry and I had an extensive conversation about why victims might not report the instances in an official process. While he seemed sympathetic to the obstacles that might limit the reporting, he explained that the conference could not hold pastors accountable based on speculation. The conference needed evidence. He articulated concern for the fairness of the process. He was the only interviewer to suggest that damaged victims might abuse the process if some kind of proof were not part of the process. He was willing to take a victim’s written account of the misconduct as enough proof to move the process forward.

In an ironic twist to the interview, Harry described an instance of clergy sexual misconduct that he had witnessed. The incident was not reported. Instead, he described a confrontation with the perpetrator where he reprimanded the offender and told him that the conduct was not appropriate. He did discuss the incident with the victim but she was not interested in formal charges. Unfortunately, this instance centered on the outfit that the victim was wearing. Harry described the difficult consideration victims often have to wrestle with (See Table 7).

Table 7*Harry's Reflection*

Question	Harry's response	Journal Reflection
Is there anything you want to tell me about your personal experience with clergy sexual misconduct?	I have seen it happen. No, it didn't get reported. Someone said something inappropriate in front of me...I went up to them and talked to them about it... I asked her if she was ok... she didn't do anything wrong but someone might say something ...blame her for it.	This seems to perfectly illustrate some of the obstacles to reporting these instances in this process. Who knows how often things like this happen?

Rejection and guilt are both evident in Terry's account of his experience in a congregation where a pastor was accused of sexual misconduct. While Terry was not the accuser or a witness to the event, he describes the aftermath in the congregation. Terry explains that he was not aware of what steps were taken regarding the official complaint process. All he knew was the Pastor left. Shortly after the accusation was made public, there was conflict in the congregation. Some felt guilty for failing to recognize the abuse. Others accused church leaders of covering it up. Some supported the pastor. In the weeks that followed the pastor's departure, the church divided and those who supported the accuser rejected those who supported the pastor. The feeling was reciprocated and most of the congregants who supported the pastor left. The church fractured. Terry carries a sense of guilt from that (See Table 8).

Table 8*Terry's Description of The Impacts Of This Misconduct*

Question	Terry's response	Journal Reflection
What types of conflict has this led to in the congregation?	It divided the church. Neither side could hear the other. I really couldn't choose sides but I could see how Pastor X's supporters rejected the possibility that the accuser was being truthful. It became hostile. The church was ultimately left with far fewer members.	Conflict between the two sides creates a barrier to investigation because each side has already reached a conclusion. These types of cases often lack the tangible evidence that might change someone's perspective. Also, where is the conference? Where are officials from the denomination?
What types of conflict has this led to for you internally/personally?	I think we all carry some guilt about what happened to the church. If the accusation was true then ...I don't know what the answer was... How do you worship through something like that? But for the church to suffer... I think it's on all of us.	The very dangerous lesson here is that accusations of clergy sexual misconduct destroy churches. Even if the accusation was true, it's hard to imagine a different outcome.

Carrie also discussed how her position as a minister might be threatened if she made an accusation. She worried, "they might think I participated or wanted this." She thought it might become a barrier to congregants seeing her as a minister. They might reject moral authority or spiritual leadership.

Each of the participants wrestled with barriers to act. Victims struggle to report even the smallest offenses. Witnesses are reluctant to speak up about what they witnessed. Even Jerry, who felt his friend was wrongly accused, could not articulate what he could do about this injustice. Those barriers to action are sometimes based on the perception that there are limited options available to the participants, but mostly they

were founded on fear. Sometimes it was fear of other's judgments. Sometimes it was fear of creating conflict. Sometimes it was fear of injustice. Whether the fear manifested as guilt, shame, rejection, blame, or any other trait, it was often enough of a barrier to prevent the type of persistent reporting the policy on professional sexual misconduct for the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church requires.

Theme 2 – Systems Failure

The United Methodist Church is a global system that manages many different aspects of ministry in the community and the local church. Among the different parts of ministry that require management, is the behavior of those the church classifies as clergy. The system manages the behavior of clergy by developing policies that both dictate and limit the behaviors of clergy who operate in the system. Those policies are presented in The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church.

Paragraph 363 of The Book of Discipline (2016) describes the complaint process for individuals who feel that clergypersons have failed to abide by the policies provided by the church. The process requires individuals to submit a written and signed complaint to the bishop or district superintendent who serves the region that the accused clergyperson is currently assigned to. The bishop is expected to conduct an investigation and offer a response within 90 days. The bishop's investigation is largely undocumented. The bishop can dismiss the complaint or refer the matter to the council for the church for further action. The stated goal of the bishop's response is to facilitate a just resolution. In this context, a just resolution is defined by the church as, "one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things

right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties” (The United Methodist Church, 2016).

Many of the responses gathered from the participants in this study demonstrate concern about the effectiveness of this process as a tool to facilitate justice for victims of clergy sexual misconduct or accountability for those accused. Some participants suggest that the system may instead provide additional harm to the victims and a form of empowerment to the accused. Mary describes how hard it is to tell someone about what happened and how fearful she was that the abuse would continue. She described it as a “catch 22 situation” where she might be damaged if she reported it but might allow him to continue the abuse if she didn’t report it.

Each of the participants was asked the question, “How do you feel church leadership handled the situation?” While they each answered from different perspectives, the answers all pointed to a common failure in the system. While some of them failed to notice the failure, their words illustrate how significant the failure is in issues of clergy sexual misconduct (See Table 9).

Table 9

Each Participants Feelings About How Church Leadership Responded

Question:	How do you feel church leadership handled the situation?
Carrie’s Response	Not well. They swept it under the rug. I guess I didn’t pursue it. I didn’t file a formal complaint. I should’ve. But he will just keep on doing it.
Harry’s Response	If victims don’t file written complaints there isn’t much we can do. So I don’t know. We need more training. We need to

	focus perhaps on how to avoid these instances.
Terry's Response	I didn't give them a chance. I was not willing to write it down or go before a bishop and say it. It wasn't that big. Maybe he would do something worse one day but I didn't think this was worth reporting in that way.
Larry's Response	I don't know what they did. There was no communication. He just left. I mean I didn't report him so I guess they felt I didn't need to know what was going on.
Jerry's Response	Poorly. This was a difficult situation. I get it. They felt like they had to do something. They did not investigate. They did not protect the pastor from a false accusation.
Mary's Response	I don't know what they did. Am I supposed to? What does the Book of Discipline say about that?
Journal Reflection	This question leads to the most reflection by participants on the United Methodist Church. The process for handling reports of clergy sexual misconduct was heavily scrutinized. The challenge of asking victims to write down their statements in order for anything to happen seems to be a significant barrier to reporting. When I worked for a large company there was a process for filing all kinds of complaints. The process included a written account of what happened but that was not what triggered the investigation. Anyone, victim or not, witness or not, could call a number to initiate the investigation. It was the responsibility of the investigators to determine what could be proven and what evidence was required. Only if there were some reason to proceed would the parties be asked to write down their accounts of what happened. That process had flaws as well but the system seemed to put less pressure on the parties and more on those

who were adequately trained to investigate.

Those participants who directly witnessed or were victims of clergy sexual misconduct describe the difficulty of creating a written account of the experience. The aforementioned fear of providing details coupled with the possibility that a record of these details might be stored somewhere where others could access it make it a challenging step in the process. The fact that it is the first step to formalizing a complaint is a more severe flaw in the system. Harry repeatedly stressed the fact that there are very few cases in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church that ever become formal complaints and in fact most, and possibly all (Larry was not clear about whether or not there had been a formal complaint or what the dispensation of that complaint might have been), of the cases discussed during the interviews in this study did not become formal complaints.

The system may be adequate for other kinds of complaints, where people are less hesitant to recall or describe the reasons for the complaint. In the case of clergy sexual misconduct, the written requirement seems to create a barrier to reporting which derails the entire process. How can the process seek a just resolution that repairs harm, and achieves accountability, if it prevents investigation in the first place?

The system fails because it creates a barrier to achieving its objective. Instead of providing a path for repair and reconciliation, it simply promotes silence and suppression. Voices like Larry's are never heard. Larry was not a victim of clergy sexual misconduct. He did not witness it. But he did attend a church where the pastor was accused of it. He was never questioned. The congregation was never spoken to about it in any organized way. He believed it happened. He heard some rumors but never knew what happened to

the pastor or the victim. He never knew if there was more than one. He was hurt. His faith was damaged. His community was broken. He believes, “nothing was ever done about it, except the pastor left.”

Theme 3 – Institutional Fairness

This theme emerges from a collection of responses from participants with distinct experiences with clergy sexual misconduct. Jerry, Carrie, and Harry may not share many opinions about how this issue impacts the church or how best to manage it, but each is concerned with the idea of fairness and how essential it is for healing. In order to understand their comments on this matter, it is important to provide some context for each of them (See Table 10).

Table 10

Describes the context for three of the participants

Jerry's Context	Jerry is a pastor serving a congregation in the United Methodist Church. He has served his current congregation for 3 years. He has never been accused of clergy sexual misconduct but his close friend has been. His friend, also a pastor in the United Methodist Church, was serving a congregation in a cross-cultural appointment (when Pastor is a different racial/ethnic identity than the majority of the congregation). Jerry believes that the congregation's displeasure with their appointed pastor led a member to submit a false complaint of clergy sexual misconduct to the bishop's office hoping to remove his friend. Ultimately, his friend was removed and Jerry believes the church and that congregation damaged his friend's reputation. Further, he believes that every pastor is one accusation away from the same kind of damage.
Carrie's Context	Carrie is a United Methodist pastor who experienced clergy Sexual misconduct at the hands of another pastor. She did not report the event formally and struggled with that decision. Among the many reasons she did not make an official complaint is that she believed that she would not be treated fairly in the process. She has served the church in a capacity that allowed her to see instances when the

	church failed to care for the victims in cases similar to hers. Instead, she explains, “they would just sweep it under the rug.”
Harry’s Context	Harry is an administrator for the United Methodist Church. He represents the officials who make administrative and executive decisions for the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. He explains that the church has a challenging balance to maintain in these types of cases. There is a struggle to support the pastors, care for the congregations, and get justice for those who may have been victimized. He believes in training and preventative programs as the best path towards maintaining that balance.

It is important to note that each of these three participants served in some capacity as a formal part of the church administration. They are each a member of the clergy. The participants who were not part of the church administration, who were congregants, expressed similar concerns about ensuring fairness in the process, but each of them offered a limited understanding of whether or not the current process is fair. Most questions about fairness were answered by Larry and Mary, the non-clergy participants, with the statement, “I don’t know.”

Each of the participants identified in table 9 approaches the issue differently, but they share a common truth. The system can never be functional and effective if it is not fair. For some, there is little distinction between a broken system and an unfair one. They are not the same. A failed system does not do what it intends, while an unfair system may do what it intends but in a way that is not just or fair to those involved. The previous theme included reflections from participants and why or how the system fails, but for some of the participants, it is also unfair.

When asked, what feelings do you have about the process, 4 of the participants mentioned or suggested a lack of fairness. For Jerry, it was unfair to his friend. For Carrie, it was unfair to victims. For Larry, his exclusion was unfair. For Harry, there were

forces competing to undermine efforts for a fair investigation. Generally speaking, the participants were allowed room to explore the notion of fairness in the process. Almost all of them pointed back to the process in the Book of Discipline. Even Mary suggested following it, though she couldn't clearly articulate what it said.

The process spelled out in the Book of Discipline prioritizes confidentiality and the assessment of the bishop. There is a judicial process, which seems to be more reflective of our criminal justice system in America, but that process is initiated only if the bishop initiates it after his or her investigation. While the victim is required to write out a complaint in order to initiate the bishop's review, proceedings and interviews conducted to investigate the complaint during the bishop's review are not to be recorded in order to protect the accused. While the process is consistent, it may not consider the imbalance of power and connection that a non-clergy congregant has when compared to a clergy person. In cases where the victim is not a clergy person as well, the bishop is more likely to personally know the clergy person than the congregant. The clergy person is also more likely to understand the process than the congregant.

Sexual and professional misconduct response teams are one way the United Methodist Church hopes to facilitate a more balanced and fair approach to addressing issues of clergy sexual misconduct. These teams exist to support the complainant, the accused, and the congregation. They strive to create a safe space for reporting allegations and compassion for the individual accused of misconduct. They hope to provide the congregations impacted by these incidents care, and recommendations for ways to heal the community. They respond when a person calls a secure hotline to report an instance of sexual misconduct, but they are not empowered to investigate the incident. Instead,

they focus on sharing information and direction with the parties involved. Larry has no recollection of ever seeing anyone from this team, but he admits the instance may have occurred before these teams were created.

In addition to sexual and professional misconduct response teams, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church also uses other tools to facilitate fairness in the process. There is also a Committee on Sexual Ethics, which provides information and education about misconduct. The conference also invites victims and witnesses to report misconduct confidentially through a third-party website at an organization called Lighthouse services. The problem with these measures is that they do not alter the existing system. They do not create fairness. Instead, they provide the appearance of justness.

For example, the Committee on Sexual ethics is attached to the Board of Ordained Ministry. This board evaluates and discerns candidates to determine if they are fit for ministry. As part of the process of evaluation I am currently engaged in, this board has personally interviewed me. I have never been asked a question that would help anyone evaluate my potential for sexual misconduct, though I have been asked questions about other matters of character.

Perhaps a better example relates to the confidential third party reporting. While the option to report confidentially exists through this third-party site, any report made to them would not be enough to trigger a formal investigation. As the Book of Discipline (2016) outlines and the conference administrators repeatedly told me, if there is not formal, written, signed complaint, then there is no investigation.

For the participants in this study, the problem with fairness is bigger than communication. Access to the bishop and his or her process is limited and arbitrary. The Book of Discipline seems to allow the bishop the freedom to make a determination about the legitimacy of the complaint based on the bishop's unique and undefined process. Therefore, it is difficult for response teams or others to advise victims of the risks of this process.

The United Methodist Church maintains a website to address sexual ethics. Among the many pieces of information available on the site is a detailed breakdown of the complaint process. It includes a page, which outlines what someone might expect to encounter when filing a complaint. The following table portrays some of the highlights (See Table 11).

Table 11

The Expectations and Limitations of the Reporting Process

What you can Expect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness • Objectivity • A Full investigation
What are the limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You are not allowed to bring an attorney • You can not have access to all of the information from the investigation • You are not permitted to discuss the investigation and complaint process.

When confronted with the specifics of the process, the participants' concerns about fairness were most evident. As the table below illustrates, fairness may be difficult to balance in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct (See Table 12).

Table 12

Participants feeling about the process for reporting and providing repair after cases of clergy sexual misconduct

Question	What feelings do you have about that process?
Jerry's Answer	It's not good, because the pastor has no consideration in the process. As a pastor, I feel like anyone can accuse me and I can't do anything about it.
Carrie's Answer	...What they [The United Methodist Church] can do is limited. I'd like to see the church take a stand...There is limited cooperation with law enforcement or the complainant...There is a standing process... It may not be as helpful to the victims.
Harry's Answer	I think it's good... If and when it can be executed. Systemically there is a challenge to care for the pastors and congregations. We ask: how do we care for all parties? Personally, I do think fear may sometimes prohibit reporting and stall the process.
Larry's Answer	kind of felt out of the loop...left out intentionally, you know.

Note: Mary and Terry did not answer this question though Mary articulated some feelings about the process in other questions. Mary admitted that she did not know much about the process. Terry was mostly unresponsive to questions about the process.

The perception of the process among participants in this study covers a wide range of attitudes. What is consistent is concern about how the process is executed.

Concerns about exclusion, representation, and execution combine to create universal concern about the goals of the process.

Theme 4 – Crisis Minimization

One of the most significant obstacles to investing resources in fixing the problems that exist in the process of clergy sexual misconduct reporting is demonstrating the

severity of the problem. While some might argue that even minor instances of abuse are significant, most of the participants in the study, with two exceptions, would not recognize the problem with clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church as a crisis. It was difficult for them to even accept the possibility that it was a major problem in the Methodist church at all. This conclusion was not based on any conversations or experiences that participants could express. Instead, several participants explained simply that they did not believe it was a problem. In order to understand this belief, it is important to unpack some reason for it.

The most common reason participants give for why they don't see clergy sexual misconduct as a crisis is because so few cases are ever formally reported. As I mentioned earlier, nearly 60% of United Methodist clergy who completed a questionnaire distributed by the United Methodist Church, acknowledged knowing a victim or a perpetrator of clergy sexual misconduct. However, this percentage is rendered meaningless when coupled with another percentage from a different survey. In 2017, the General Commission for the Status and the Role of Women published results from a survey, which revealed that 40.3 % of those respondents who filed a formal complaint about sexual misconduct had their complaint trivialized, or dismissed by the Bishop. Only 14% of the formal complaints were even investigated (Murphy-Geiss, 2018). The problem of clergy sexual misconduct may not be evident to those who only look at formal complaints, but this is not a qualitative examination of the number of formal complaints. The reality of the participant's experience, and the significance of the problem, is evident in the number of other people participants know in the North Carolina Conference who also have experience with clergy sexual misconduct.

In order to appreciate and understand the significance of this problem, it is also important to explore the terminology used. While some participants say, “this is not a significant problem in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church,” they appear to mean, “there are not a significant number of formally reported cases of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church. This distinction is important because none of the participants claim that the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct are insignificant. Instead, they claim that clergy sexual misconduct has a lasting impact. Participants describe years of internal conflict caused by one instance of misconduct. Carrie describes, “it’s not something you just forget.” Participants discuss the spiritual and emotional impacts of clergy sexual misconduct. Jerry explains, “I’m still mad. I don’t even want to discuss it.” Participants discuss the struggle to find suitable ways to address the misconduct. Larry acknowledges that, “it was hard when it first happened because going to church felt like participation.” In each of these cases, participants are highlighting the significant impact of clergy sexual misconduct.

The mistake some will make when analyzing this phenomenon is that they will define significance only by the number of formal complaints filed in the North Carolina conference, but what determines the significance of this phenomenon is not merely those numbers. For each participant interviewed, clergy sexual misconduct was viewed as an egregious and significant breach of trust. It was described by more than one participant as “a horrible thing.” The story the victims tell and the trauma they describe is enough to establish any instance of sexual misconduct in the conference as significant.

During his interview, Harry mentioned, six times, that he didn't believe clergy sexual misconduct was a significant problem in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. His primary source of evidence for that claim was the few number of formal complaints he had seen in his years working at this position. Harry would be one of the first people informed when a formal written complaint was filed. I tried to get someone to confirm the number of calls that were made to the complaint hotline that never materialized into formal written complaints but I was repeatedly told that that information could not be shared. Despite Harry's insistence that the problem was not widespread, he offered several different examples of instances of sexual misconduct he had witnessed. However, none of the cases he describes were ever written as formal complaints.

Carrie and Mary had a different perspective than Harry. Both of them spoke of numerous cases of clergy sexual misconduct that they knew about in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. These cases, they each suggested, would not become formal complaints because the people involved would not feel comfortable going through the process (See Table 13).

Table 13

Participants views of the challenges in the process

Question	What else would you like to share about your experience of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church?
Carrie's Response	This is a big problem... The person reporting is often not believed. They often feel backlash. You're hurting their career. I want to see the church take a stance, but

	they need proof. We believe in grace and forgiveness and that's a stumbling block...I don't think the victims are going to come forward... But there is the development of the Commission on the Status and Role of Women. They have a new ministry that might take steps to help victims walk through the process.
Mary's Response	I don't know. I'm hopeful, I guess. I just don't know what it looks like. How do we make people comfortable reporting their worst experience to people who are supposed to be the place you go for help? I hope something changes.

Note: When pressed, Mary could think of 8 specific instances while Carrie just used the qualifier several.

Towards the end of Carrie's interview, she offered a glimmer of hope when she began to speak about the work of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women. This division of The United Methodist Church has been charged, among other things, with the responsibility of leading the church's drive to prevent clergy sexual misconduct. On October 12, 2015, the commission launched the aforementioned website designed to address sexual ethics in the church. However, the commission has also conducted quantitative studies about the frequency of clergy sexual misconduct in the church that provide some insight. According to the website for the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, the primary goal is to, "advocate for full participation of women in the total life of The United Methodist Church" (gcsrw.org).

In 2017, the commission published a study that presented several significant statistics. The study found that 64.6% of clergy responding to the survey had experience with sexual misconduct in the church. For laity, 31.4% of those surveyed had experience with sexual misconduct in the church. Other groups, including seminary students and

employees of the church, were separated out in the study. In summary, more than 50% of all participants reported some experience with sexual misconduct in the church (Murphy-Geiss, 2018). This establishes clergy sexual misconduct as a significant problem in the United Methodist Church.

While we might have an intellectual debate about the validity of the sample size used in the commission's study, it is difficult to debate the simple significance of the results. The significance is further supported by the fact that similar studies were published in 1990 and 2005, where 38.6% and 62.2% of the respondents reported experience with some kind of sexual misconduct in the church (Murphy-Geiss, 2018).

The challenge for those who would use these numbers to oppose administrators like Harry is that these numbers point to trends in The United Methodist Church as a whole. Harry's claim about the insignificance of the problem has always been a local claim. Harry's claim is that the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church doesn't have a significant problem with clergy sexual misconduct. These statistics do not refute that. Nothing here does, other than the words of Carrie and Mary. This may highlight a significant problem. While the United Methodist Church is tracking the disconnect between reported cases of sexual misconduct and known cases of misconduct, it appears that the North Carolina Conference is not. This missing data contributes to a diminished view of the statistical significance of the problem of clergy sexual misconduct. There are those who would use the diminished or untracked numbers of formal complaints as evidence that Harry's claim is correct, but significance is about more than frequency.

This is a qualitative study. While a reasonable analysis of the quantitative data, if it were available, might lead us to the conclusion that the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church is not abnormally different from the larger church, that analysis is not necessary to establish significance. The data identifies how participants are damaged and the lasting impact of instances of clergy sexual misconduct. The participants describe internal congregational struggles with individuals taking sides in the church. Carrie describes the constant fear that someone saw or knew what happened. Multiple participants explain how disappointed they are with the church's response to the phenomenon. These events are significant for a church that depends on congregants having faith in the institution as just, fair, and righteous. These events are significant for the reputation of the church.

While the commission's study does not present data about the prevalence of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference, it may highlight a justification for why individuals in this conference, including the participants in this study, may not recognize the severity of this problem. The study reveals that only 28.3% of women and 14.5% of men report the instances of clergy sexual misconduct they encounter. Additionally, only 14% of those reported are investigated (Murphy-Geiss, 2018). Despite the large number of instances, few cases ever reach a point where uninvolved clergypersons and laity might become aware of them.

Anyone who claims that certain kinds of misconduct are less significant than others also minimize concerns about clergy sexual misconduct. According to the aforementioned study published by the Commission on the Status and Role of Women, in 2017 the most common forms of misconduct experienced among those who participated

in the study were jokes, inappropriate looks, and touching that didn't rise to the level of assault or attempted assault (Murphy-Geiss, 2018). These instances might easily be dismissed as less significant or not worth reporting.

Terry's words perfectly illustrate this point. When asked, "explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?" He replied, "Nothing, really." I asked him to expound a bit on his thought and he offered the following answer (See Table 14).

Table 14

Participant's Minimization of Clergy Sexual Misconduct

Question	[Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?] Can you expand on your thoughts a little?
Terry's answer	Well. Just it wasn't that big a deal. No one should lose their job over it. I think it was bad but not ...I don't know. It didn't seem big enough to report. It wasn't worth getting someone in trouble over.

Terry's perspective was not isolated. Over the course of the six interviews conducted and informal conversations with four potential participants, many words were used to minimize the significance of instances of clergy sexual abuse. The following chart lists some of the language of minimization used to describe instances of clergy sexual misconduct. It will continue to prove difficult to portray clergy sexual misconduct as a problem as long as the language used to describe it and the people who experience it minimize its significance (See Table 15).

Table 15

Words used in discussion with the researcher to minimize clergy sexual misconduct

Language used to describe clergy sexual misconduct in interviews and other conversations with the researcher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not major • Not big enough • Really a small thing... • Playful...not serious • Wasn't that big a deal • Not worth reporting • Stuff like that happens all the time • Normal • Not criminal or anything • Just inappropriate

While some forms of misconduct seem less significant than others, it is important to note that those forms can still have an impact. Carrie is an example of this. She discussed the significance of inappropriate language when she referred to her discomfort with reporting what had happened to her. She discussed how his words made her feel shame and guilt and became an obstacle to her doing, what she now views as “the right thing.”

For the reasons identified in this section, some participants failed to see clergy sexual misconduct as a crisis. For these participants, the number of formal complaints that they knew about was so small that the problem appeared less significant. The emotions, experiences, and concerns that the participants describe tell a different story. Churches wrestle with any instance of clergy sexual misconduct. Congregations can be torn apart. This reality, coupled with the fact that no one appears to be tracking the actual number of cases of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference suggests that the crisis may be significant in ways the participants could not specifically verbalize.

Additional Findings

Beyond the themes identified, three additional findings were observed:

1. Clergypersons, like others, sometimes succumb to inappropriate human desires. The studies conducted by the Commission on the Status and Role of Women reveal a continuing trend of clergy sexual misconduct in the United Methodist Church. This trend, coupled with the descriptions provided of the participant's experiences with clergy sexual misconduct, suggest that clergypersons do not maintain a unique relationship with this type of misconduct. The details of these encounters are not extraordinary. The participants do not tell stories of clergy offenders wrestling with internal demons who, in a moment of weakness, make a mistake. Instead, these are stories like Mary's account of a preacher who reaches out and touches her breasts without provocation.
2. An individual's perception of clergy sexual misconduct is influenced by his or her relationship to the church. The participants share many similar thoughts about the process of clergy sexual misconduct, but the greatest deviations result from the unique perspectives the participants bring. The administrators focused primarily on the fairness of the process. The clergypersons focused primarily on how clergy are treated in the process. Laypersons focused primarily on the inclusion or exclusion of lay people in the process.
3. The risk of addressing clergy sexual misconduct is significant. If clergy sexual misconduct was identified as a significant problem the impact would be significant for all parties involved. Clergypersons would need to be held

accountable and examined in a more comprehensive way. Administrators would have every action taken during past offenses and accusations closely scrutinized. The congregations would be forced to reexamine their own history and consider signals and signs that they may not have addressed. This risk may contribute to the reluctance of some administrators, like Harry, to see any real problem or to correlate the significance of the problem to the number of cases formally reported, rather than to the lasting impact of the harm caused. One participant remarked during the interview process that, “the whole experience really challenged what I believe...or maybe how I believe.” This seems like a crisis of faith. This seems significant.

Documents Findings

The following documents were examined for information that contributed to this researcher’s understanding of the participant’s description of his or her experience with the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct.

Table 16

Document List

Documents	Relevant Contributions
The Book of Discipline (2016)	The formal governing guidelines for the complaint process and other rules governing the churches handling of all matters.
Reports from The Commission on the Status and Role of Women (2017)	The findings from surveys and studies are included here along with information about changes the church has made to address this issue over time.
Process Documents from the sexual ethics website (2015)	These documents outline and summarize the existing process for filing complaints from The Book of Discipline and addendums to that process used in The North Carolina Conference. Those addendums are response teams, and the anonymous hotline identified previously.

Relevant information from these documents are included in the early sections of this chapter wherever they are important for the information presented. These documents were carefully examined and analyzed for information that added detail to the participant's descriptions, contradicted those descriptions, or changed those descriptions in some way.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Research Questions

The central question of this study is how do victims understand the conflict between congregants and clergy offenders as well as the process of repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church? In order to answer that question, three smaller questions must be answered.

1. How do parties experience the conflict between clergy and congregants in the aftermath of accusations of clergy sexual misconduct?
2. What constitutes the process for repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct?
3. Is the process for repair and reconciliation effective?

This study revealed answers to each of these questions through the lens of six individuals who shared the complex details of their experiences with clergy sexual misconduct. Their stories, combined with background information about the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, and the reflections of the researcher create a picture of this phenomenon and the process designed to manage its aftermath.

Question #1: How do parties experience the conflict between clergy and congregants in the aftermath of accusations of clergy sexual misconduct.

Despite the unique perspectives many of the participants brought to the interview, there were many similarities in how each participant described the conflict. They were all fearful. Concerns about what this meant for the church, its leadership, and its future

dominated most of their perspectives. Others couldn't see beyond very personal fears. They struggled with how others might see them, and how they might interact with the church going forward.

In addition to being laced with fear, the conflict is also burdened with a complicated pursuit of justice or perhaps justness. Participants were not simply wrestling with emotional baggage, but practical issues as well. Maintaining a process that was fair for all the parties involved was critical to most of the participants. Many described the need for open communication and inclusion in the process. The participants want to be a part of the process of repair and reconciliation though they seem to grasp how complicated that is for the church. No one seems sure what the appropriate punishment looks like for the various forms of clergy sexual misconduct. No one seems sure about how to protect clergy or victims. No one seems sure how to address congregations. All of the participants seemed concerned about how each of these matters is currently addressed.

All of the participants explained how difficult this subject is to face. The participants described the challenge of communicating about difficult events. The participants described the struggle to explore a sense of personal spirituality and faith. It requires a critical examination of the church and the people whom the church has identified as religious authorities. The participants shared questions about God, faith, and justice. Despite the difficulty, each participant believes that communication about clergy sexual misconduct, training around it, and attention to it are worthwhile endeavors.

Question #2: What constitutes the process for repair and reconciliation after instances of clergy sexual misconduct?

The United Methodist Church has a well-documented process for responding to clergy sexual misconduct. While researchers and participants might argue about the effectiveness of that policy, the fact that a policy exists is beyond dispute. The same certainty does not exist about a policy for repair and reconciliation in the aftermath of these allegations and investigations. The process for repair and reconciliation seems to rely heavily on the aforementioned sexual and professional misconduct response teams and a new initiative designed to provide information and resources to congregants.

First, it is fair to note the actions the United Methodist Church has taken in the beginning months of 2020, largely in response to the #metoo movement. Those actions include updates to the sexual ethics website and a new toolkit titled #Metoo Toolkit (see Appendix D). The updates provide information about the process and available resources in the church. The toolkit also provides information and a page of external resources that might provide care for victims and offenders (The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women in The United Methodist Church, 2020).

The sexual and professional misconduct response teams are used to support the parties involved in clergy sexual misconduct (North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2013). These teams have two documented functions. First, they exist to, “provide objective support, compassion, direction, just resolution, and healing for the complainant, the accused, their families, the congregation, and any others affected by allegations or incidents of sexual misconduct” (North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, 2013). This sounds exactly like the teams that are required to facilitate repair and reconciliation for the parties. However, over the course of the research, I could not confirm any actions a response team had taken in the North Carolina Conference of

the United Methodist Church. Two of the participants knew the teams existed but neither would share any example of what they had done to support parties affected by clergy sexual misconduct. One of the participants suggested that they knew of some of the work a team had done but they were unwilling to share details because it, “wasn’t their story to tell.” Since confidentiality is important to many involved in these cases, it is not surprising that it is challenging to identify the specifics of how these teams work.

A greater challenge for these teams is evident when exploring the second documented function. They exist, “to provide the complainant with a safe, non-threatening environment in which he/she can reveal allegations of sexual or professional misconduct and receive support, compassion, direction, just resolution, and healing.” This objective describes precisely the part of the current process that most of the participants found most weak. Even individuals who had preliminary conversations with this researcher but ultimately decided not to be interviewed described discomfort with writing out formal allegations, the only allowable method of advancing the investigation in the United Methodist Church’s process.

Another concern for the church’s decision to rely so singularly on these teams to support the various parties is the vague descriptions of the team member’s qualifications. Each party who is affected by clergy sexual misconduct needs a different kind of care; it isn’t clear if one source can or should be trying to meet those diverse needs. The team is described as an inclusive team of twelve members with specialized training in responding to these types of incidents. The team members are deployed based on the specific details of each situation. It isn’t clear what the specialized training is or how decisions are made to deploy certain team members. What is clear from this research is that complainants are

struggling, the accused are struggling, and those connected with the process in various ways are also struggling. The teams seem not to work effectively.

Question #3: Is the process for repair and reconciliation effective?

The difficulty in answering this question stems from the reality that many cases of sexual misconduct never enter the formal stage of investigation. Undoubtedly, if cases are not formalized, administrators won't recognize them as a problem. There is no evidence to suggest that sexual and professional misconduct response teams are addressing the cases that are not formally submitted. This suggests that the process for repair may never even get started. If the church fails to recognize the problem, it is difficult to justify any work towards repair or reconciliation.

When cases do become formalized, like the case involving Jerry's friend, there is still little understanding of what role response teams play. Jerry explained that he was unaware of any team showing up to repair relationships at the church. He was certain that no such team reached out to his friend, and despite the impact it clearly had on him, no team had reached out to him.

It is fair to question the effectiveness of the current process of repair and reconciliation. It is fair to wonder how many congregations, victims, clergypersons, communities, and families continue to suffer in the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church because they are waiting on response teams that don't believe there is a problem or that, for some unknown reason, will never come.

Connecting to the Literature Review

Much of the literature and research surrounding clergy sexual misconduct treats the misconduct as the focal point. This study treated the misconduct, or the accusation of

misconduct, as the starting point and participants were challenged to consider the next steps. This approach allows the participants to focus on their own experiences and avoid conjecture about why this might have happened. Nevertheless, it is helpful to make connections between the experiences of the participants and the literature, which already addresses clergy sexual misconduct.

Clergy Access to Power

One of the contributing factors to the immobilizing fear individuals encounter in the aftermath of clergy sexual misconduct, is almost certainly related to the unique access to power clergypersons possess. When a clergyperson said to Terry that, “you left your dress at home, but the view looks nice from back here,” it was highly inappropriate to her, but not highly unusual in society today. Terry described other instances when people who were not associated with the church made crude or suggestive comments. She described feelings of anger and dismissiveness in those cases. This encounter was different.

When Robinson (2004) argues that clergypersons cultivate a kind of intimacy that can be helpful or harmful, she highlights the reason this experience was different. For Terry, the encounter with the pastor left her feeling hurt, shameful, and somehow responsible. She explained, that she might have been dressed inappropriately and that likely contributed to the pastor’s behavior. Terry never reported the incident to anyone and never addressed it with the clergyperson.

Visual cues that Terry displayed while discussing the incident confirmed her feeling of shame, but might also express the vulnerability she had with the clergyperson. She put her head down, avoided eye contact, and spoke softly. Perhaps she had become

so vulnerable, that she simply lacked the power necessary to defend herself (Benyei, 2014) (Wilmot & Hocker, 2013).

Conflict between individuals about inappropriate language is not uncommon, but in Terry's experience what could have manifested as an external conflict between a layperson and a clergyperson transformed into an internal conflict that Terry wrestles with alone. The likely reason for this transformation is the power a clergyperson wields over a congregant. It may have been reward power surfacing in Terry's mind as she remembered her fondness for her pastor. It may have been some form of expert power surfacing in Terry's thoughts as she considered the pastor's words about how she had dressed. Terry's experience may be an illustration of how the diversity of power that clergy possess may have a significant impact on how victims report and experience clergy sexual misconduct. Clergy can have access to multiple bases of power at the same time (Raven, 2008).

Terry's unwillingness to report the harm she experienced may be the most significant example of clergy power. If Weber (1947) is correct, then the ultimate test of power is the ability to freely exercise your will despite opposition. In Terry's case, her will, under different circumstances, might be justice. The clergyperson's will was her silence. His will was done. In fairness, Terry never clearly articulated her desire for justice, but she did discuss how it was different when inappropriate comments came from individuals who were not a part of church leadership. It was different. She was different.

Misguided Trust

Clergy power is not the only factor revealed during this study, that may influence how victims report and experience clergy sexual misconduct. Jerry describes how odd the

entire encounter felt. He explains, “you just don’t expect that from him. He’s a pastor. He’s someone you can trust.” While Jerry’s outburst was not in direct response to a question, it was a significant piece of information. It was bolstered by Harry’s description of an incident he had personally witnessed where a pastor used inappropriate language in his presence. Harry uses his tone of speech to highlight how shocked he was to find a pastor behaving this way. The implication is we all would expect more from a pastor. As Weber (2010) suggests, clergy are expected to be individuals with exemplary character.

This flawed premise may contribute additional harm to clergy sexual misconduct. Clergy persons are people. They experience the same temptations and challenges as other people. As mentioned previously, victims trust clergypersons to be individuals with exemplary character and strong convictions (Weber, *The types of legitimate domination*, 2010). When congregants expect a heightened sense of morality from a clergyperson, these congregants may make decisions that are less conservative, than they might otherwise make. These decisions create opportunities for offenders to violate trust.

Additionally, this research reveals an unhealthy acceptance of the church’s role in managing clergy sexual misconduct. While some participants expressed concern about how the church is currently handling cases of clergy sexual misconduct, most saw problems as more logistical than improper. In other words, most of the participants saw flaws in the execution of the process, but not in the motivations behind the process’s design. However, the literature suggests that churches often protect the institution at the expense of the congregants (Cooper-White, 2012).

Sexual deviance

The problem with clergy sexual misconduct does not begin with the victim, or with any circumstances created by the victim during an encounter. Ultimately, the misconduct occurs because the offender decides to act in inappropriate ways. When Presidential candidate Donald J. Trump was captured on a recording using graphic and disturbing language to suggest that men could grab women by their sexual organs, he told us something about himself. He revealed a part of his character. Similarly, when clergypersons behave in inappropriate ways, use inappropriate language, or express inappropriate thoughts, those who are watching will learn something about the clergyperson.

The participants in the study were not asked to speculate about why a clergyperson would commit acts of clergy sexual misconduct, however, Mary offered some insight as she discussed an instance of clergy sexual misconduct that she witnessed prior to her movement to North Carolina or her involvement with the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. She described how the pastor was staring at a woman's breasts. She explains, "It was obvious what he was looking at." While she called the behavior misconduct, she also seemed to excuse the behavior. She explained that the clergy person was a human and had human desires. It was natural. Ironically, the literature suggests that most people struggle to see clergy as merely human. In fact, clergy are often considered to be what Rediger (1990) called the "third sex." This term suggests that clergy should have immunity to the temptations that ordinary men and women wrestle with.

While clergypersons in this denomination are not asked or expected to take a vow of celibacy, they are limited in the sexual behavior they are supposed to engage in. The Book of Discipline addresses some of those limitations directly with the statement, “Although all persons are sexual beings whether or not they are married, sexual relations are affirmed only with the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage” (The United Methodist Church, 2016).

It is appropriate to note that as I finalize this dissertation, the United Methodist Church continues to wrestle with issues of human sexuality and a planned vote at the 2020 (postponed until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic). General Conference is likely to divide the denomination into at least two separate units. This division stems from a perpetual inability to resolve conflicts within the church regarding gender identity and homosexuality. Given the decades of debate that was required to arrive at a point where The United Methodist Church was able to confront the “heterosexual marriage” limitation in the Book of Discipline, it is difficult to imagine that there has been any discussion about the other limitations clergy face.

If a clergyperson has sexual desires beyond “the covenant of monogamous heterosexual marriage,” the church expects them to suppress those desires. When clergypersons cannot suppress those desires effectively, those desires may manifest as inappropriate behavior. Currently, The Book of Discipline does not offer a process or resources designed to help clergy manage sexual desires (The United Methodist Church, 2016).

Closed Systems

The absence of resources designed to help clergy manage sexual desires may contribute to the notion that the process that currently addresses issues of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church may be inadequate. The system formalizes a process for reporting instances of clergy sexual misconduct and for reaching a “just resolution” in the matter. The Book of Discipline defines a just resolution as, “one that focuses on repairing any harm to people and communities, achieving real accountability by making things right in so far as possible and bringing healing to all the parties.”

One significant challenge to this ambitious goal is that these resolutions are not introduced in a vacuum. Instead, they are introduced into the complex system of the church and that system can make it difficult to produce solutions that genuinely provide healing to victims and the accused. The church, like any system, has formal and informal rules and rituals. Systems demand adherence to those rules (Benyei, 2014). These rules and rituals govern the experiences and behaviors of the congregants. Churches tend to function like family systems where status dictates the amount of power members have. Congregations, like families, are governed by concepts like loyalty, respect, history, and relationship (Benyei, 2014). Consequently, the system creates significant pressure on victims to protect certain clergypersons based on the clergyperson’s status, history, position, or simply as a form of loyalty. This pressure is not easily managed. This illustrates the interrelated nature of the system. Victims can not be free to act in their own best interests when those actions threaten the larger system (Steinke, 2006).

The process spelled out in The Book of Discipline includes several provisions designed to reduce some of that pressure while remaining fair and just. For some clergypersons, like Jerry, these provisions help to create a fundamentally unbalanced system. Jerry explains, “A false accusation is all it takes. The pastor has no consideration in the process.” A close examination of the provisions laid out in The Book of Discipline (2016) may not agree with Jerry’s assessment (See Table 17).

Table 17

The Rights of Complainants and Respondents

The Rights of the Complainant [the victim]	The Rights of the Respondent [The accused]
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to be heard • The right to notice of hearings • The right to be accompanied • The right to be informed of resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The right to be heard • The right to notice of hearings • The right to be accompanied • The right against double jeopardy • The right of access to records

Note: Adapted from The United Methodist Book of Discipline (2016).

Most of the participants in this study, were largely unaware of these rights (with the exception of Harry and Carrie). They had not visited the website where they are posted or discussed them with anyone. As a follow up to my research, I called several of them and asked about the rights they had as victims. None of the individuals I reached could articulate any rights they had. The silence spoke to the victim’s inclusion in the process. When Larry described being left out, he may have identified a key obstacle to the process of providing care to the victims. Care likely requires transparency.

At first glance, the rights for the accused and the victims seem fairly balanced, but a closer examination reveals that the records that provide the foundation for resolution are only available to the accused. The victims do not have the right to see the information

that helped the bishop, or the judicial council arrive at a just resolution. This may be the ultimate form of loyalty to clergy and disloyalty to the victims. It fails to promote understanding and healing for the victim and instead protects the process. It leaves the victim with uncertainty about the process and wondering why decisions were made. It resembles a parent who makes a decision for his or her child and refuses to offer any explanation for the decision. It is the parent-child relationship that Benyei (2014) warns about, where the child has little or no opportunity to voice any objections. However, it is not difficult to speculate about why the system operates this way or how decisions have been made. The answer seems to be, in ways that protect the privacy of the clergy person. Carrie suggests an alternative possibility when she says, “the conference is going to protect the church. The pastors are the church or at least their reputation.” Protecting the church as a system requires the process to be more loyal to the individuals who most represent the church. Those individuals are called clergy.

Implications for the Field

This study revealed that there is a deficiency of care, repair, and reconciliation for those who have experience with clergy sexual misconduct. During the theoretical portions of my research, I discovered sources that endeavored to address that deficiency. Some tried to address the problem by offering a measured approach to pastoral care that might be applied to cases of misconduct (Ferro, 2005). Others tried to punish the church for its failure to act effectively (Fortune, 1999). In my experience, they all failed to really address the deficiency. They failed because they did not address the real and significant hurdles to repairing something as complex as an individual’s relationship with the church. They failed because they could not, or would not, concede that the church is at

war with the victims while simultaneously trying to care for them. They failed because they would not explore the revolutionary and unfamiliar solutions that are likely necessary.

Clergy sexual misconduct is not a simple phenomenon. It involves significant conflict internally and externally. It is a phenomenon that remains hidden even in the transparency of this time. It is significant for the church and the millions of people who believe in church. It can change the way congregants view the church as a system and a family. Jerry, Larry, Harry, and Carrie all point to the internal conflict the church faces when trying to address this phenomenon. The church struggles to protect the victim and to care for the accused. The church inevitably must choose one side or the other. The experiences of the participants in this study suggest that the church often falls on the side of the system and the clergy, leaving the victims to find their own way.

This study should inspire more research into the missing cases of clergy sexual misconduct. The cases that are not reported because the system is unjust, or the process is unfair, may be the critical piece of evidence that inspires authorities and administrators to make a drastic change. This is the type of change that will allow unheard stories to surface and unspoken pain to heal.

This study highlights promising efforts to provide care, and an understanding that clergy sexual misconduct is a significant harm. The challenge is to be more effective in uncovering misconduct, implementing care, mitigating harm, and communicating with the parties involved. Future studies must explore how each of these elements is interconnected.

Further, this study explored conflict analysis and resolution on several levels. First, conflict between victims of clergy sexual misconduct and the offenders is significant and difficult to resolve. In fact, much of the conflict is unresolved because efforts are put in place to keep victims away from the individuals they have accused of misconduct. Most of the participants in this study would not say the name of the person they accused despite assurances that both their names and the accused names would be kept confidential. Second, conflict between the church system and the accused is complicated because the church has a vested interest in the rehabilitation or innocence of the accused, but if the accused is guilty, the church wants to limit the harm he or she can cause. Third, conflict between the church system and the victim is the most problematic. The church has the power, makes the decisions, and strives to protect both sides in the conflict. The victim is largely voiceless and dependent on the system to produce a just resolution, despite not knowing what that would look like.

In studies of conflict resolution strategies, theorists present concepts designed to help parties find common ground or the ability to move forward. The dynamics of this conflict are complicated because an unequal distribution of power means one party, the church, lacks the incentive to make any significant change.

Transformative mediation offers a way forward. Transformative mediation is a tool that helps tackle the most complicated conflicts. Sometimes parties become so embedded in their position, powerless to move forward, or self-centered in their objectives that it seems impossible to resolve anything. Transformative mediation suggests shifting focus from self-absorbed ideas to responsive ones and shifting power

dynamics so that parties become more equally empowered might begin to redefine the conflict in a way that is more manageable (Bush & Folger, 2005).

For clergy sexual misconduct that means:

1. Empowering the victims – They need both access to information and a voice in the process.
2. Developing communal objectives – What can we do that serves the needs of the victims, the accused, and the church?
3. Being transparent- Parties have to be willing to sacrifice the flawless image to allow for the healing only truth provides.

Transformative mediation is a long process, but it often bears fruit in the most complex types of conflict (Bush & Folger, 2005). It begins with the parties each acknowledging the difficulty they face and coming together to make small steps toward empowerment and responsiveness.

Limitations: Obstacles, and Adjustments

During this study, several obstacles emerged. Some required adjustments to my strategy while others required patience and emotional distancing. Journaling was a helpful tool for managing the researcher's expectations and accepting the perpetual roadblocks to my research.

Before I began my research, I spoke with representatives from the office of the bishop of the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. I discussed my desire to gain access to sensitive information, even if it was redacted. I was told I would have some access. This proved false. Once research had begun, I was told both by the

bishop's office and the office of the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women that I could not have access to information that had not already been published.

Initially, I had hoped to interview 12-15 participants. I spoke with and conducted preliminary discussions with 17 people and originally got 12 people to agree to be formally interviewed. Six of my potential participants decided not to participate on or before the day of the scheduled interview. All of those who decided not to participate, after agreeing to participate in preliminary discussion, explained that the topic was too emotionally charged for them. Some of these potential participants articulated concern that the study would contribute to the ongoing harm the community has suffered because of clergy sexual misconduct. Others explained that they did not want to relive the trauma personally. Despite additional attempts to recruit more participants, and conducting a second round of preliminary discussions, additional participants would not agree to participate.

While the final collection of participants offer a diversity of perspectives, I had hoped to interview more of those who had a direct connection to the acts of clergy sexual misconduct. Interviews included three individuals who had directly experienced clergy sexual misconduct. Two participants described instances where they witnessed clergy sexual misconduct. One participant was a friend of someone accused of clergy sexual misconduct who witnessed the impacts it had on the clergyperson. This participant spoke about their experience with the aftermath of the conflict and how the church responded. Among those who decided not to participate were two clergy persons who had been accused of misconduct. The view of the accused clergy is largely unrepresented among the participants.

The challenge this absent perspective poses to the validity of this research is important to acknowledge because it makes the argument that additional research is needed, but this absence is not a significant barrier to understanding the phenomenon. It is difficult to believe that the perspective of those accused of clergy sexual misconduct adds unexplored content to the discussion of how victims understand this phenomenon or how the church handles it in the aftermath. The stated goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of clergy sexual misconduct and the process for repair and reconciliation that follows it. While the accused might provide additional insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the phenomenon, those insights would not alter the experience as shared by those who chose to participate. These obstacles are important because they can inform future approaches to research. Developing more efficient strategies to encourage participant support without administering undue pressure should be a critical part of future studies in this field. Concentrating future sampling efforts around accused clergypersons will add to the understanding discovered in this research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

When this research began, I was hopeful that the process of studying and struggling to understand clergy sexual misconduct and the strategies used to promote healing and reconciliation in the aftermath of this misconduct would be productive. The objective was never to solve the problem of clergy sexual misconduct in its entirety, but instead to uncover the way this phenomenon is experienced by various parties, and hopefully glean from it, what issues need to be addressed.

Despite the attention this topic has gotten over the past several years, there is still a significant amount of information to be learned about the impacts of clergy sexual misconduct. When Henry Ward Beecher was caught in a scandalous affair in the mid-1800s, witnesses likely could not have imagined the fallout from such a tragedy. While clergy sexual misconduct undoubtedly predates Beecher's scandal, considerations about what impact it has on the church as an institution were not likely addressed and today not much has changed.

There is significant awareness, within the church and the participants in this study, that every act of clergy sexual misconduct is a problem, but little understanding of the multifaceted nature of that problem or the complex components of a solution. Whenever, and wherever, there is clergy sexual misconduct, there is a complex conflict to be resolved. Like many conflicts, it is not simply a matter of linear problem solving. The question is not merely, what do we do about this horrible thing that has happened. It is instead, many questions and many perspectives that seem diametrically opposed.

Questions like:

1. How should the conduct be investigated?
2. If the allegation is not supported by evidence what are the next steps?
3. If the allegation is supported by evidence what are the next steps?
4. Who should be informed about the allegation? About the verdict?
5. What does an appropriate punishment look like? Should there be room for reform and rehabilitation?
6. How can the church care best for all the parties involved?

Each of these questions elicits a different answer from an individual who has experienced this phenomenon in a unique way. Individuals will likely offer very personal perspectives on clergy sexual misconduct, based on experiences, personal philosophy, and relationship to the church. The persistent challenge is to find common ground. This task proves even more difficult when we consider that the administrators answering these questions for the church have a vested interest in the outcome. Protecting the image of the church is as significant a motivation for some as developing a just resolution for clergy and victims is for others.

Despite the challenges revealed in this study, I remain hopeful. With moderate investments of time and financial resources, the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church can make the process for repair and reconciliation more effective and just for all the parties affected by clergy sexual misconduct. I offer several recommendations for future research and strategies to facilitate justness, repair, and reconciliation. I strongly encourage the church to seek out a facilitator to tailor a transformative mediation model to the conflict surrounding clergy sexual misconduct.

The themes identified in this study provide an appropriate framework for recommended adjustments and opportunities for future research. For each theme identified during this study, I have included some strategies for managing the experience of clergy sexual misconduct and recommended areas that more information gathering is warranted (See Table 18).

Table 18*Recommendations to Further Explore the Themes Identified in This Study*

Category/objective	Recommendations
Immobilizing Fear- Considering how to facilitate participation in the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A confidential process of reporting should be created that initiates investigations without a written statement. • Trained psychiatrists should conduct confidential assessments of accusers and the accused as part of the initial investigation. • Future studies should explore the concerns of clergy and laity independently.
Systems Failure – Examining where the process fails the parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The office of the bishop should research the reasons why so few cases ever reach her desk. • Clergy and laity should be asked what policies and procedures would make them more comfortable with the process. • Researchers should explore how other systems regulate misconduct by those with authority.
Institutional Fairness- Creating a process that is fair to all parties involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A third-party team, with no vested interest in the outcome, should lead initial investigations and give results and recommendations to the office of the bishop. • Congregations, and communities, should be made aware of any allegations found to have validity.
Crisis minimization – Developing a better picture of the scope of the problem.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A study/survey that identifies the frequency and type of clergy sexual misconduct witnessed or experienced yearly should be conducted and published. • Workshops should be held regularly to help individuals identify inappropriate behavior and facilitate confidential reporting.

These recommendations are a starting point for addressing the concerns associated with clergy sexual misconduct. The impacts of this misconduct are not always obvious, but they are often manageable. The focus should be on what the North Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church can do to better manage the aftermath of this phenomenon. Better training and transparency is a good start, but in the end real improvement will require a real commitment to listening (to the victims and the accused), confidentiality (so the parties feel comfortable sharing their stories), and accountability (so that the community, congregations, and the world know they can trust the process).

Personal Reflections and Final Thoughts

When I first decided to research this complicated and emotionally charged topic, I imagined an opportunity to understand the complexities of clergy sexual misconduct, and the conflicts between clergy, accusers, congregants, and church administrators that derive from it. I never imagined the personal disappointment I would encounter. Despite remaining hopeful for the church's commitment to repair and reconciliation, I must admit that I found the process of researching disheartening. Listening to the stories of misconduct and the excuses that sometimes accompanied those stories, challenged my faith in the institution of church.

As I mentioned previously, I am a licensed local pastor currently serving in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. As part of this process, I regularly meet with the Board of Ordained Ministry, who assess my fitness and my readiness to move through the process of ordination in the church. While conducting this research and journaling my reflections about clergy sexual misconduct, and how the

church has handled it, I was forced to ask myself a difficult question. Is this a system I can belong to?

The system fails to seek the truth. In an effort to protect the reputation of clergy, the sanctity of the church, and the appearance of progress, The United Methodist Church has silenced victims. I would like to believe that the victims who have suffered the most egregious of offenses would be brave enough to overcome the obstacles of a damaged reputation, requirements for written complaints, and an unspecified process for the investigation, but I cannot do so comfortably. It is far more likely that the truth is lost in a process that strives for a just resolution, but instead encourages no process at all.

The consequences of this lost truth are significant. Offenders, who are not properly identified, are allowed to inflict harm on other individuals affiliated with the church. Victims are not cared for and are instead forced to face the trauma of their experiences alone. Witnesses are rendered silent because they believe that nothing will or can be done about this type of misconduct. Administrators believe that the problem is not significant because the data does not formally reflect how often this problem occurs. This is the essence of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. It is a problem hidden from a solution. Despite the good intentions of those who genuinely seek to care for those who encounter this tragedy, victims are uncared for, witnesses are not heard and the system does not seem to have an answer for any of it.

Finally, there cannot be repair and reconciliation if the organization and the parties are not willing to acknowledge the problem. The men and women who agreed to be interviewed for this research showed enormous bravery. Their willingness to say the

problem out loud is greatly appreciated and contributes greatly to the field of conflict analysis and resolution. The insight and concepts gathered here would not have been possible without their stories. I hope that this work and their bravery will inspire others to come forward to researchers, counselors, bishops, or anyone who might facilitate some of the needed care and compassion in the aftermath of these events.

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Appendix A

Qualitative Interview Protocol Form and Questionnaire*Title of the Study:*

THE MORNING AFTER:

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF REPAIR AND
RECONCILIATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF CLERGY SEXUAL MISCONDUCT

Participant #: _____

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Church Role (Circle all that apply):

Clergy

Lay Leadership

Member

Frequent Visitor

Church Council Member

Conference Leadership

Years in Methodist Church:

0-5 years

5+-10 years

10+-20 years

20+ years

INTERVIEW EXPECTATIONS

Interview questions will resemble the following examples:

- 1.) Describe the feeling you remember experiencing in the immediate aftermath of this instance of misconduct?
- 2.) Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?
- 3.) How do you feel church leadership handled the situation?
 - a. Why do you feel they handled it this way?
 - b. How do you think the decisions about what to do were made?
 1. Is that good?

The questions are designed to draw descriptive details from the interviewees and provide an opportunity for individuals to expand on their answers.

Specific questions like, "Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse," or "how do you heal trust in church leadership after something like this occurs?" will challenge respondents to explore the essence of the event and begin to find meaning in the actions of the faith community. This meaning will lay a strong foundation for discussions about reconciliation.

ACTUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- A.) How did you first become involved with this congregation?
- B.) How long have you been a part of this congregation?
 - a. In what capacity? How has it changed over time?
- C.) Describe the feeling you remember experiencing in the immediate aftermath of this instance of misconduct?
- D.) Explain what you think should have happened in the aftermath of this abuse?
 - a. How are you coping with this experience?
 - b. What might aid you in your coping process?
- E.) How do you feel church leadership handled the situation?
 - a. Why do you feel they handled it this way?
 - b. How do you think the decisions about what to do were made?
 - i. What feelings do you have about that process?
- F.) What do you feel the immediate impacts will be/were for the congregation?
- G.) What do you feel the long-term impacts will be?
- H.) What types of conflict has this led to in the congregation?
- I.) What types of conflict has this led to for you internally/personally?
- J.) What else would you like to share about your experience of clergy sexual misconduct in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Damion T. Quaye, Principal Investigator
 Dissertation Research
 Department of Conflict Analysis and Resolution
 Graduate School of Humanities & Social Sciences
 Nova Southeastern University

Appendix B

Statement of Confidentiality & Consent**Clergy Misconduct Study Consent Form**

Researcher: Damion Quaye

Institution: Nova Southeastern University

STUDY TITLE:

THE MORNING AFTER: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE
PROCESS OF REPAIR AND RECONCILIATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF CLERGY SEXUAL
MISCONDUCT

You are being asked to take part in a research study about clergy sexual misconduct and the impacts it has on congregations in the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church. We are asking you to take part because you responded to published requests for volunteers to tell their stories. Please read this form carefully and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to take part in the study.

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the conflict between clergy who commit or are accused of sexual misconduct and their congregations they serve.

What we will ask you to do: If you agree to be in this study, we will conduct an interview with you. The interview will include questions about your experiences with the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, your local church congregation, and clergy sexual misconduct. The interview will take about 30 minutes to complete. With your permission, we would also like to tape-record the interview and take notes.

Risks and benefits:

It is important to note that there is the risk that you may find some of the questions about your experiences to be sensitive.

There are no benefits to you. This study is completely a volunteer exercise.

Compensation: This study is an unpaid endeavor. You will not be compensated financially or otherwise for your participation.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file; only the researchers will have access to the records. If we tape-record the interview, we will destroy the tape after it has been transcribed, which we anticipate will be within two months of its taping. The final published work will only include those parts of your story that are relevant to the concepts presented and the conclusions reached.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer. If you decide not to take part or to skip some of the questions, there is no penalty. If you decide to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time.

If you have questions: The researcher conducting this study is Damion Quaye. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Damion Quaye at dq30@mynsu.nova.edu or at 301-661-5258. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (954) 262-5369 or access their website at <https://www.nova.edu/irb/staff.html>. You may also report your concerns or complaints to

Human Subjects Protection/Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
irb@nova.edu

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

This consent form will be kept by the researcher for at least three years beyond the end of the study.

Appendix C

MEMORANDUM

To: **Damion Quaye**

From: **Ransford Edwards,**
Center Representative, Institutional Review Board

Date: **January 21, 2019**

Re: **IRB #: 2019-33; Title, "THE MORNING AFTER:
 A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF
 REPAIR AND RECONCILIATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF CLERGY SEXUAL
 MISCONDUCT"**

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under **45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt 2: Interviews, surveys, focus groups, observations of public behavior, and other similar methodologies)**. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me (954-262-5369 and Ransford Edwards, respectively) of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.

Cc: **Claire Michele Rice, Ph.D.**
Ransford Edwards