

# Wounded body. Pastoral guide for congregations dealing with sexual violence

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This book is about churches and congregations confronted with sexual violence. When one reads the papers alone, one realises how many there are in Holland. Probably only the tip of the iceberg is known. Using trustworthy statistics one can conclude that at least 10% of all Dutch people (men and women) have become victims of sexual abuse. A report from the Ministry of Justice mentions that 45% of all Dutch people are or have been a victim of domestic violence. There is no reason to believe that these figures are lower in church circles.

That means that this book is about each church and congregation. Even if the congregation does not realise it, it is highly probable that it has victims of sexual violence in her midst. Just as probable that there are perpetrators of violence amongst its members. Victims and perpetrators take part in the church services and other activities. Children and young people go to the catechism-hour, who may have been sexually or physically abused or have been psychologically damaged, maybe even that same day. We meet people who serve on the church council, on committees or workgroups, who carry painful secrets. On the pulpit or behind the organ could be someone who is a victim and/or perpetrator.

Strikingly enough, in most congregations, church organisations and training colleges for pastors, no attention is paid to this phenomenon. A certain amount of church organisations have set up procedures in case a pastor is accused of sexual abuse. But most of the time this wheel has to be invented over and over again. When a congregation is confronted with sexual violence, under great pressure of time and emotional tension, an ad hoc regime is formulated, at best with advice from experts who are on the ground. That expert may not possess any insight into the specific situation of a congregation.

In short: there is a need for more insight and structure to function well as a congregation when such a drastic confrontation appears. This book wants to contribute to that. It is meant for pastors, church councils and leaders and church members who want to work towards a carefully thought out management of the church. The book is based on research into the connections between sexual abuse

and faith and on contacts with congregations who have been confronted with sexual abuse.

This book has grown from a statement for the joint synods of the Dutch reformed Churches and the Lutheran Church in the Netherlands. In January 1999, they discussed the church management about sexual abuse. On the agenda was the report 'Religion and Incest' as well as 'Hiding-place in the wilderness'. This last report about church management about issues of sexual violence, was written by both of us together with Drs. J.G.K. Littooy instructed by the service KTO (Kerkopbouw-Church edification, Theologie-Theology, and Opleiding-Training) of the churches together movement. The synods decided to work out the report and to make it available to churches and congregations.

For the work out we had in mind the concrete settings of local churches and congregations. What happens in and to a congregation when it is faced with sexual violence? How can a church council handle such an event with care. What can the involved church members do? How can a congregation be led through such a painful process and be built up again? To find a question to these answers, we have used the expertise of several people who have been closely involved with this issue. People in leadership roles as well as people who have rendered assistance and those who were directly involved have been asked to write about their experiences with sexual violence, their faith and pastoral management. We want to thank them deeply for their worthwhile contribution. We are very pleased that churches together as well as other churches and groups joined in.

This is not a neutral book. Not for us as writers, because both of us-in different ways- we have become involved with the issues around the damage that can be caused through sexual violence. For churches this is not a neutral book too. The synods spoke out emphatically: "sexual violence is sin: evil in God's eyes and an injustice towards a fellow human being". And: "The church needs to choose straightforwardly for the victims of sexual abuse". In the use of certain terminology, this point of view comes through. We do not speak in neutral terms, but talk about abuse, perpetrators, victims etc. In the following chapters we will illuminate and shade, but the fundamental choice will continue to guide us. In this way, we can treat perpetrators and victims with care. Finally this is not a neutral book for you. It's likely that you read from a certain point of personal involvement (directly or indirectly). In any case this subject won't leave anyone cold.

This book is not the definitive handbook for pastoral management around sexual violence. The opposite is the case, it is the first exploration in an area where there are at the moment more questions than answers. We attempt to offer a handle in this area to find a way through on a road, which is full of traps and snares

We have called this book a pastoral guide. We think about a kind of travel guide through uncharted territory. We want to achieve two aims. In the first place we want to offer the reader a view of the complex and broad field of sexual violence.

Secondly we want to show ways or give handles to determine a course within the context of church management. The book consists therefore of four chapters. In the first chapter we describe wounds (the trauma) which occurs in the lives of the different people involved. In the second chapter we discuss the processes and factors which play a role in sexual violence. The third chapter is given over to questions of faith and the Bible. In the fourth chapter we finally describe what happens to a congregation which is faced with sexual violence. Assistance for management of such a phenomenon is given. We follow in these chapters a given situation of sexual violence, in which the broad brushstrokes are given. The story is based on several factual situations, but is totally fictional. The description means to clarify how sexual violence can take place and what factors can play a role. The other (short) stories too which we use as an illustration are based on reality. This reproduction of events in a certain amount of cases is with the permission of the people involved. In other cases the stories have been changed to such a degree that recognition is ruled out.

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