

BURN THE DAMNED CAPE: THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE NEGLECT  
OF SELF CARE AND THE ABUSE OF POWER BY AFRICAN AMERICAN  
MALE CLERGY

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## ABSTRACT

# BURN THE DAMNED CAPE: THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE NEGLECT OF SELF CARE AND THE ABUSE OF POWER BY AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE CLERGY

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There has been a great deal of research done regarding clergy abuse especially following the global spotlight placed upon the Catholic church and the countless claims of sexual misconduct by priests. There has also been an exodus of clergy leaving the ministry because of stress, depression, and basic burnout. Up until recently, there had not been much scholarship or data focused on African American clergy. As a minister of music, worship leader, and associate pastor having served in several faith settings, I recognize a need for more research focused on African American faith leaders. This project aims to argue that the root of misconduct stems from there being some area of deficiency. While this does not excuse behavior or any acts of violence, it does raise awareness of looking at care of self while in service to others. This project focuses on African American male clergy and their abuse of power and neglect of self-care. It looks at how abuse of power is defined particularly within a faith context. It also looks at any theological implications informed by scripture. How does certain texts address abuse of power? How does it address care of self? It also focuses on what happens to congregations, pastors, and ministries when pastoral self-care is compromised. What are some cultural or traditional expectations of faith leaders that have led to malfeasance? This is not to suggest that abuse of power does not occur with female faith leaders and

specifically African American female clergy because it absolutely does. This project focuses on African American male clergy with the goal of seeing how self-care and abuse of power intersects with a desired outcome of creating programs within congregations that address clergy self-care awareness and ethical accountability. By doing this reframing, and moving towards a more restorative rather than punitive approach, this project challenges the optics of the pastoral model of leadership within black faith communities in a 21<sup>st</sup> century context.

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## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mom, Junella Turner, who required that I strive to do and be the best version of myself at all times. This is for you. Wherever you are in your part of glory, I know that you are beaming. To my aunts Odessa, and Claudie Mae, thank you for instilling in me the importance of laughter, and along with my mom, a strong work ethic, strength and courage to dare to dream. I hope that the three of you are proud. I also dedicate this to my dad, Chester Ray Currie, Jr. You loved me the best way that you knew how and that was introducing me to the game that you loved immensely, golf. The course is one of my happy refueling places that this project has reminded me that I need to embrace more often. I am indebted to my spouse, The Rev. Dr. Dominique Patrece Denman, who at first was against the idea of me returning to school because she knew that I had other dreams and passions, mainly being an artist, my other happy place. Thank you for continuing to support my “yes” as I navigate this dual dance of art and ministry. Thank you. Divine Creator and all of my guardian angels and ancestors who watch over by my mind, body, and spirit, may you be pleased with this offering.



## INTRODUCTION

Kanye West...Yeezy...and now just Ye is a powerhouse in the music and fashion industry. He has openly admitted that he suffers from bi-polar disorder. His high profile marriage to Kim Kardashian ended and she has since moved on to another relationship. Ye took to social media to use his power by posting negative tweets and threats towards his former wife and her current love interest. Anyone who publicly challenged Ye or tried to come to his former wife's defense also became a target for his virtriol. In a 2019 interview, Kardashian – West stated that her husband did not take medication for his mental illness for fear that it would change who he was.<sup>1</sup> Now, several years into his diagnosis, along with his refusal to take medication, Ye has left his fanbase and critics wondering what will trigger him next and who will be his target(s)? Though he is not a faith leader, he's orchestrated his Sunday morning worship services that are private and invite only. In the past, he's called himself a god.<sup>2</sup> Ye, in my opinion, supports my argument of this correlation between the neglect of self – care, in Ye's case, the care of one's mental care, and the abuse of power. I do question if Ye's village is enabling him because he is their employer. Who wants to be on the receiving end of a manic episode? Currently, there have been no criminal charges filed. Nonetheless, verbal and emotional abuse are still considered to be abuse.

During the 2022 Oscar awards ceremony, A-list actor Will Smith, after hearing an ill-timed joke from comedian Chris Rock referencing Smith's wife's appearance, stormed

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<sup>1</sup> Michele R. Berman and Mark S. Boguski, "Understanding Kanye West's Bipolar Disorder-From a presidential bid to Satanic vaccines-could this represent a full - blown manic episode?," *MedPage Today*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.medpagetoday.com/popmedicine/celebritydiagnosis/87581>.

<sup>2</sup> Kanye West, "I Am A God," by Kanye West, et. al, recorded 2013, Roc- A- Fella and Def Jam New York, on *Yeezus*. CD.

the stage after seeing her reaction, and assaulted him. Moments later, Oscar – nominee, Smith received the Best Actor award for his work in the movie, *King Richard*. His actions were seen globally and fuelled news cycles and social media. Because of Mr. Smith's status, and power, he was not removed from the ceremony and refused to leave the room following the attack. Mr. Rock opted not to file charges and the ceremony continued. In his acceptance speech, Mr. Smith alluded to the stress and demands of having status (and a wealth of power). Pundits, like Vicki Newman, suggested that Mr. Smith's childhood had been abusive and that he needed to address his mental health while his team does damage control regarding his career.<sup>3</sup> Mr. West and Mr. Smith are examples of high-profile persons with power. They are also two black men who are susceptible to public scrutiny and judgment with very little window for redemption if one falters. These are just two examples of how power has been used. This project only offers a sample of a much broader problem within the African American faith community regarding care and power, and how the two are managed.

Reports of various forms of impropriety from high profile persons in the entertainment, political, social and corporate worlds unfortunately is not new in today's society. Those who are considered to be privileged, who can have anything, and anyone, at any given time have sought more. They have gone beyond boundaries without consent, without thought, without fear of retribution with the belief that members in their employ will stay silent. Some of these persons within their employ are assigned the role of fixer, the one who makes people places and situations go away. When these high-profile

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<sup>3</sup> Vicki Newman, "Will Smith 'getting therapy over childhood issues that saw him lash out at Chris Rock'," *The Mirror*, March 30, 2022, <https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/will-smith-therapy-oscar-slap-26594202>.

personalities commit offenses, it is almost guaranteed that there is always a price for silence or a good legal team on retainer to make a problem disappear or be tied up in litigation for years. These stars are people who are placed on unattainable pedestals where they are worshiped by fanatics, fans who think that they know everything about them. Our favorite stars, whether in entertainment, sports, politics or the like, are called such because they are thought to be unreachable, untouchable above everything and everyone else, existing in their own orbit shining brightly until their star burns out due to scandal and they fall mercilessly from the sky.

It comes as no surprise that within sacred sanctuaries, and faith communities across the United States, stars also shine brightly suggesting that the same issues of privilege and impropriety among leaders, especially clergy, also exist. Society sometimes wrestles with the reality that clergy are people too with the same issues as everyone else. Unfortunately, clergy, like others in the secular spotlight, have to navigate their lives under the microscope of judgement and scrutiny of the public eye. While one would like to think that the church is immune to such indiscretions, unfortunately, this is not the case. In his response to clergy misconduct in Nigeria, Solomon Ademiluka speaks about a code of silence by victims of abuse out of fear. He writes:

The code of silence is stricter when assault is committed by influential men [in] certain positions of authority, such as political office holders and church priests. In the bid to protect their reputation, they embark on heinous efforts to make their victims silent [by] subjecting them and their family members to intimidation, including anonymous death threats when attempts to bribe victims have failed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Solomon O. Ademiluka “Interpreting the David-Bathsheba Narrative As A Response By The Church In Nigeria To Masculine Abuse of Power For Sexual Assault” 2021. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77(4), a5802. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.5802>

Within the United States, victims of clergy abuse whether mental, physical or sexual have maintained this same code of silence. Leaders within the church have walked in their own privilege and those who are guilty of misconduct have tried to shame and threaten their victims in the hopes that they will keep silent.

The idea of leadership privilege and abuse of power unfortunately is a familiar one. Consequences for clergy misconduct have been punitive in nature ranging from suspensions from the pulpit until there has been a calming period, expulsion from the local church through firing, to the extreme cases involving legal ramifications including lawsuits and or incarcerations. In other cases, male clergy who have been accused or even admitted to misconduct and abuse have been able to be reassigned to different congregations by their predominantly-male-led denominational governing bodies. And still in other instances, male clergy have had the luxury of being able to continue in leadership positions with little to no consequences for their actions. Meanwhile, their survivors have been vilified, shamed, threatened, or been forced to leave the faith communities that they were once a part of. Those members of the clergy who have committed offenses are not always readily willing to be held accountable for their actions. Congregations and faith communities make up the third side of this triangle because they have either coddled, or protected their leaders thereby enabling them. Additionally, there have been minimal guidelines available to address clergy care and misconduct within a larger number of Black faith communities. We have been silent. We, clergy, congregations, and survivors have to be willing to look at how African American worship communities can be more compliant when addressing issues of clergy care and abuse of power. In a general observation of African American worship and faith tradition,

the Bible has served as the initial point of formation. On the topic of power, I too will use the Bible as an initial starting point.

Chapter One will address the topic of abuse of power by a leader from a theological perspective by focusing on King David and his relationship with Bathsheba. Engaging with Robert Alter and others, we will propose that this biblical narrative acts as a template for modern day clergy who have a faith life, gained notoriety but have been negligent in how they have cared for themselves and those around them. This chapter will then move into looking at abuse of power from a historical perspective within the Black church. The scholarly work of mainly Albert Robateau and others, present a platform that addresses how these black leadership roles came into being through the context of the American slave trade, subsequent and post enslavement life. Theological and historical contexts of abuse of power do not look through contemporary lenses, but can reveal insights we need in order to analyze contemporary patterns of abuse.

Chapter Two will address clergy malfeasance in a more current and contextual fashion. There has been a great deal of research done regarding the topic, especially following the global spotlight that was placed upon the Catholic church and the countless claims of sexual misconduct by priests. Though there are many, I will be engaging three specific scholars who have done some of this work. Scholars like Marie Fortune, James Poling and Anson Shupe, have written extensively on the subject of clergy abuse and their victims. Fortune and Poling have approached the topic of clergy abuse with a focus on women and children with a need for accountability and education relating to clergy professional ethics. Shupe, from a sociological perspective, dares to move the conversation and research from the larger scope focused on other races and ethnicities to

the Black church. He offers an analysis of real case scenarios of clergy malfeasance suggesting that deviant behavior is inherent because of the power that has been entrusted systemically and hierarchly. Plainly stated, malfeasance happens and boundaries are crossed because of accessibility and the decisions of the leader. This is the argument that leads me to suggest that care of self, care of ego, and care of mental and physical bandwidth has not been taken to prevent malfeasance from occurring. Through additional case studies, some documented, and others from personal accounts, this chapter will also highlight awareness of how abuse of self among African American clergy has shown up in other ways including struggles with drug and alcohol abuse as well as mental and physical health challenges.

Chapter Three will focus on data gathered from a small sampling of interviews with African American faith leaders as well as additional data from researchers who have started to study this specific demographic. This research group presents the opportunity for Black clergy to learn by seeing themselves and hearing voices from their community of fellow clergy and senior leaders. In this chapter, the issue of self – care shares the spotlight with how power is utilized. Interweaved with research done by Wynnetta Wimberley on clergy depression, bi-polar disorder, and deaths by suicide, this chapter will seek to ask questions and gain insight from those who have experienced or known of those who have abused their power as a result of not caring for their emotional, spiritual, mental, or physical needs. I wanted to know if there was an awareness of clergy abuse of power within the African American context and if there was an opinion on there being any connection to the ways in which clergy manages care of self.

As of this writing, the world is three years removed from the onset of a global pandemic in which there was great loss of life and economic stress. I wanted to know how these leaders had been affected in the midst of trying to not only be concerned for their own personal wellbeing, but also to navigate ministry and the needs of their congregations during the coronavirus outbreak. Finally, I wanted to know firsthand what practices, ideas, or guidelines would be helpful to them as a way of being proactive and preventative as it relates to the subject of wellness to foster healthier and more accountable leadership models.

Chapter Four will encompass the data and research themes taken from the interviews. I will again engage Wimberley, Poling, and Fortune, and others who have done research focused on creating healthy spaces for clergy, survivors and congregations following instances of clergy malfeasance. As this is a project focused on Black males, I thought that it was important to invite Black male scholars into the conversation as a way of further deepening our perspective on their self-understandings related to leadership. For example, I include the perspectives of Kirk Byron Jones and Nicholas Grier. Grier removes the titles and focuses on African American males and suggests that healing takes place spiritually, and within community. Jones introduces what I would like to call a theory of overload or the superman complex. The cape is damned having caused harm to all and cannot be burned until tools are in place to care and heal. When clergy abuse power or cross boundaries, much of the focus revolves around being punitive. But can restorative justice be part of the healing process? How does care look for clergy, congregations, and survivors? How would Jesus embrace offending clergy, the survivors of their abuse, and the congregations in which they serve? I believe that all parties move

forward through education, spiritual practices and congregational and or denominational guidelines and regulations geared toward accountability and healing. I would suggest that the burning of the cape does not happen instantly but takes time. It is a fluid but necessary process.

I will use the terms “African American” and “Black” interchangeably as a way of being sensitive and inclusive, as well as hopefully not being offensive to any one group within the diaspora who may prefer one term more or less than the other. I will also use the terms “faith leader,” “pastor,” and “clergy,” interchangeably because this issue is not defined by denominational jurisdiction but hopefully will speak to those who are in leadership in the various ways in which they serve community. In some instances, I may write in phonetics or use colloquialisms intended to reach, make room for, or connect with a specific group that has been immersed in the Black church worship experience.

This project will utilize scholarly voices, as required, that hopefully speak to the academy and aid in generating ideas for change because these conversations are needed and we have been silent for far too long. As an ordained minister serving in community, I am also called to reach or meet the lay person who may be in the pews or in the church kitchen, those who may direct traffic in the church parking lot, or lead the worship team. They will need to know that they are in spaces, safe ones where they can speak up if need be without fear or trepidation while serving the God of their understanding. I will always be an artist. That creative spirit resonates to my very core. My goal is that this project will be transformative within the communities that I have served, presently serve, and the new ones that will be served by having had these conversations. To that end, the style and energy by which this project is presented will attempt to walk a fine distinction between



all three audiences, scholarly, lay, and the creative. With any hope, there will be a fourth audience, the one who, like myself, can and have at some point in their lives, resonated with all three.

PROLOGUE: *TICKIN' PREACHA*

“When I said yes, I meant yes... yes to success

Anointed, appointed, now maybe a little disappointed? Nah...I'm too blessed to be stressed. Now I long for just some time, time...time that's filled with swift transition

Please God let me have a chance...a chance to dance...a chance for romance

A chance to be...just me...the real me...that no one will ever see

A chance to escape...There are times that I just want to lay down my collar and my cape.

Ahhh the cape...flowing grand...let's me stand above the rest...no contest...it's true, I'm the best. Yes, that's me...see, I'm even on T.V.

Flying high...high...shhhh...in the sky...in the lie

That says I'm perfect...can't put me in check.

Help me to say no...too much on the go. No!

No more meetings, luncheons, NO...banquets, NO...or 3am calls

No more coercion to buy raffle tickets, NO... or attend charity balls.

No time... family, make time...no time...friends, next time...

No time...you, make time...no time...just this one time... just this one time...how much for this...shhhh...ahhhh

What time...Saying yes, when I really mean no...I wish I could just say no...actually “hell no” but

Gotta go...where's my collar? Where's my damned cape? I'm hurting. It's heavy. It won't let me escape.

No time...make time...no time...next time...no time...

Time's up...gloves off...phone off...collar off...cape off...Boom!!!

“They did a good job. He looks just like himself.”

-Ode to the superheroes of my youth

## CHAPTER ONE: *SOVEREIGNS, SHEPHERDS & SERVANTS*

### I Said Yes-ish...The Collar

I believe that being called into ministry is a sacred occurrence that comes with much responsibility. Christian tradition has likened the relationship between pastor and congregation to that of a shepherd and their flock. Shepherds are given accountability, and responsibility, and that equates to power, and perhaps a sense of invincibility. As the flock grows, so does the responsibility, and accountability. One of the perks of having more sheep is that the shepherd also is compensated more and has access to more resources. The increase is global in the life of the shepherd: flock, notoriety, responsibility, and financial stability to name a few. As the flock grows, the shepherd may lose sight of their role as caregiver. As the shepherd starts to see how their power can influence people, and situations, the shepherd starts to believe they are immune to any negative feedback. I contend that greed becomes the driving factor underlying such shepherd's desire to maintain their status. This desire for more, is coupled with an element of fear: fear of losing status, prestige and material gain. There is finally, plainly stated, a lack of education in how biblical text is interpreted for one's current context and location.

When greed is coupled with the fear of losing everything, and a general lack of education is prevalent, health is sacrificed in three key areas: wellness, ethics, and boundaries. The concept of wellness includes care for self, family, and congregation. Ethics and boundaries touch all aspects of clergy life and leadership. When a pastor cares for himself or herself, it includes taking the time to address physical, mental, and psychological wellness. Caring for one's family includes being intentional about

establishing clear boundaries with congregations, other vocational responsibilities, or tasks in order to be fully present for all things family related. When a pastor cares for the congregation, it includes leading effectively, ethically, and integrally, making the best decisions in the moment that are sound for the sustainability of the ministry. Knowingly dismissing the importance of either of these three: self, family, or congregation, especially if there is a deficiency, borders on being unethical. When these areas are compromised in any way, out of greed, fear, and/or lack of education, it can result in an abuse of power.<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly, I have known and still know those who have abused their power, both male and female. There is fear in speaking up and of course, there is the problem of knowing where or who to report abuse, especially if it is not physical or sexual. This project is not aimed to be a tell-all exposé or reveal where skeletons are located. On the contrary, for many, it's not about physical skeletons at all, but the decaying and decomposed mental and psychological states that many who have experienced church hurt or abuse from clergy and those in leadership are living with every day.

The goal of this project is not to bring shame, cause harm, criticize, attack, slander, tarnish reputations, or disrespect the office of the pastorate, nor is it to minimize the positive contributions from a long and historic list of great orators, justice advocates, and faith leaders who have expounded the gospel message. That would be hypocritical as I am one who is charged with offering hope to the kin-dom of God while serving in

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<sup>1</sup> When one hears the word “abuse” or of someone being labeled an abuser, the immediate assumption is that there has been an incident of domestic or child abuse. However, the term encompasses far more than physical or verbal abuse towards another individual. I believe that by not caring for one’s mental health, one is doing an abusive act. The act of abuse is more psychological in nature. I believe that African American clergy are perfectly aligned, if not careful, to become abusers.

ordained leadership. Nonetheless, a problem within the Black church does exist. New voices are starting to speak up with hopes of there being a shift in how leaders, both male, female, and non-binary are held accountable. Because of there being such a great gender disparity within pastoral leadership within the African American faith community, I will focus on African American male clergy.

I believe that clergy, particularly African American male clergy, have been unwilling to be vulnerable and ask for help in its various forms. I believe that the lack of wellness leads to negative coping mechanisms, which leads to a false sense of power, (the high) which leads to the abuse of power and subsequent downfall. It will be important to ask difficult questions and have uncomfortable, yet necessary, conversations with my fellow African American clergy and faith leaders as we find ways to be more intentional, effective, healed, and whole shepherds of the flock. I believe that it's important to be in conversation with scholars who have engaged in the uncomfortable. This project asks: how has society, cultural mores, questionable theologies, literal and/or figurative interpretations, and using biblical contexts in the 21st century helped form the mindset of many African American clergy to the point of misconduct? There has been impropriety by those who are said to have been called by God. It invites a theological question of whether a person is born predisposed to sin with no hope of redemption or is born with a clean slate and is tempted or drawn into sin and thereby needs compassion and grace when acceptable social, ethical, and religious constructs are broken. How can clergy get to a place of being comfortable and transparent in safe spaces to name the things that challenge us, to name the areas of struggle or temptation? It may not be God's will to remove the thorns, but can there be a way to navigate and lead a community effectively

while being supported and getting the help needed? Can hurt clergy stop abusing the people that they say they are called to serve? Can there be grace? Can there be restoration and redemption? What would Jesus really do? Pastors serve their communities publicly, burnout publicly, and miss the mark publicly. How does healing look in the public square? Abuse is multifaceted. It can be silent. It can happen over time. It is important to be able to recognize and deal with those things which are triggers or weaknesses early on. By doing so, clergy and the people that they serve give themselves a better opportunity for long term wholeness accountability and sustainability.

### Tights and Capes

I believe that social and economic contexts have by default called African American clergy to take on the role of superhero, trying to be everything to everyone. And just like superheroes have been depicted wearing capes as part of their costumes to show their elite strength and power to conquer all, I believe that these capes have also been a symbol to damn the ones who metaphorically wear them, causing them to falter and fail. The wearing of the cape symbolizes invincibility and when those expectations are not met, or when the person realizes their own shortcomings but still cannot resist the urge to wear the cape, the wearer is now addicted.

Joshua Isaak writes: “No hero who was first introduced with a cape has been able to shed it entirely.”<sup>2</sup> Having power is addicting. If not treated, the spiral can be great for leaders who are not able to manage. I contend that there is something about the cape. This

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua Isaak. “Why Superheroes Wear Capes (And Why They Don’t Anymore)”. Published October 12, 2021. accessed January 18, 2022. <https://screenrant.com/why-superheroes-wear-capes-batman-superman-dc-marvel/>

notion of power and the relationship between power and the cape is further explained by Isaak. “Capes were worn by the aristocracy in many cultures; capes thus imply power, wealth, royalty, and/or all three. [Villains] wear capes thinking quite highly of themselves and consider themselves to be highly influential and powerful.”<sup>3</sup> Just as our modern real life and fictional characters have traded in their actual capes for suits and other contemporary wear, the invisible cape is still present along with the power and since of invincibility it purports.

Just as fictional characters Clark Kent and Bruce Wayne were not comfortable with being their authentic selves, so are faith leaders who also struggle with embracing their authenticity. Charged with doing this work for and among my colleagues and other clergy who reference the bible as a tool for life lessons begs the question: how does the bible address the dissonance between power and care? And how can African American clergy get to a comfortable place of being able to burn the damned cape?

“But What Does the *BYYYYBULL* Say?”

“Things progressed and I grew more uncomfortable. Fearful of standing up for myself and worried about making a stir, I just wanted to pretend it wasn’t happening and go to sleep. Everything would be better tomorrow. He was nice. He wouldn’t do anything more than I wanted.”<sup>4</sup>

As stated earlier, spiritual leaders acting inappropriately, abusing their power, is not new. Being able to speak about or name such indiscretions within the African American faith community with the aim of clergy having more accountability is new. For some clergy within faith communities, their mantra, though flawed in my assessment, is

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jolene Underwood. “I Said No, He Said No Problem-A Story of Date Rape” *Courageous Soul. A Cultivated Life*. August 26, 2015. [www.joleneunderwood.com](http://www.joleneunderwood.com). accessed January 15, 2022.

that they live their lives based on their selective interpretation of the Bible. Texts are selected out of context, interpreted at face value (literally), to serve a purpose in the moment, while other texts are totally overlooked or ignored. However, there are numerous ancient canonical and non-canonical texts that support examples of leaders who have abused their power.

### He Makes Me Lie Down In Green Pastures

As contemporary clergy and senior leaders, there must be the connection to the concept that some of those who abuse power are not necessarily evil beings. As an example, I would like to focus on the person of David from the Hebrew Bible. Studies of David have shown his complexity as an individual and Biblical figure. When speaking of the intricacies that personify this character from the Hebrew bible, David A. Bosworth writes: “Biblical scholars in the twentieth century have characterized David in one of two seemingly contradictory ways. The traditional version characterizes David as a pious shepherd who rises to become king of Israel. The critical version presents David as a cunning usurper who murders and schemes his way to a throne not rightfully his. The biblical text allows both readings.”<sup>5</sup>

While I feel that my project can certainly embrace both of these characterizations, I will be focused far more on the latter version of David because it speaks more strongly to how the narrative demonstrates that he abused his power as king. Though I choose David in these conversations about the correlation between abuse of power and self care,

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<sup>5</sup> David A. Bosworth “Evaluating King David: Old Problems and Recent Scholarship” The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Vol 68., 2006 p191-210. p.191



I acknowledge that there is far more scholarship and deeper exegesis on this biblical and historical figure than this project will allow. Of the many narratives featuring David, I would like to focus on the David and Bathsheba narrative in 2 Samuel 11. This narrative is one that questions leadership, how power is mishandled, and sexual impropriety.

David was a king, a successful political and military figure, who was revered, much like a modern day faith leader. If ever there was an example of a rock star in the bible whose name was not Jesus, it would be King David. According to biblical literature, he started out as a young herdsman who ascended to great power. Perhaps in a moment of despair, he recognized his own human frailty by taking on the role of sheep, when he acknowledged the Lord as his Shepherd and guide in one of the most quoted texts in the Hebrew bible, Psalm 23.<sup>6</sup> This shepherd boy grew up, rose to power, and in spite of all of his successes and victories as a leader, he abused his power. This is quite evident in the David Bathsheba narrative.

While his men are out fighting, David chooses to stay home within the comfort and fortified walls of the palace. Scholars speak to the fact that David in the opening verses of this narrative, should be out fighting as this was the time of year and season for kings to go to battle following the winter. David, in his privilege, decides to stay home. He's not sick. There is not a government crisis in Jerusalem. David just has the luxury to be able to be home while his army is out fighting on his behalf. He is king and is operating in his power and privilege.

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<sup>6</sup> Although many psalms are attributed to David, there is no way of knowing for certainty whether they were actually written by him or by someone else writing in the style of David.

He wanders onto his balcony and notices naked and very married Bathsheba on her roof below, bathing. Robert Alter alludes to the power dynamics at play even with the different height of the balconies. “The palace is situated on a height, so David can look down on the naked Bathsheba bathing, presumably on her own rooftop.”<sup>7</sup> The king’s roof is higher and is able to look down to an inferior rooftop.

Alter subtly alludes to the idea of power dynamics even within the architectural design of the two buildings. He summons her to the palace. He does not go, but instead sends messengers to retrieve her for himself. The text does not reveal whether she goes willingly or goes to him under duress. Nonetheless, David has sex with Bathsheba and impregnates her.

Some modern scholars, like Davidson and Brueggemann believe that David raped Bathsheba, that she was obliged to respond to the king, keep silent and do as he desired. Others, like Bailey and Nichol, suggest that Bathsheba was a willing participant who was fully aware of what she was doing when she went to her rooftop to bathe. Alexander Abasili in his research challenges the reader to consider how ‘rape’ is defined. One should interpret cautiously. Noting that “biblical Hebrew does not have a direct equivalent to denote the English word ‘rape’...underscores the cultural and contextual differences between the Hebrew biblical conception of sexual-coercion and the contemporary understanding of ‘rape’.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Alter. “The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel,” (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1999), p.250.

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili. “Was It Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined” *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011)1-15. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2011 DOI: 10.1163/156853311X548596.

Whether David ‘raped’ Bathsheba in the contemporary understanding of the word or not, what remains true according to the text is that David used his resources, his power, to get what he wanted (sex) from an inferior with less power who was married. Larry Spielman goes deeper by supporting the idea that David abused his power. He references ancient Israel law concerning a woman’s menstruation cycle.

In ancient Israel, the law required a ritual cleansing bath at the conclusion of her menstrual flow. After such a bath, Bathsheba, according to religious law, would still be sexually taboo for several more days. When David took Bathsheba he would have known this law...There was a strong cultural/religious reason why David ought not to have sought her sexually.<sup>9</sup>

If the argument is that Bathsheba was indeed violated, she as the victim, similarly to the Nigerian victims of clergy abuse referenced by Ademiluka, remains silent until she has to reveal to her offender that she is pregnant. The text does not reveal if her silence is out of fear of retribution, shame, or manipulation, but with what small amount of agency that she does have, she sends word to the king that she’s with child. As a leader, David has a choice with how he uses his privilege and power. He could tell the truth, but he does not. Is this an instance in which David has allowed his ego to govern? Perhaps he thought that he was above the laws that had been established by his ancestors. In an attempt to keep his own indiscretions with Bathsheba hidden, he sends for her husband Uriah, who has been fighting (covering/protecting his leader), to return home. He has the power to make such a request knowing that it will be carried out, knowing that no one would ever question the king, just as very few have the courage to question a faith leader.

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<sup>9</sup> Larry W. Spielman. David’s Abuse of Power. Word & World. Volume XIX, Number 3. Summer. 1999. Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

It is all too disturbing in our contemporary faith community contexts that those who serve our leaders are often put in positions that compromise their own integrity and knowledge for what is right out of fear of retribution, fear of not being believed, shamed or fear of losing their jobs. Then there is the tension of wanting to be loyal, of not wanting to tarnish the reputations of some of our most celebrated and decorated leaders while going against what should be done. Later in this narrative only the prophet Nathan has the courage to challenge David's actions and he does so in a parable, allowing the reader to hear God's displeasure with what has transpired. Is this a moment of grace or compassion that will later foreshadow a model for restorative justice?

David, based upon scripture, was a very revered warrior and leader. "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."<sup>10</sup> He was chosen by God. This of course challenges my theology. For if I believe that God is sovereign and makes no mistakes, which I do, then am I also saying that God purposely chooses flawed leaders who are anointed? David A. Bosworth offers the following when commenting on scholars who "mistakenly imagine that David's dubious qualities require a negative evaluation of Yhwh as unjust."<sup>11</sup> He writes:

What kind of deity would "be with" such a murderous usurper? Some readers understandably prefer to question Yhwh's justice rather than conventional human notions of justice. These readers expect the Bible to teach what they know to be false, namely, that good and evil are rewarded or punished in this life. The "doctrine of retribution" is grounded in part in a selective and simplistic reading

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<sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 18:7 (NRSV).

<sup>11</sup> David A. Bosworth "Evaluating King David: Old Problems and Recent Scholarship" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol 68., 2006 p191-210. p.191

of the Deuteronomistic literature. A critical reading of the Books of Samuel suggests that Yhwh has purposes independent of ethics.<sup>12</sup>

If God has a purpose that is beyond human understanding, this puts the responsibility of ethics and integrity on the faith leader. As per Alexander Abasili: Bailey and Nichol suggest that responsibility falls on Bathsheba and that she was opportunistic and wanted to be married to the king. She wanted power and knew the king would be watching her, so she used her body to seduce him.<sup>13</sup> I follow Spielman's reference to: "Stephen Covey's "proactive model" of leadership [that] focuses on the leader's responsibility in any given situation. Ultimately, the leader has "response-ability"-The ability to choose your response. The leader must be in control."<sup>14</sup> This ability, this agency, this freedom to choose the response as well as how one responds is a power paradigm.

Being in covenant with God while navigating human flaws places leaders in a conundrum, especially those faith leaders who fail to acknowledge their shortcomings. How does one be intentional about their humility and respect towards themselves and others as a self care practice? How does this evolve with how leaders handle power and the congregations that they serve?

In the David-Bathsheba narrative, David uses his agency as a way to attempt to control and manipulate the circumstances that he created. Uriah returns home upon the king's orders and is invited to share a meal at the palace where the king tries to get him

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili. "Was It Rape? The David and Bathsheba Pericope Re-examined" *Vetus Testamentum* 61 (2011)1-15. Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2011 DOI: 10.1163/156853311X548596.

<sup>14</sup> Spielman, p.252.

drunk in hopes that he will go home to Bathsheba and be intimate with her. Those who are around king David, his messengers and other servants who have done his bidding, must now keep silent while hiding his indiscretions. Now, they are part of this circle to help protect his image. Uriah was loyal, to his men, to his king, and most likely, to Bathsheba. The messengers and servants had to report back to David, as the royal coverers, to see if Uriah and a pregnant Bathsheba had been intimate. Upon hearing that they had not had sexual intercourse, David sends another messenger, another person privy to the king's indiscretions and yet must cover them, he sends a letter to his leader on the front lines. The subordinate is ordered to send Uriah to the front lines of battle. Again, we see loyalty and a desire to please, or perhaps fear is the driving force that keeps the servant acting ethically. Uriah is disposed of assuredly when David requests that while on the front lines, Uriah's fellow soldiers, his military brothers, are ordered to retreat thereby leaving Uriah alone on the battlefield to die. David's actions constituted an abuse of power. David was a shepherd boy, servant to Saul, ancient celebrity and military hero. To those that he loved, served, and led into many victorious battles, David amassed great fame, notoriety, and power, but that was not enough to sustain him. He was father, son, sibling, friend, warrior, lover, writer, dancer, shepherd, fugitive, actor, musician, king, and part of the messianic line. But he also was a flawed leader who acted inappropriately. Robert Alter, in his commentary on David said it best:

The story of David is probably the greatest single narrative representation in antiquity of a human life evolving by slow stages through time, shaped and altered by the pressures of political life, public institutions, family, the impulses of body and spirit, the eventual sad decay of the flesh. It also provides the most

unflinching insight into the cruel processes of history and into human behavior warped by the pursuit of power.<sup>15</sup>

The David narrative gives a biblical model of a leader who abused his power while being revered by those he governed or served. Granted, he was a political leader who was in relationship with God as evidenced by scriptures that are attributed to him like Psalm 23. His abuse of power does transcend to a modern day problem among African American clergy both male and female. Yes, in all fairness, admittedly there have been African American female clergy who have and do abuse their power. However, there is less evidence and research on female clergy abuse. Additionally, when the abuse is in the form of sexual abuse, men tend to commit the majority of offenses. Although it did not focus on clergy, in one study of offenders, Franca Cortini and Theresa A. Gannon report:

Males are responsible for approximately 95% of all sexual offenses, and females are responsible for approximately 5% of all sexual offenses. Females tend to recidivate at a rate of 1.5%. This means that out of 100 females who have offended sexually, only 1-2 of those females will be arrested for a new sexual offense.<sup>16</sup>

As delicate of a matter as this may be, offenses occur from both gender identities. Cortini and Gannon give cause to consider that these offenses are going on in the Black church.

Many African American clergy have at some point in their careers studied, taught or preached on King David. I wonder if these same faith leaders have considered

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<sup>15</sup> Robert Alter. "The David Story: A Translation With Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel," (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1999), p.250.

<sup>16</sup> Franca Cortini and Theresa A. Gannon. (Eds.) "Female Sexual Offenders Theory Assessment and Treatment" West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lcrp.12008> [https://saratso.org/pdf/Females\\_Who\\_Sexually\\_Offend\\_FAQ\\_Edits\\_2018\\_06\\_13.pdf](https://saratso.org/pdf/Females_Who_Sexually_Offend_FAQ_Edits_2018_06_13.pdf). accessed February 2, 2022.

all of who and what David embodied, including the flattering and less flattering moments of his existence and leadership?

Moving beyond the David narrative, another biblical text that addresses abuse of power by clergy and continues the theme of sovereigns, shepherds and servants is found in the book of Ezekiel.

The word of the Lord came to me: Mortal, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel: prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: Thus says the Lord God: Ah, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fatlings; but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak, you have not healed the sick, you have not bound up the injured, you have not brought back the strayed, you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.<sup>17</sup>

The Ezekiel passage addresses the greed of ancient leaders and calls out the failure of the shepherd to lead effectively, as well as God’s response to such circumstances. Just as this subject matter is complex and has many moving parts, so does the book of Ezekiel.

Stephen Cook gives the best overview of the general theme when he writes that the book “moves from judgment and punishment to promise, salvation...and peace for all God’s people.”<sup>18</sup>

Scholars like Katheryn Pfisterer Darr agree that Ezekiel is an elite and sophisticated intellectual based on his style of writing, his political expertise, and use of

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<sup>17</sup> Ezekiel 34:1-4 (NRSV).

<sup>18</sup> Stephen L. Cook, “Introduction & Commentary on Ezekiel,” in *Theological Bible Commentary*, ed. Gail R. O’Day and David L. Peterson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 243.



vocabulary.<sup>19</sup> Tova Ganzel, puts the span of time for the entire book as being a “twenty-two year period in Jewish history.”<sup>20</sup> This prophetic book is written in the style of oracles, visions, and allegories as God speaks to Ezekiel in an effort to warn those who are living in exile in Babylonia as well as the remnant left in Judah that there will be a price to pay for their sins and disobedience. Scholars agree that the prophet Ezekiel “is steeped in the theological traditions of Zion and of the Holiness School. Despite being a deportee, he never loses his priestly identity.”<sup>21</sup> He is part of the Zadokite priesthood, which, again according to Cook, was the “highest ranking of Israel’s sacral orders.”<sup>22</sup> A high ranking leader is calling out other leaders who have failed to lead their flock effectively. Cook explains the importance of this further by explaining that the dwelling of the glory of the Lord, the sacred presence of the Lord, is dependent upon the children of Israel, God’s chosen and beloved people, remembering to be holy as God is holy, even in exile, even when their place of worship and sacrifice has been destroyed.<sup>23</sup> In a modern context, the idea of living holy as God is holy in the midst of heartache and

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<sup>19</sup> Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, “The Book of Ezekiel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections. Vol. VI,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1086.

<sup>20</sup> Tova Ganzel, "Commentary on Ezekiel." in *The Jewish Study Bible: Tanakh Translation*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1033.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen L. Cook, 2010. "Introduction to the book of Ezekiel." in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsome, and PHEME PERKINS (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1162.

<sup>22</sup> Cook, “Introduction & Commentary on Ezekiel,” 241.

<sup>23</sup> Cook, “Introduction to the book of Ezekiel,” 1161.

suffering is an arduous task for anyone, and yet this is an unspoken assumption when thinking of the role of clergy.

As the prophet writes to audiences both exiled and not, I am reminded of my own ancestors. I am aware of African kings and queens, persons of status who in some instances may have been hunted like animals, bought and subjected to captivity. And just as the enslaved tried to preserve some of their collective and individual African identities during secret meetings away from their oppressors, through their prayers for freedom, through their songs of hope and trust, and through other oral traditions, the Babylonian exiles are trying to, as Ganzel states, “preserve their national identity outside of the land of Israel, without a Temple, its sacrificial worship and the leadership of the priests, and without a Davidic king.”<sup>24</sup> When we get to our key verse, Ezekiel addresses the shepherds who have neglected their flock. In this context, according to scholars, the shepherds are the kings of Israel and they have acted inappropriately. They have abused their power. Their leadership skills are in question. Ganzel explains further, “Ezekiel contends that Israel’s kings have acted improperly and must be replaced...as a prophecy of redemption, the emphasis is not on the condemnation of the kings, but on the establishment of a better monarchy.”<sup>25</sup> Ganzel’s analysis constructively contributes to my critical exploration of the contemporary African American clergy context, that the goal is not to condemn our leaders but mutually find a better and healthier way in which to support them in leadership as well as hold them accountable when there has been evidence of misuse of power and authority. It’s important to note that this also calls for

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<sup>24</sup> Ganzel, "Commentary on Ezekiel," 1033.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 1095

the shepherd to acknowledge or name the areas in which they are weak to those who are entrusted and may be able to help.

Ego is attacking the shepherd from within. Ego is feeding greed, the belief that boundaries and ethics can be compromised because the threat of being exposed is minimal, given the authority and power of the leader. Refusing to get help for mental health issues is also ego related and a denial of vulnerability. The superhero, the shepherd who refuses to admit his own struggles and weaknesses, eventually scatters his sheep. Even if one leaves the fold, damage has occurred.

But just as enslaved people of African descent in U. S. history believed that freedom would be theirs, towards the end of the book, Ezekiel prophecies about God restoring God's people. The bones can indeed live again, but we must be able to decipher how that looks in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How can the cycle be broken? How can there be learning and healing between shepherd and sheep? Cook rounds out my argument of the idea of a false sense of invincibility from the shepherd when he references Ezekiel's theological aim. He says that the prophet is trying to, "awaken the audience to their false sense of security and their complacency and to convict them of their total need of God."<sup>26</sup>

The role of African American pastor, historically, was not one linked to royalty, power and privilege. To fully understand the office of pastorate from an African American perspective and grasp how the use of power and privilege evolved into being misused, an overview must be taken that moves us from ancient Jerusalem to the shores of the new Americas in the 17th century. And while African American female faith

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<sup>26</sup> Cook, "Introduction & Commentary on Ezekiel," 243.

leaders existed during this time, because of gender biases, and social norms, the pastoral role was predominantly occupied by men.<sup>27</sup>

Ye, Thou I Walk through the Valley of the Shadow Of Death

One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood.<sup>28</sup> -Olaudah Equiano

Neither Black history nor African American studies were part of the curriculum at many early learning institutions of my youth. Of course students studied the core classes consisting of English, Mathematics, and Science. There was a familiarity with the name Shakespeare and the scientific brilliance of Einstein. However, Black History or Indigenous History as it relates to the United States was not part of the basic lesson plan unless it was a special event like the anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr's birthday or a commemoration of his historic "I Have A Dream" speech during the 28 (29) days of February. The focus was on the top black historic contributors to society. It was as if the same group of famous personalities of color were placed in yearly alternating rotations. There was rarely a deeper exploration to discover and learn about other less prominent persons of color.

Systemic constructs contributed to a lack of information being distributed regarding the history of a people. There is a similar construct that believes that one group

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<sup>27</sup> This project focuses on African American male clergy abuse of power and its correlation to self-care however, this writer believes that over the course of time, African American female clergy have also abused their power and that there is also a connection to how self-care has been practiced.

<sup>28</sup> Olaudah Equiano. *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano; or, Gustavus Vassa, the African, written by himself. Vol. I.* London: Printed for and sold by the author, [1789]. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery: A Transnational Archive* (accessed January 29, 2022)

of persons is inferior to another. If the inferior group gains knowledge, they become a threat to the other group, disrupters, and destroyers of the status quo. The oppressed will have power and will eventually overtake the oppressor. Scholars like Milton Sennett, Albert Rabateau, and Carter Woodson, are a small sampling of those who were committed to preserving black heritage. Moving from the first testament character, King David, and the Ezekiel passage challenging the leadership style of the shepherd, to the new Americas, my quest is to explore the origins of the black church leadership model that prevails today, looking for ways in which the black male leader has either been negligent in his care of self, resulting in his abuse of power. I enter this conversation from the context of voices of those who were taken from their homelands on the continent of Africa.

When we ready to leave de Kroo boat and go in de ship, de Many-costs snatch our country cloth off us. We try save our clothes, we ain' used to be without no clothes on. But dey snatch all of us. Dey sey, 'You get plenty clothes where you goin'.' Oh Lor', I so shame! We come in de 'Merica soil naked savage. Dey say we doan wear no clothes. Dey doan know de Many-costs snatch our clothes 'way from us.' -Kossula Cudjo Lewis<sup>29</sup>

Power paradigms, economic stability, religious and political beliefs, fueled a fifteenth century world in which Portugal and Spain wanted to ensure that it had enough workers for its land. Albert J. Raboteau writes: "The Spanish depended on the labor of native peoples to turn the lands they conquered into profit-making colonies...but warfare, overwork, and disease drastically reduced the native population, so the Spanish colonists began requesting the Crown to allow them to import African slaves to solve their labor

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<sup>29</sup> Zora Neale Hurston. *Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo" Amistad* (An Imprint of Harper Collins Publishers: New York, NY. 2018. p.54-55. Edited by Deborah G. Plant.

shortage.”<sup>30</sup> Other countries soon followed the same system of acquiring forced labor through capture and trade.

Probably one of the largest and heinous acts of betrayal and abuse of power from black leaders on the continent happened in the 16th century. It was during this time that African leaders agreed to hunt and trade their own people and people from neighboring villages. They were familiar with the land and provided intel that led to the destruction of villages and the entrapment of many of its occupants.

During the Middle Passage, a period that spanned nearly 400 years, millions of innocent people endured the 80 day trans-Atlantic voyage and arrived in the Americas naked, weak and bound in chains after being stripped of their royal clothing. Royal not because all of them were monarchs and rulers, because some of them were, but royal because they were proud, strong, and had a sense of belonging and connectedness as rich as the fertile soil. As previously suggested, prior to being captured, in many of the African regions, there was patriarchal governance and leadership. Olaudah Equiano writes: “Like the Israelites in their primitive state, our government was conducted by our chiefs, our judges, our wise men and elders; and the head of a family with us enjoyed a similar authority over his household with that which is ascribed to Abraham and the other patriarchs.”<sup>31</sup> There was evidence of faith or spiritual leaders during this time. Equiano continues: “Though we had no places of public worship, we had priests and magicians, or

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<sup>30</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. “*Canaan Land: A Religious History of African Americans*” New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 1999.p.5.

<sup>31</sup> Olaudah Equiano.”The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African, Written by Himself. Vol. 1. First American Edition. New York: W. Durell, 1791. pp. 19-31.

wise men. I do not remember whether they had different offices, or whether they were united in the same persons, but they were held in great reverence by the people.”<sup>32</sup> Jacob K. Olupona clarifies with regards to the amount of power held by these early black leaders. “Sacred authority in Africa differs from stereotypical Western notions of secular leadership insofar as African monarchs, chiefs, and elders fulfill both political and religious roles.”<sup>33</sup> Research cannot determine whether these faith and spiritual leaders overextended themselves to the point of abusing their power while leading within their communities. But what is evident is that prior to American enslavement, black male leadership prevailed on the continent.

Now labeled as cargo, these former rulers were stripped of their power and authority. Once all occupants were haggled over, families divided, and sold to the highest bidder, they were given articles of clothing. Perhaps this was done in an effort to not offend their women and children, or make the men folk perceive inferiority in any way. I imagine that whatever clothing was given, that the fabric became symbolic as being a cape in a number of ways. This symbolic cape, as tattered and worn fabric may have been used as protection from the scorching sun, to clean numerous wounds after being whipped by the oppressor, to guide someone towards freedom while crossing a river, or to wrap a newborn child as its mother took her last breath in captivity.

It became evident that all those who had survived the trans-Atlantic passage from their various tribes and villages, arriving speaking different languages, with different

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Jacob K. Olupona. “African Religions: A Very Short Introduction.” New York, NY: Oxford University Press. 2014. p.38

customs, would not be returning to their African homelands. Now they had to acclimate themselves to life in captivity obeying the rules and laws of the land. For those who felt pangs of guilt for how the enslaved were treated, Christianization of their property became important. Raboteau writes: “From the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, conversion of the slaves to Christianity was viewed by the emerging nations of Western Christendom as a justification for enslavement of Africans.”<sup>34</sup> This idea was further fueled by the belief that the enslaved were better off spiritually and materially from contact with Western civilization compared to coming from a life of paganism, nakedness, and bestiality.<sup>35</sup>

Within the broader context of this discussion, the ancestors of many African Americans who were transported to the shores of the new Americas, had to obey their masters and mistresses as slaves. This ensured the physical bondage, but not control over the spiritual mind, which was problematic for the slave owner. Raboteau chronicles De Azurara: “though their bodies were now brought into some subjection, that was a small matter in comparison of their souls, which would now possess true freedom for evermore.”<sup>36</sup> For slave owners, maintaining the status quo and producing at the highest level meant being able to have full and complete power over the enslaved person’s mind, body, and soul. This translated into being able to control the narrative. To that end, and to ensure that their authority was not questioned, clergy were hired to preach specific messages to the enslaved.

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<sup>34</sup> Albert J. Raboteau. *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. p.96.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.97.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.



Historians detailed that each week, the enslaved were allowed to gather with their masters in attendance to hear a censored or redacted Christian message from select biblical texts. These sermons utilized portions of the bible that emphasize obedience and present hierarchical relationships, especially those between master and slave, as part of the God-ordained order. Raboteau quotes a message given by one white preacher to a group of enslaved: “You slaves will go to heaven if you are good, but don’t ever think that you will be close to your mistress and master. No! There will be a wall...If you want to sit behind this wall, you must do the language of the text ‘Obey your masters.’”<sup>37</sup> The black preachers in the sight of overseers would preach the same message out of fear of retribution. Many of them were illiterate and could not read but according to Raboteau, they had “native wit and unusual eloquence.”<sup>38</sup>

According to those who attended, there was no mention of Jesus. The message was that the slaves should obey and not steal. When the enslaved grew tired of these repeated messages by way of preaching, they decided to change the narrative. Somewhere within these oppressed groups, leaders emerged. “When de niggers go round singin’ ‘Steal Away to Jesus,’ dat mean dere gwine be a ‘ligious meetin’ dat night. De master...didn’t like dem ‘ligious meetin’s, so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night.”<sup>39</sup> At these clandestine meeting places located either in the slave quarters, or down away from the main house along areas known as hush arbors, a mixture of what had been brought from their African

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.213.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.213.

homelands was combined with a less threatening and oppressive theology, one that spoke to a more futuristic theology steeped in hope and trust that God would guide them out of bondage just as the Israelites had been guided by their leader, Moses. The message was that their freedom would be seen and lived out on Earth or eternally in heaven. Either way, they would be free. This was how the shepherd would lead his flock. This is how the displaced flock would again be connected to some of its rituals and practices of their former ancestral homes. This meant investing in community by obeying a leader and since the preacher was the most visible, he became the most trusted.

The lack of formal academic training by many of the enslaved leaders to interpret text, as well as their oppressor's fear of becoming inferior and irrelevant, leveraged the ability to continue to persecute Africans who had been brought to the new Americas. In the midst of this, the role of the enslaved pastor evolved allowing for a certain amount of privilege and power. Raboteau gives this former slave's account of slave preachers.

Amanda McCray declared that the preacher on her plantation, though a slave was exempt from manual labor. Conscious of his own importance, he went about "all dressed up" in frock coat and "store bought shoes." As long as he didn't interfere with other slaves' work, he was allowed to hold services whenever he wished, and frequently he traveled to neighboring places to conduct prayer meeting.<sup>40</sup>

Though enslaved, it was this freedom, this privilege, to travel to other locations for meetings that served as a model for modern day clergy and the argument for the importance of self care. Rabateau continues with the full schedule of an enslaved preacher.

I had a meeting appointed at a freedwoman's house...I left home about seven o'clock on Saturday evening, and arrived there about ten; we immediately commenced the meeting and continued it till about daylight...After breakfast we went two miles further, and held another meeting till late in the afternoon, then

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

closed and started for home reaching there some time during the night. I was very much fatigued...so much so that I was not able to work the next day.<sup>41</sup>

As enslaved pastors continued to technically be bi-vocational, their context and social location continued to change. Between the Great Awakening and the Civil War, there came the emergence of free Black churches where the enslaved and free could gather to worship. There was a need for the Black pastor to not only be a spiritual voice, but also to be a social justice voice. When it became overtly evident that slavery would be declared unlawful, many African Americans needed and desired to still have some sort of structure and order as they navigated their newfound freedom. With the establishment of Black Churches in the south and north, Pastors became the spiritual and faith compasses for former slaves. These pastors and former servants gained more power and underneath it all, the cape remained attached.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER TWO: *LOOK UP IN THE SKY, IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S PASTAH*

I got shuteye, when a man believes his own lies...starts believing that he has the power. He's got shuteye because now he believes it's all true. And people get hurt...good God- fearing people...and then you lie. You lie and the lies end, there it is. The face of God staring at you straight. No matter where you turn. No man can outrun God.<sup>1</sup>- Nightmare Alley

### Here I Come To Save The Day...Again

In the movie, *Nightmare Alley*, set against the backdrop of a traveling circus, a newcomer, Stan, has asked seasoned hypnotist and illusionist, Pete, to show him a few tricks of the trade. After seeing how financially successful Pete has been in convincing the crowd, Stan wants to know how he too can become a great hypnotist, and share in the wealth. Pete warns Stan that what he does is not real but just part of the entertainment and shouldn't be taken seriously. Pete's fear is that Stan will actually start to believe that he has supernatural powers instead of just being an illusionist. Pete warns of the dangers of believing one's own lies for it would cause harm to innocent people who want to have something to hope for. In a sense, this act of betrayal becomes an ethical and moral issue. Marie Fortune, while addressing clergy sexual misconduct, explains her ethical analysis as the offending clergy taking advantage of vulnerability. She writes:

The congregant, client, employee, etc. is by definition vulnerable to the minister/counselor, i.e., in multiple ways, she/he has fewer resources and less power than the minister. When the latter takes advantage of this vulnerability to gain sexual access to her or him, that constitutes a violation of the mandate to protect the vulnerable from harm.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Nightmare Alley*, directed by Guillermo del Toro, featuring Bradley Cooper and David Strathairn, et al (TSG Entertainment, Double Dare You Productions, and Searchlight Pictures, 2021) film.

<sup>2</sup> Marie M. Fortune and James N. Poling. "Sexual Abuse by Clergy: A Crisis For the Church." Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock. 1994. p.7.

Though Nightmare Alley was fictional, the idea of power dynamics and the dangers of abuse to innocent persons by clergy holds true and is relevant. Real conversations about abuse and power in relationship to our spiritual faith leaders is not an easy topic to broach. This conversation requires the spotlight in public discourse that has primarily focused on the powerless victim's 21st century mantra of "me too" to shift to the powerful alleged perpetrator's mantra of, "not me, I would never do that."

The topic of clergy sexual misconduct did not gain much notice among the general public until it made national headlines. Jeffrey Ferro writes:

In June 1984, the Diocese of Lafayette, Louisiana, secretly paid \$4.2 million to the families of nine children who had been sexually abused by Father Gilbert Gauthé, Jr. Some four months later, in October 1984, Gauthé was indicted on charges of rape and possession of child pornography... the Gauthé case was significant because the story received broad news coverage in the United States...the New York Times and the Washington Post picked up the Gauthé story. As a result, news organizations began to expand their coverage of the issue of clergy sexual misconduct.<sup>3</sup>

Keeping in mind that any study of one segment or group of persons should not be interpreted as representing their entire group as monolithic, I believe that the foundational problem plaguing certain members of clergy within the African-American church is a sense of entitlement and invincibility. By feeding this phenomenon, and not checking the ego, a form of mental care, clergy have set themselves up for failure exhibited by their misconduct and ultimate abuse of power. This chapter aims to take a closer look at abuse of power and the neglect of self-care by looking at case studies and seeing if in fact that lack of self-care contributes to clergy malfeasance.

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Ferro. *Sexual Misconduct and the Clergy*. New York, New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2005.p.15.

### Your Rod And Your Staff

As the institution of the Black Church moved from the enslavement era into the twentieth century, the focus was geared toward social justice and racial equality. Many African American clergy, while wearing their capes, were at the forefront of leading these campaigns from the pulpit into the communities in which they served. C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya write:

In 1870 an A.M.E. clergyman, Rev. Hiram Revels of Mississippi, became the first black citizen and the first black senator elected to Congress. Also Rev. Richard H. Cain served four years in the state senate and two years in the House of Representatives; he became a bishop in the A.M.E. Church in 1880...A large number of black clergy were involved in local and state politics.<sup>4</sup>

When addressing in further detail the rise of power given to African American clergy, during this period, Lincoln and Mamiya address a significant point in the conversation of origin of power given to black male clergy. They write:

In a society dominated by patriarchal values, the Black Church became especially important for black men who were denied the normative masculine role in every area of social life. From the period of slavery until the civil rights era, adult black males were usually called “boy” by white southerners and only the black minister was given a title such as “preacher” or “Rev.”<sup>5</sup>

Because these leaders were the voice of the people and employed by the people, there were expectations and assumptions that the pastor would be accountable to the people.

Lincoln and Mamiya continue:

Black clergy, particularly those who were employed full-time by the larger churches in the community, were expected to speak out about the pressing issues of the day, especially about the problems of racial discrimination...One woman said regarding this role, [the pastor’s role], in an oral history interview [stated]:

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<sup>4</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya. *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990. pp.204-205.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.206.

“What are you [minister] scared of? The city is not paying you a salary, we poor black people is taking care of you.”<sup>6</sup>

The above statement is an example of the burden of wearing the cape [protector/savior] and power that was given to black male clergy during this time. Some African-American male clergy who were not also social or political advocates of justice in broader society also gained popularity through the recording industry by recording their sermons. If they had the ability to also sing, their celebrity was as great if not greater. Lerone A. Martin, in his work on the rise of the celebrity of African-American clergy through the entertainment industry writes about the tension of the Black Church even in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to be relevant within American culture. In this instance, I would like to suggest that the cape, instead of being a figurative source of protection that the pastor wore as the voice of the people, now became a figurative costume piece to entertain a broader audience. Martin writes:

From 1925 to 1941, African-American clergymen, many from the rural South, became nationally known preachers through a little-known partnership with the major record labels of the day... They rode the wave of the Great Migration, selling their records to the millions of African-Americans who had moved to the cities but missed the chanted folk sermons and call-and-response style of the rural churches in which they had grown up... The sermons don't take off and start selling until the preachers begin to recreate a black evangelical worship service in the studio pulpit.<sup>7</sup>

African-American pastor, Rev. C.L. Franklin, was an example of one of these pastors who migrated from the south, and gained notoriety as a preacher and singer

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Lerone A. Martin "African-American Clergy Became Celebrities: "Preaching On Wax"." *Faith and Leadership*. Duke University Leadership Education at Duke Divinity. 2015. <https://faithandleadership.com/lerone-martin-african-american-clergy-became-celebrities-preaching-wax> (accessed December 2021).

through his recordings and tour dates. He was also one who, with all that he had accomplished, faced allegations of impropriety. Franklin biographer Nick Salvatore writes:

A remarkable man, Franklin's preaching and involvement in black music and culture have had a lasting impact on the black church...Although his education, like that of many Baptist ministers of the period was limited, Franklin was a powerful preacher...Almost immediately, he had worshippers filling the pews and lining the walls of New Salem Baptist Church. Even rumors that a teenage girl in his congregation was pregnant with his child did little to slow his rapid climb both in his church and in the National Baptist Convention<sup>8</sup>...Recordings of his sermons found their way into the home of many-making him a household name...[He] was a man of large and exuberant appetites as well as exceptional abilities. He was a star with influence in politics as well as pop culture.<sup>9</sup>

Rev. Franklin possessed power and for better and unfortunately sometimes for worse, he chose to use it as he saw fit. In the midst of his impropriety, there was no one on record willing to speak up to hold him accountable. In that regard, he was untouchable.

### So Where's the Beef?

The thought of black people having been oppressed, now empowering faith leaders, some of whom became eventual oppressors and abusers was not something that seemed fathomable. Speaking out against the pastor was not done. There were no known guidelines or precedence within black communities for holding a pastor accountable for inappropriate actions especially if the offense was sexual in nature. This is not to imply that abusive behavior did not take place. I am suggesting, however, that there was not

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<sup>8</sup> Carl Ellan Kelley Franklin was in fact Rev. Franklin's daughter and in later years was recognized by the Franklin family as the biological half-sister to the other Franklin siblings. Rev. Franklin was never charged with any misconduct, mainly having sex with a minor.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Salvatore. *Singing in a Strange Land: C.L. Franklin, the Black Church, and the Transformation of America*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 2006.



much documentation to support the claim of abuse within the early black church. One had to look at other non-black faith communities in order to glean some sort of protocol for clergy abuse. Models of false invincibility, entitlement and power dynamics were evidenced as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as chronicled by Marie Fortune. She writes:

He had created [Plymouth Church] in his own image – big, prosperous, a little flamboyant, apparently self-sufficient-truculent, even – but for all that strictly a Congregational church. And when Henry Ward Beecher made his dramatic entry, flung his soft hat under a settee, wrapped his cape about him and sat looking from left to right and right to left over a sea of faces, he knew that there, in the midst of his own, he could do whatever he pleased...He could do no wrong.<sup>10</sup>

Fortune goes on to tell of Victoria Woodhull's publishing in 1872 of allegations of sexual impropriety and how Beecher's congregation supported him instead of the woman that he committed adultery with because he was too important of a leader within the community to face any repercussions.<sup>11</sup>

Just as Beecher could do no wrong in the late 1800's, the same was true for a segment of African American pastors who were gaining popularity, power, and access to anything they wanted. Preachers like Franklin and others were gaining more and more popularity through their recordings, exposure on the radio, and speaking engagements. As these caped leaders became more known in the political, social justice, and or music arenas, their local churches began to flourish.

The birth of the megachurch was born and black faith communities with memberships north of 2000 attendees each week started to pop up all over the country. Anthony Pinn suggests that baby boomers moving to suburban areas also contributed to

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<sup>10</sup> Marie M. Fortune. *Is Nothing Sacred? The Story of A Pastor, The Women He Sexually Abused, and the Congregation He Nearly Destroyed*. Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

the growth of megachurches, but he suggests that there was not one specific factor involved. He writes:

As of 1991, an estimated forty-five churches in the United States had five thousand or more worshipers on a given Sunday. Now there are more than four hundred such churches, thirty-five of which are black churches...Many of these churches began to develop in part spurred by the movement of black “baby boomers” into suburban areas. However, this does not account for the success over the past several decades of figures [the pastors/preachers].<sup>12</sup>

The implication is that many of these megachurches who started with small congregations were and are successful due to senior leadership. The pastor is the brand. The pastor, at this stage is not only “pitching” salvation, but he’s “pitching” the church, trying to get folks to buy in by attending their church, and for some, they’ve been souled, while others have been sold.

#### The Call of the Shepherd and the Supersize Me Culture

Bi-annually, association meetings are held within the United Church of Christ. These meetings comprise a regional group of churches that connect to a particular conference which connects to the national body of churches. I attended one of these meetings, and part of the conversation shifted to the lack of church growth in the conference compared to a prominent mega church within the region, LCBC (Lives Changed by Christ), noted for having one church with several locations throughout the state of Pennsylvania. From the change of architecture, to the coffee shops in the lobby, the supervised childcare where parents can digitally arrange to drop off and pick up their kids before and after service, to the theatre style seating, many people, especially younger

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony B. Pinn. *The Black Church in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

people have abandoned traditional worship settings. This along with churches being able to provide social services and other activities during the week has supersized congregations and further fueled the megachurch phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> Pinn goes further: “There is no doubt that these churches have the financial resources and personnel necessary to do good work with respect to socioeconomic and political issues. And many have programs going on for so many hours of the day that they are referred to as “seven-day-a-week” churches.”<sup>14</sup> Being able to maintain resources like day-care centers, credit unions, after-school programs, substance abuse programs, clinics, feeding and housing programs meant that the pastor, still wearing his cape, needed to appeal to the congregation in giving. Pinn quotes (now former) Baltimore mega- church pastor (and now Bishop) Frank Madison Reid, III: “The central tenet that all of the megachurches have is meeting the needs of God’s people.”<sup>15</sup> Part of the megachurch phenomenon involved a theology of prosperity, also known as prosperity gospel. Pinn continues:

It is likely that churches will interpret the message of the New Testament so that Jesus speaks favorably to the acquisition of goods. Marketing and public relations companies will help churches develop the language and appeal necessary to increase their audience... This prosperity thrust is much softer on controversial issues and tends to amplify individual growth over national consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> According to research done by Aaron B. James, a megachurch is defined as any church having more than 2000 attendees on average each week. (see note) James, Aaron B. 2013. "Rehabilitating Willow Creek: Megachurches, De Certeau, and the Tactics of Navigating Consumer Culture." *Christian Scholar's Review* 43, no. 1: 21-39, <http://ezproxy.drew.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.drew.edu/scholarly-journals/rehabilitating-willow-creek-megachurches-de/docview/1443781388/se-2?accountid=10558>

<sup>14</sup> Pinn., p.137.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p.138.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.138.

The megachurch phenomenon, speaks to a culture that equates abundance with being better based on aesthetics and popularity. Churches with very large congregations suggest that more people are able to give of their resources including their finances, time, and skillset, to support the church. This type of abundance allows for the pastor to navigate a sort of privilege as part of being the face or the brand of the church. Some people are stimulated by the visual and flock to worship settings that have an appealing look and emotional feel to them. To that end, when one thinks of their faith and where they would like to worship, the desire is to search for the church that satisfies or fits this criteria. The role of the pastor fits into the equation of deciding where a potential new member may join. In a culture of options and distractions, the perceived assumption by a potential congregant is that the pastor is able to be the following: motivating, encouraging, accessible, perform all of the sacraments, and is theologically astute.

The expectation is that the pastor will excel at all of these things. In doing so, he ties his cape on even tighter, is praised by his congregation, forcing him to try to maintain the ideal of perfection. Whether it be a megachurch or storefront, the pastor has committed to serving a perfect God's imperfect people at a great cost not only to himself but to his congregation. In their study on African American pastors, Anson Shupe and Janelle Eliasson-Nannini reference Edwin Bratcher's work *The Walk-on-Water Syndrome* which speaks to this lack of accountability for clergy as they gain more power. They reference Bratcher's term, "pastorology":

When the laity place the clergy on a pedestal, the clergy give a helping hand, enjoy the intoxication of the higher elevation, and strive to stay on the pedestal... The paradox is that although the Bible teaches that pride and the desire to be like

God are the sources of man's tragic fall, it is precisely at this point that we as ministers most often succumb.<sup>17</sup>

I agree with Bratcher and also believe this problem of "pastorology" can stem from an underlying character flaw that, for these purposes, I will call a "superhero complex." Max Carey explains in further detail:

A superman (woman) type, in his or her own chosen field, can do anything, accomplish any goal, meet any deadline, solve any problem, overcome any obstacle. They believe that they know all of the answers. They will do whatever is necessary to get the job done 24/7/365. They prefer to work alone. They desire to be controllers. They are addicted to achievement...They look at their many good qualities and inflate them. They white out their flaws and weaknesses. They become convinced that they *are* what they so much want to be: superhuman.<sup>18</sup>

I would like to believe that those who inhabit the superhero complex are leaders who, at the core, desire to serve. Being a person who has a heart of servitude to others is certainly an admirable trait. However, as Fortune continues to remind us, there is a question of ethics and accountability that has not been so readily addressed when looking at members of clergy who have abused their power particularly as it relates to sexual abuse towards women. She explains:

When clergy cross sexual boundaries with parishioners and counselees, they have betrayed the trust placed in them and have failed to fulfill their role as clergy persons. No matter what other personal ethical issues may be involved – such as adultery, addiction and burnout – the core issues in clergy misconduct is the violation of clergy professional ethics rather than of personal sexual ethics...it is not enough for the offending minister to take responsibility for his or her actions,

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<sup>17</sup> Shupe, Anson and Janelle M. Eliasson-Nannini. *Pastoral Misconduct: The American Black Church Examined*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012. p.171.

<sup>18</sup> Carey, Max. *The Superman Complex: Achieving the Balance that Leads to True Success*. Atlanta, GA: Longstreet, Inc., 1999. p.16-17, 79.

but that the church must also respond if there is to be prevention, justice – making, and ultimate healing for all parties.<sup>19</sup>

Though she approaches the topic of clergy abuse from the context of women who have been sexually violated, her model for accountability and ethics crosses a myriad of areas of abuse when addressing clergy malfeasance.

### Boys Will Be Boys: When Good Men Behave Badly

There is a societal double standard. If a woman commits adultery, especially with multiple partners, she's too often villainized and scrutinized. She's called a whore among other adjectives. If a man does the same, he's just being a man with needs. He is, to use a colloquial phrase, "sowing his oats." In some opinions, his sexual prowess is celebrated and becomes even more seductive and attractive. No one wants to be the one to cast a negative light on those who have, in the public's perception, been model citizens. No one wants to tarnish the reputation of those who have done great work and left powerful legacies that have benefited many. However, I believe that awareness that can stop abuse and perhaps enable healing calls for accountability and that means being transparent. There has to be the willingness to address the (negative) harmful actions of those whom we have held in high esteem, not for the sake of hurting or discounting their contributions to society but to raise the importance of the need for boundary sensitivity. Communities also would benefit from looking at its own tendencies to create delusions of deities among its leaders without care or consideration to the individuals who may or may not have been offended victimized by their actions. We place capes on fallible humans with

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<sup>19</sup> Fortune, Marie M. and James N. Poling. *Sexual Abuse By Clergy: A Crisis For the Church*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994. p.ii

unreasonable expectations. When they falter or fail to live up to the ideal, the consequences are great affecting the leader, the survivor, and the communities in which the leader serves.

There has been much written about icons such as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Rev. Dr. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Some writers stop short of including both men's penchant for women. Other writers allude to their affairs but fail to name their indiscretions as sexual misconduct. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. embodied the capes worn by early African – American clergy. He was flamboyant. He walked in his privilege by succeeding his father in ministry. He pastored an affluent megachurch in Harlem and used his power and influence to have a successful career in politics becoming a congressman. He also had a weakness for beautiful women. Though his achievements were great, his political star waned due to “his reckless disregard for congressional proprieties. His pleasurable rambles around the world, compounded by headline – making lawsuits, cost him his seat in Congress.”<sup>20</sup> His cape was damned. For this section on good boys behaving badly, and for the purpose of this project, I will focus on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. When highlighting the ways in which Dr. King may have abused his power, Michael Eric Dyson writes:

It is a scene that is too painful to conjure from many of Martin Luther King Jr.'s supporters. After spending his last night delivering one of the most brilliant speeches in his career...King allegedly rendezvoused with two women at different points of the night and in the early morning fought with a third female “friend” before being gunned down later that evening at the Lorraine Motel... we can still endorse [the] belief that the more honestly we confront King's moral lapses, the more we are able to extract from his failings as a sense of his authentic humanity and a full grasp of his towering achievements. To avoid exploring King's

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<sup>20</sup> Wil Haygood. *King of the Cats*. New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993.p.i.

weaknesses is to deny him the careful consideration that should be devoted to any historic figure...[to] pretend King didn't sin is to subvert the healthy critical distance we should maintain on all personages, the lack of which leads to charges of uncritical black hero worship.<sup>21</sup>

Dyson references Rev. Dr. Ralph Abernathy's 1989 biography on Dr. King where he believed that what made a legend a true legend was the ability for the public to embrace Dr. King's accomplishments as well as the areas where he was less than perfect. We see the superhero wearing the cape but the cape is damned. Dyson continues:

King's true greatness can be understood only when we get rid of the false expectations of human perfection in our heroes and leaders. King was a spiritual and moral genius, but his genius had nothing to do with unrealistic notions of purity. King's was, paradoxically, and imperfect perfection. King may not have been perfect but he was perfect for Americans who desire racial justice. His moral aim of transforming America was perfectly suited for the times and places in which he acted with decisive courage.<sup>22</sup>

It is important to note that in the crossing of sexual boundaries among clergy, those who are targeted by the clergy are not limited to any specific gender. Prominent African American bishop, Eddie Long, rose to fame by subscribing to a prosperity gospel and promoting traditional family values. He too gained the attention and favor of world leaders who shared his conservative values, such as how he gave voice to strong opposition to LGBTQ+ rights during his sermons. While he was wielding this influence and power he came under investigation for engaging in inappropriate behavior with young men. Shupe and Eliasson – Nannini write the following:

Long was accused of having committed sexual improprieties on four former male members of a youth organization that Long had chartered and even mentored. Specifically, the men claimed Long had repeatedly coerced, cajoled, and seduced them into homosexual acts, violating his clerical authority and fiduciary

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Eric Dyson. *I May Not Get There With You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, New York: The Free Press a Division of Simon & Shuster Inc., 2000. p.155-157.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



responsibility to them. During the years of sex, he had purportedly offered them new cars, cash, exotic trips, jewelry, and free living accommodations in church – owned houses.<sup>23</sup>

Known for displaying his toned physique by wearing tight fitting muscle shirts while in the pulpit, his health quickly declined as he lost weight. He settled out of court with the plaintiffs and denied any wrongdoing up until his death.<sup>24</sup>

### Line ‘Em Up

Members of African American clergy, like Bishop Long, have gained status through their preaching and branding and some have even experienced congregational growth and have become mega church ministries. Nonetheless, boundaries still have been crossed and care has not been taken either personally or congregationally, leaving way for behaviors and actions that deviate from that which is acceptable and in some cases, legal. I believe that it is important to note that this type of behavior (deviance) and the treatment of such behavior calls for a more extensive medical and psychological study that this project does not allow for. It does, however, meet the ongoing criteria for abuse of power and there being some sort of correlation to self – care neglect. There has to be some self - awareness at some point that a problem exists, which means being willing to remove the cape. This type of accountability fosters change. Nonetheless, for our

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<sup>23</sup> Anson Shupe and Janelle M. Eliasson-Nannini. *Pastoral Misconduct: The American Black Church Examined*. New York, NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2012. p.162.

<sup>24</sup> Shupe and Eliasson-Nannini go into greater detail regarding Long on pages 158-168 which further supports the claim of misconduct and abuse of power. Long’s death occurred after Shupe and Eliasson-Nannini’s work was published. He maintained that his goal was to be a father figure to the young men.

purposes here, Shupe, Stacey, and Darnell have addressed their definition of deviant behavior as it relates to clergy in the following manner:

Pastors [who] misuse trusting people; exploit them sexually and financially; and/or manipulate them with excessive demands grounded in spiritual authority. [These] pastors range from the tempted clergyman alone in a counseling session with a distraught, vulnerable woman to a pedophile priest to a reckless, high living sociopath who ruins lives and even family fortunes through religiously-based fraudulent investment schemes.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the ways in which Shupe et.al have defined deviant behavior from clergy, I would like to suggest that deviance can also model itself in the theology of some pastors. According to Yonat Shimron, Rev. Burnett Robinson, a Bronx, New York Seventh Day Adventist Black pastor recently spewed the following from his pulpit during a sermon on wifely submission found in the letter to the church in Ephesus:

In this matter of submission, I want you to know upfront ladies, that once you get married, you are no longer your own. You are your husband's. You understand what I'm saying? I emphasize that because I saw in court the other day on TV where a lady sued her husband for rape. And I would say to you gentlemen, the best person to rape is your wife. But then it has become legalized.<sup>26</sup>

Pastor Robinson has used his platform of power, patriarchy and skewed theology to justify a man raping his wife. There are other examples of deviant behavior from African American clergy. In a chilling example of clergy abuse of power, Rev. Tracy Burleson, former pastor of a small Baptist church in Houston, Texas is suspected of masterminding a fire that destroyed his church to collect on the insurance money, committed adultery,

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<sup>25</sup> Anson Shupe, William A. Stacey and Susan E. Darnell. *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America*. New York, NY: New York University Press, 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Yonat Shimron. "The Best Person To Rape Is Your Wife," says Bronx pastor. Religion News Service. November 22, 2021. <https://religionnews.com/2021/11/22/the-best-person-to-rape-is-your-wife-says-bronx-pastor/> (accessed March 2022).

pressured his congregation to increase their giving, and emotionally abused his son by manipulating him into killing his wife for insurance money. Casey Glynn writes:

A Texas pastor convicted of capital murder in the May 2010 shooting death of his wife has been sentenced to life in prison without parole. Prosecutors say the Houston-based pastor Tracy Burleson paid his son, William Fuller, to kill Burleson's 56-year-old wife to collect on a \$60,000 life insurance policy. Pauletta Burleson was found shot to death outside the couple's home in May 18, 2010. Burleson told police he and his wife had an argument on the night of the shooting and he left to buy snacks from a neighborhood store. Burleson said when he returned, he found his wife lying dead outside. However, investigators didn't buy his story. Further investigation led police to the pastor's son. When they questioned Fuller, they say he cracked and made a shocking confession... Fuller admitted that he shot and killed his stepmother in a murder-for-hire plot allegedly devised by his father. It is a claim Burleson denied. "I would never tell my son to do anything like that," Burleson said of the allegation. "I didn't pay my son. I didn't have no money to pay my son." Investigators said the pastor and his son were also having an affair with the same woman, Tyonne Palmer-Pollard. Officials said she assisted the gunman after he called and told her the pastor's wife had been shot. According to police reports, Palmer-Pollard picked up the gunman, drove him to get cleaned up and assisted in destroying the gun. She was charged with tampering with evidence. Burleson's 21-year-old son, William Fuller, remains jailed without bond awaiting trial on a murder charge.<sup>27</sup>

The Burleson case on the surface personifies clergy abuse of power. However, since I am not being trained in psychology or restorative justice, it is hard for me to look at this instance as one that resulted because of a lack of self – care. Nonetheless, I reference this case because it raises a deeper question as to whether deviant behavior falls within the parameters of being a mental health issue. If so, then the Burleson case would certainly

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<sup>27</sup> Casey Glynn. *Tracy Burleson, Texas pastor convicted in wife's murder, sentenced to life in prison*. CBS New. October 3, 2011. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/tracy-burleson-texas-pastor-convicted-in-wifes-murder-sentenced-to-life-in-prison/> (accessed February 2022).

fall within the purview of lack of care being at least a factor contributing to the outcome of abuse.

It is interesting what we can learn from children and their limericks, poems and things. I found a bit of irony in the following classic:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,  
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.  
All the king's horses and all the king's men  
couldn't put Humpty back together again.<sup>28</sup>

Many historians have given various origins of the famed English nursery rhyme. Some have suggested that the main character was based on a member of noble distinction and power who fell from grace and could not regain his prestige. Just as the main character in the nursery rhyme teetered and lost their power and influence, so have there been clergy who have fallen in the eyes of those whom they serve by abusing their power and causing harm.

African American pastor, Rev. Kirbyjon Caldwell, started out as the senior pastor of a small congregation. With hard work and a dedicated team of followers, the ministry grew to over 18,000 members on the roll. Located in Houston, Texas, Windsor Village was one of the largest predominantly African American Methodist congregations in the country. He served as spiritual guide to presidents and other powerful leaders. He had power, resources, and the love and respect of a flock that willingly obeyed as they followed his leadership. But somehow, all of that was not enough. Ethical boundaries

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<sup>28</sup> Mother Goose. *Humpty Dumpty Sat On A Wall*. n.d. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46951/humpty-dumpty-sat-on-a-wall> (accessed March 27, 2022).

were crossed relating to false investments and wire fraud. Following public denials of any wrongdoing, Pastor Caldwell finally confessed and was found guilty.<sup>29</sup>

His actions were a blatant model of abuse of power through deception. The shepherd, the superhero that had been instrumental in spearheading the growth and wellbeing of his flock must now live with his choices and actions. While the congregation is presently fortified and stable enough to withstand this storm, what happens to smaller congregations where they have fewer resources and are forced to try to put the pieces back together again?<sup>30</sup>

### Though I Walk Through the Valley of The Shadow

The suffering element of being a pastor is often forgotten especially if his suffering is not readily tangible or publicly visible. By the time the suffering shepherd is recognized or exposed, it's usually too late. The damage has been done. The shepherd, the community, and the flock have been affected in some way. The congregation, unaware of there being an underlying problem, is now in a state of confusion.

Wynnetta Wimberley delves into the topic of depression as a form of mental illness among Black pastors. Going untreated, depression can have an adverse effect on all parties involved.

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<sup>29</sup> Bob Smietana, "Kirbyjon Caldwell, former presidential adviser who promoted 'good success,' sentenced to prison," *Religion News Service*, January 14, 2021, <https://religionnews.com/2021/01/14/kirbyjon-caldwell-former-bush-obama-advisor-megachurch-windsor-village-chinese-bonds-prison/>

<sup>30</sup> Though he was forced to step down from being the senior pastor during his legal battles, Rev. Caldwell was still allowed to teach Bible study at Windsor, was relegated to Lay pastor while his wife was elevated to Senior Pastor. He was still quite visible in the life of the church. In January of 2021, he was sentenced to six years in prison. See <https://abc13.com/kirbyjon-caldwell-houston-indictment-megachurch/9631555/>

In the African-American religious tradition, we have historically made haste to “hide the nakedness” of our clergy leaders. Often times those attempts at covering up human frailty have proven detrimental to the pastors themselves as well as the congregations they are called to serve... the admiration and respect [that clergy] receive can be attributed to a historical view of them as being the mouthpiece or representative of God. Unfortunately, this cultural sacramentalization of the black preacher sets pastors up for failure through isolation, internalized / external expectations, and a loss of self-awareness. It is from this framework that the etiology of depression can materialize in African-American pastors.<sup>31</sup>

In Wimberley’s work she focuses on a case that became very high-profiled within the Black church community. A young African American pastor was unable to walk away from his congregation to get the help that he needed for his mental health and as a result, he ended up dying by suicide. In her work focusing on depression in African American clergy, Wynnetta Wimberley addresses the untimely death by suicide of Georgia pastor, Rev. Teddy Parker in 2013.<sup>32</sup> No one on the outside saw the warning signs that he was in emotional distress, though members of his inner circle knew that he struggled with his mental health. His family and congregation were unaware that he suffered from depression. Months prior to his death, Pastor Parker had been instrumental in saving a man’s life who also had suicidal ideations.

It is important to note that mental health issues do not discriminate and can affect anyone at any time. Clergy and other leaders and decision makers are not immune. There may be some tension in categorizing death by suicide as a form of abuse. Some may be of the opinion that it’s insensitive and disrespectful considering all of the lives affected. Certainly, that is not the intention. However, when one defines abuse as harm or being

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<sup>31</sup> Wynnetta Wimberley. *Depression in African American Clergy*. New York, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.p.5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

injurious to oneself or others, death by suicide aligns with this definition of abuse. In this instance, the superhero, the shepherd positioned to protect and save others, was not able to save himself. Kirk Byron Jones references Thomas Merton's theory of contemporary violence which I believe provides a landing spot for this idea of self-harm as a form of abuse. He writes:

There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence... [and that is] activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence... there is confirmed medical evidence that the consequence of chronic self-neglect - namely, stress - weakens the immune system, thereby making us more vulnerable to colds and diseases, and possibly even to some types of cancer. Stress can cause sleep problems, leaving us fatigued and vulnerable to accidents as well as illness.<sup>33</sup>

The details were never made clear as to why Pastor Parker died by suicide. Did stress play a factor? Those left behind mentioned a sermon that Parker had preached lamenting that there were times that he felt like he could not hear God. The Parker case reinforces this notion of there being these puzzle pieces, (wellness, power, abuse) that intersect with one another which, if left unchecked, virtually lead to pain and suffering, some fatal. This theory of contemporary violence, along with mental illness in the form of depression may have been a factor in Pastor Parker's death. Wimberley writes:

A distinctive feature of depression is that it can present differently in men than it does in women. Along with fatigue, men are more likely to experience an increase in irritability. Their responses to others may translate as being testy, short tempered, brusque, or abrupt. Men who are experiencing depression typically also display a dramatic decrease in their connectedness with family members and friends...it is not uncommon for me to witness the devastating ways in which depression impacts the lives of clergy; more than just the depression itself, it often leads to substance abuse, workaholicism, extramarital affairs, financial impropriety,

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<sup>33</sup> Kirk Byron Jones. *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers*, 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2021.p.12.

an addiction to pornography, intimate partner violence, the spiritual abuse of authority, avoidance, and so on.<sup>34</sup>

So, should the sheep follow the shepherd if he is not well? Are there ways in which congregations have contributed to harming their own pastors unknowingly, thinking that they are helping them, when in fact they are causing more harm? Should we have more conversations regarding the varying degrees of mental health so that it is less stigmatized?

### Pastah Just Loves My Cookin'

There was a pastor who pastored a church in Harlem, New York. Though I was not one of his members, we often worked together at different funeral homes in the area. I was always amazed that he would have any interest in being in the rotation for families needing the services of a minister to say something over their loved one. He would oft times have one of his deacons drive him to the funeral home and wait for him. We often spoke briefly prior to services and he was always busy doing something, going to the next engagement, writing the next book, planning the next event. He preached at most of his three weekly services and facilitated a highly popular mid-week mid-day service for local workers who wanted to experience worship on their lunch breaks. He never slowed down. He often spoke of his alma mater and held a recruitment meeting in his church office for potential students. He was a large man and one that I would consider to be extremely overweight, obese even. And yet he never slowed. His church culinary staff prepared a wealth of food for those of us gathered. His plate was filled to capacity with food choices that were not healthy. And his staff made sure that there was no lack in case

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<sup>34</sup> Wimberley, p.10.



he desired a third serving. I am not certain of any underlying medical issues. However, I was saddened to hear that he had had a fatal heart attack while vacationing. His body no longer could withstand the treatment. This is not to say that his death could have been prevented. It does raise the question of whether congregations have a responsibility to intervene when they see that their superhero is flying rogue? What is the responsibility of lay leadership when the pastor is not leading from a place of physical, emotional, mental, and or spiritual wellness? Within many African American congregations, there are committees or ministries designed to care for the needs of the pastor and his or her family. Care includes providing meals, running errands, financial support, transportation, offering prayer or being a confidant. But are these pastor's aide ministries or organizations really equipped to fully handle or address when a pastor has crossed boundaries that include sexual misconduct, fraud, mental health issues, or physical neglect? At this point, who becomes the person or committee responsible for holding the pastor accountable for his or her actions? Wimberley writes:

Bishop Paul Morton references reports of the renowned founder of the COGIC Bishop Charles H Mason being found in his later years walking the streets of Memphis naked, while preaching. He alleges Bishop Mason suffered some form of mental breakdown attributed to a failure to relinquish his duties as head of the COGIC movement. Bishop Mason led the organization for 57 years until his death in 1961 at the age of 95. Morton intimates the followers of Bishop Mason may have urged him to maintain his leadership position despite his age and mental acuity, which proved an unhelpful and ultimately, uncaring communal response.<sup>35</sup>

Should the pastor have a responsibility to disclose to his senior leadership that he needs help? Wimberley continues:

Bishop Paul S Morton, founder of the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship, acknowledged receiving a diagnosis of bipolar disorder after experiencing a very

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.59-60.

public “breakdown” during a ministry engagement in the Bahamas. Similarly, during a sermon, Bishop George Bloomer announced he was taking Prozac, a medication prescribed to him when he had what he identifies as a “nervous breakdown.”<sup>36</sup>

### Stress: The Road to The Final Frontier

Lights, cameras, action! The term has been a Hollywood directive given by directors to indicate to the various technical departments that a production was ready to start filming. In recent years, the same directive given on backlots and soundstages has transferred into pulpits and sanctuaries as congregations try to stay relevant in an ever-changing society that has a short attention span and far too many options. Pastor Zachary Tims pastored a congregation that he and his now former wife, Riva, grew from a small meager gathering to a membership of over 7000 members. His charm along with his conservative evangelical teachings gave him crossover appeal, allowing him to land the interest of television producers who produced his weekly broadcast globally. He moved into the spotlight where the lights were bright, and cameras were rolling. The pastor achieved what many would define as success. The newfound popularity and church growth meant more preaching, more speaking engagements, more traveling, more hours of work, responsibility, physical and emotional wear and tear. Saying no was not an option if Pastor Zach wanted to continue to be relevant in an ever - changing world. With a known history of being a recovering addict, he secretly relapsed. Unfortunately for Pastor Zach, he underestimated the dangers of insobriety and died unexpectedly on August 14, 2011 in a New York City hotel room. His mother, former wife Pastor Riva

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.60.

Tims, and two staff persons flew to New York to identify his remains. Writing about her experience, Pastor Riva shared:

I've been married to this man for 15 years, and I loved the person I once knew—before the money and the fame. I loved the man who was sold out to God and believed in holiness and integrity. Even after his infidelity was brought to light and we went through the long, painful process of ending our marriage, I always thought one day the man I knew would return. I am not saying he no longer had integrity, but he changed. I wanted to see him the way I once knew him. I wanted my friend back. That hope died the next day at the morgue. As I stared at Zach's lifeless body, I began to weep. I wept for the man I had married. I wept for the father of my children. I wept for what could have been but now could never be. My sadness was soon mixed with anger. I couldn't help but think that if he hadn't been allowed to keep ministering without being healed, if he hadn't been allowed to travel without accountability, if he had humbled himself and taken more time away from the pulpit after his infidelity was exposed, I might not be standing here.<sup>37</sup>

In another instance, I vividly recall my own childhood pastor. He was not seminary trained, was bi-vocational, and rarely took any time away from his pastoral duties beyond a two-week vacation towards the end of the summer with his wife and kids. If there were any emergencies or deaths, he and his family would return early from their travels in order to be present and offer spiritual support. He really never took time for himself because he was trying to be a good father and husband during vacation time. Being pulled in a multitude of directions without taking the time to properly rest, I believe, took a toll on his health. He too did not live long.

Many clergy, like Florida pastor Zachary Tims and my childhood pastor, do not realize the toll of stress that comes with being in ministry. Approaching the dangers of stress through a psychological as well as theological lens, Mary Anne Coate suggests that stress is a hidden conflict in ministry. The tension lies in a lack of balance. “The problem

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<sup>37</sup> Riva Tims. *When It All Falls Apart: Finding Healing, Joy, and Victory through the Pain*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012. p.187.

of strain and stress in ministry is encapsulated in the mismatch of human need and demand and the capacity to give.”<sup>38</sup> While I agree with Coate, I would like to also suggest that this mismatch, this imbalance, goes deeper and if left unattended can have a harmful domino effect that can ultimately dictate the degree of efficacy that is possible in how one leads. And the problem of leading while wounded, still wearing a cape that has become a burden, flying off-balanced should not be the prevailing norm for African American clergy. Something has to change. Conversations must be had.

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<sup>38</sup> Mary Anne Coate. *Clergy Stress: The Hidden Conflicts in Ministry*. Edited by Derek Blows. London, England: SPCK, 1989.

### CHAPTER THREE: *CHECK YOUR CAPE AT THE DOOR*

Everybody can't handle what the pastor is going through...when you know something negative that the rest of the congregation doesn't know...when you know that he has a drinking problem...when you know that he or she is a womanizer or manizer or whatever...when you know that he is dealing with the demons of drugs...when you know that his wife wants to file for divorce or her husband wants to file for divorce, when you know all these things, you've seen the pastor's derriere... Every pastor needs a circle of friends, not a lot, a handful of brothers and sisters to whom and with whom he can talk.<sup>1</sup>

I grew up serving in church and started my faith journey through the portal of music. I was part of the adult choir as a youth because I was gifted with the ability to sing. I also was able to play an instrument and became the church organist while still a minor. Upon accepting my call to also minister, I was placed in the very sensitive predicament of having a certain amount of power and privilege. To this day, I still acknowledge that I am privileged. Admittedly, however, there is also a little apprehension because of my uncertainty to be able to get a group of African American male clergy in a space whether virtual or in person to be transparent about the acknowledgement and growing concern about clergy abuse of power in correlation to self-care. Unfortunately, I know members of this faith cohort for which I am a part, who have abused their power in one way or another. I also know clergy who have not exercised healthy self - care practices and as such, have not always led well. I believe that there is an unspoken rule that one does not tattle or speak out of turn. We have been taught to suffer in silence, to suck it up, to pray and not tell anybody but God. While my belief in the power of prayer is great, I also believe that by not addressing sensitive subject matters such as abuse of power and care of self continues a most unhealthy cycle

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Woods 2022 Anonymous Interview.

that does not foster healthy leadership skills. And yet, as much as I knew that these conversations needed to happen, I was apprehensive. I wondered if anyone would agree to be interviewed by me. I was not concerned about securing lay leadership for my research, though I imagined that most of them would only want to speak to me anonymously. I did have some uneasiness regarding finding clergy who would be willing to be interviewed. Within my context, I am aware that doing this project is, in some ways, committing to be a whistleblower. But it was my hope that potential interviewees would move past any reservations as a way of getting to a foundational concept faith leaders need to address the issue of abuse and care with hope of finding ways to be preventative. I formulated a series of questions initially that really focused on the stigma surrounding mental health and African American clergy. I was troubled that there were clergy who had died by suicide or suffered from depression, anxiety, or other addictions and the best that anyone could come up with were cliches and what I call “church speak” sayings like “it was the Lord’s will” or telling grieving congregations that more prayer was needed, or that “Satan was busy.” I lamented seeing the exhaustion and loneliness that comes with doing ministry. I disliked the consequences suffered by all who had been affected when a pastor abused his or her power and congregations were left without the tools to continue whole and well. I have witnessed survivors who have questioned their theology, faith in God and ideas about organized religion. I have known of pastors who have died prematurely because their bodies could not handle the demands of going nonstop in the name of serving their congregations. And while I personally believed (and still believe) in the power of prayer, I also believed that there was a need to hear from the caped crusaders themselves. What would they feel comfortable in answering? What would be

off limits? I did not expect any of the interviewees to openly admit to having caused harm to another person or abused their power. Doing so would have automatically shifted my role from interviewer to mandated reporter. I decided that it would be more productive for the interviewees to not speak about themselves. I settled on questions that included wanting to know how the interviewees considered the relationship between self-care and abuse of power:

- Some think that the neglect of self-care contributes to abuse of power by AA clergy. Others believe that neglect of self-care is used as an excuse to justify abuse of power by AA clergy. How would you describe the relationship, if any, between self-care and abuse of power?

I also wanted to know how clergy had managed in the midst of COVID. This was possibly the most personal of my questions but still one that I felt would not be deemed threatening to answer:

- How do you think COVID has impacted African American clergy mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally?

And finally, I knew that I could not let this idea of stigma surrounding mental health rest. It needed to be talked about.

- A prominent African American pastor died by suicide as a result of bipolar disorder and depression, while others battle addictions. There is still a stigma surrounding mental health, and utilizing treatment centers as a form of self - care. As a leader, in your opinion, what would be the best support a congregation could offer a faith leader who struggles with their own care of self and burning their capes?

I recruited a demographic that had either been seminary trained or had experienced a significant amount of time in ministry. Roughly half of my interviewees were either heterosexually married or in significant relationships. The other half were not partnered and identified as either heterosexual, same - gender loving, or bisexual. In this chapter, through a qualitative method, I gathered a sampling of individuals who were both clergy and held senior leadership positions within congregations. The age range was late 30's to late 70's. Denominations represented were Baptist, United Church of Christ, African Methodist Episcopal, Pentecostal, and Non-Denominational. 29% of those interviewed were women and 71% were men. The method of gathering data was via virtual interviews that lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. 29% of those interviewed requested to know the questions prior to the interview process. In the earlier stages of this data gathering process, I reached out to other members of the clergy on more than one occasion and no one responded. My interviewees were from various backgrounds and geographical locations. I will use pseudonyms in place of their real names in the body of this chapter.

- One pastor, Rev. Dr. Adams is in his seventies. He pastors a Baptist megachurch (over 3000 members) in Houston, Texas.
- Rev. Dr. Woods is also in his seventies and pastors a mid-size (under 1000 members) Baptist church in The Bronx, New York.
- Rev. Lawrence is in his late thirties and pastors a small United Church of Christ congregation (under 100 members) in Atlanta, Georgia.



- Dr. Edwards is in his forties and holds a Ph.D. in philosophy and is also an ordained minister and has pastored in the Baptist tradition, but now assists in a non-denominational setting in New York City, New York.
- Minister Charlotte is in her fifties and has served in senior leadership within the United Church of Christ faith tradition in the Baltimore, Maryland area.
- Minister Traci is in her forties and serves in senior leadership within the African Methodist Episcopal tradition in Central Pennsylvania.
- Overseer Cornell is in his forties and has a Pentecostal background, serving in Atlanta, Georgia and Houston, Texas.

The above represent a qualitative sampling of faith leaders who I thought could speak on the subject matter of clergy abuse of power and its relationship to care of self. I posed a total of four questions to each person separately and certain themes emerged. There was the theme of sacrificial theology in which the clergy person believed that they are supposed to give of themselves at all cost to their physical and mental being, as part of being perceived as doing ministry well. Another theme that resonated was that of stigma surrounding care for one's mental health. Finally, there was the question surrounding congregational accountability, with the idea that congregations are in need of guidelines that address overall pastoral care.

### Sacrificial Theology

Drawing from Augustine's concept of sacrifice, Dupont writes:

The true sacrifice is offered in every act which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship, every act, that is, which is directed to that Final Good which makes possible our true felicity.<sup>2</sup>

In making the decision to answer the call to ministry, some members of clergy take on the belief that one must be like Christ and take on a mentality of being sacrificial; feeling that serving means sacrificing oneself, or going beyond what is necessary or possible. For the sake of my prevailing theme, it means being a superhero. Though she is looking at the concept of self – care through a Womanist lens, Chanequa Walker- Barnes captures Baker – Fletcher’s theme of sacrificial theology that speaks to the male counterpart. This places clergy in the position of exercising less faith, having low self – esteem, and jeopardizing their health.

It is one thing to sacrifice the comfort of one's feet for a bus boycott. It is another to sacrifice one’s health out of a sense of low self-esteem and lack of self - love. The first practice is a form of asceticism and prophetic action. The second practice implies that our bodies, minds, and spirits have less value than those of husbands, boyfriends, brothers, [wives] girlfriends, sisters, children, and friends. It presupposes at an unconscious level, that others are worthy of the love, nurture, and compassion of God, [and] oneself is not.<sup>3</sup>

Walker – Barnes brings up this idea of suffering prophet and self- esteem. Does the idea of sacrificing over time lead to resentment and eventual acting out in the form of abuse? Asked if he thought that a clear argument could be made for there being a correlation between the abuse of power and the neglect of self- care, Pastor Lawrence spoke in depth on this concept of sacrificial theology.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony Dupont. 2018. “Homiletic Perspectives on Augustine’s Sacrificial Theology: Exegetical Approaches of Sacrificium in the Sermones Ad Populum.” *Annali Di Storia Dell’Esegesi* 35 (1): 141–60. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a6h&AN=ATLAI FZK180731001552&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

<sup>3</sup> Chanequa Walker-Barnes. *Too Heavy A Yoke: Black Women and the Burden of Strength*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014.p.146.

So, I think first of all for me, both the concept of self-care or the lack of self-care, and the abuse of power all have its foundation in sacrificial or the concept of sacrificial theology and sacrificial internal theology...like we were given messages from the church, that in order to be used of God, we had to sacrifice ourselves. You had to be holy and holy meant, don't do this, don't go there. Don't say this. Don't do anything worldly. And oftentimes exercise and self-care was considered to be things that would preserve the carnal but not necessarily strengthen the spiritual. And I think these messages serve as an undergirding kind of premise upon which the rest of the lack of self-care and abuse of power is built. So, I think the relationship starts with the erroneous and inaccurate message that the church has given us historically, that in order to say yes to the call of God and to effectively answer, we must not mess with Pauline language that's steeped in that whole dualism. Flesh is bad, spirit is good. As a result of that, I think that for me, the denial of oneself is a form of abuse of power. The lack of care is an internal form of abuse of power. It for me, it's an abuse of one's personal power, agency, and ability to choose life. And I think when that is at work, it manifests itself without checks and balances and in other places outwardly. So, it feels like branches to the same tree to me.<sup>4</sup>

Though he thought that my theses was: “an interesting one,”<sup>5</sup> Rev. Dr. Adams had a difference of opinion that abuse of power as a result of neglect of care was a driving argument as to why clergy malfeasance happens and he did not see the relevance of there being a strong theme of sacrifice.

I do know that the absence of self-care is prominent amongst our profession. I don't think it's that prominent in that regard. I think that the abuse of power, speaks to the whole issue. There was a Lutheran pastor's book years ago called *The Three Aphrodisiacs power, sex, and money*. He reduced everything to those three, you know, if anything went awry, you can always trace it back to those three. I think the abuse of power is just that. I don't think it's stimulated by the absence or neglect of self-care. Though I think, you know, a good argument can be made for that. But, I think again, it's just one of the factors, and not a profound propelling factor to be honest with you.<sup>6</sup>

Kirk Byron Jones supports Dr. Adams' assessment that self – care, though not the driving reason as to why clergy abuse happens, it certainly can be part of the conversation when

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<sup>4</sup> Pastor Lawrence 2022 Anonymous Interview.

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Dr. Adams 2022 Anonymous Interview.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

looking at cause. He includes an important part of relational dynamics by including what happens to clergy families that are affected by clergy abuse.

We are at a point when too many ministers and their families are suffering needlessly, and the tragic ripple effect is adversely affecting the health of our churches and communities. This suffering is well known, if largely undocumented, in our churches. There are far too many instances of domestic abuse, (emotional, verbal, and physical), adultery, parent - child emotional angst, and division among clergy families... We must come to see the connection between familial breakdown and personal overload more clearly. The result is lives that take on too much and do not allow sufficient time for self-care or for attention to family. Certainly, neglecting personal needs and ignoring self-care are not solely responsible for the escalation of violence, tension, and separation among clergy families; however, self - neglect is an important, if understated contributing factor.<sup>7</sup>

I believe that Jones makes a compelling point regarding the idea of sacrifice and how families of clergy are overlooked when we think about clergy care of self. First families are impacted by the choices that are made by clergy, the consequences when they cross boundaries or abuse power, and are to be considered in these conversations. The concept of sacrificial theology in the form of lack of self - care resonated in Minister Charlotte's assessment.

I have always struggled with the lack of self-care, and honestly didn't realize how important it was to eliminating abuse in my life from African American male clergy until I went to seminary. I think there's a direct correlation, because part of self-care is understanding who you are and what your needs are. And if you don't know what your needs are, then you can't take care of yourself. Part of that has to do with self-esteem. Part of that has to do with societal expectations. Part of that has to do with just straight up patriarchy in the church and not really understanding that you can say, "No I'm not doing that."<sup>8</sup>

Minister Traci, who admitted being a child born out of her own biological father's abuse of power, shared her experience on sacrificial theology based on gender reversals and

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<sup>7</sup> Jones, p.7.

<sup>8</sup> Minister Charlotte 2022 Anonymous Interview.

patriarchal paradigms that translated to her experience of a continuing cycle of abuse of power. Her viewpoint on sacrifice was not so much focused on what the offending clergy person had to endure, but on the survivor of the abuse. There is a sacrifice to make the choice to keep a child who was conceived as a result of emotional or psychological abuse. There is probably an even greater choice of sacrifice if that mother and child make the decision to stay connected to this same worshiping community and take on the shunning, ill-spoken words, and feelings of disgrace from those within the church.

The A.M.E. church gets interpreted, I think incorrectly, when it comes to women in ministry. My current pastor is a woman and people think well, you've elected bishops that are women, and you know, all of these wonderful advancements, women are holding higher officers in our church. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the patriarchy is not real... what I'm experiencing and what I would say I'm currently experiencing is an abuse of power at the hands of a woman, but it's informed by a male structure.<sup>9</sup>

What was clear to me in hearing Minister Traci is that the sacrifice is informed by the need to imitate how male clergy has led in order to be accepted. For Minister Traci, female leadership was not necessarily easier or treated her nicer. There was not a sense of sisterhood by way of gender. Her female pastor imitated her male colleagues in leadership style, sacrificing the opportunity to change the narrative, and became equally if not more verbally abusive as a leader. In this instance, a complete assessment cannot be made if the female pastor lacks care of self – esteem, or courage to lead from a clearer place of authenticity.

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<sup>9</sup> Minister Traci 2022 Anonymous Interview.

### The Need to Address Clergy Mental Health

Recurrent incidents of black pastors experiencing mental health crisis have come at a great cost to the African-American community. This crisis of mental health among those otherwise deemed to be pillars of the community has undoubtedly created a healthy cultural suspicion around the validity, integrity, and safety of the black church as a place of refuge for African-Americans and around the black pastor as her heralded leader.<sup>10</sup>

Towards the end of 2019 and into 2020, the world as many of us knew it, changed for good. Gradually, we were thrown into a global pandemic in which there was great loss of life, the overall effect of which may never be fully known. The Church universal was affected. The Black church in particular, traditionally relational in its worship style with things like call and response, weekly programming (i.e. feeding programs, day-care for children and seniors), within the physical building, and the social aspect of interacting with fellow congregants, ceased. Instead of preparing weekly sermons, pastors were now trying to stay alive, offer support to multiple families who had lost loved ones, figure out how to make their payrolls for church staff since giving plummeted, try to calm fears and offer spiritual support; trying to explain that which, at the time, was unexplainable. Worship services became relegated to multiple small squares on computer or phone screens. Some churches were forced to closed their doors for good. The Coronavirus made the world pause, that caused nature to reset, helped frame the theme of clergy mental health. I asked each interviewee how the coronavirus has affected them or if they felt more comfortable in talking about the theme of clergy mental health in a general context, space was allowed for them to do so. Pastor Lawrence responded:

I think the long-term trauma is still in its infancy stage, if not even been revealed. We are experiencing a delayed grief. We are experiencing the delayed results of isolation, and complicated grief; I survived while others did not. How do I feel

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<sup>10</sup> Wimberley, p.7.

about that? I still am trying to do ministry in a paradigm that I have not been adequately prepare for. I just think that Covid has completely changed, in my perspective, what a pastor, who a pastor is. I can speak for me, the pressure that I have felt as a pastor, a black male pastor during Covid has felt very different than any other pressures that I have felt during any other times of over 30 years of ministry. Partly because people needed something from me that I wasn't quite able to give to myself. And that there was some assurance that it will be all right. We didn't have that. We still don't. And there is no theology that would undergird, that would do justice for me and my integrity, to say everybody's gonna be okay, because it's clear that everybody won't be okay. And I think people were looking for me to do and be something that I could not be. I can't speak for God while having to hold my own grief and pain, and my own uncertainty and my own fear and anxiety... People in isolation tend to exacerbate mental health. Mental health issues tend to be exacerbated when we're in isolation, depression, and fear. I think that is what has come out. I've seen an increase in divorces, and breakups of relationships in my church. I've seen an increase of mental health breakdowns, being related to diagnosed mental illnesses, and in some instances undiagnosed mental illness. I've also seen an increase in isolation, people just trying to get by, just detaching and disconnecting from a place of fear. And now we're trying to have a conversation about re-entering a space and a place that for a lot of people they no longer trust to be safe not just because of the emotional trauma and not just because of the trauma around abuse of power, but now the trauma around "Is the space literally safe for my health?"<sup>11</sup>

Being able to reassure congregations and faith communities in the midst of unknowns, like COVID was and is a reality that I don't think clergy has fully found a way to mentally care for themselves in the midst of trying to lead. Dr. Adams had this to say regarding the issue of Black clergy mental health:

The lack of care, the mental issues that plague our profession is great. I don't think we address that much in the black church period. That's more amongst the clergy itself. The issues of anxiety, depression, self-esteem issues, all of those kinds of things, all of that is lack of care. For that, I know very few who would seek counseling or seek help in that area.<sup>12</sup>

Dr. Adams validated my initial theory prior to starting this project. There seemingly is an unspoken stigma surrounding mental health care for clergy and getting help from

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<sup>11</sup> Pastor Lawrence.

<sup>12</sup> Dr. Adams

professionals when needed. Having experienced mental illness in her family, Minister Charlotte had this to offer regarding how the United Church of Christ responds to issues of self-care surrounding mental health and those seeking ordination, or are already ordained:

In the United Church of Christ, there's a lot of oversight. We have Committees on Ministry who oversee the Members in Discernment process, who are people who are coming into authorize call. And, there are Committee on Ministry reviews if there is somebody who is up for a fitness review. This particular committee is the committee who would deal with any mental health issues. Because of the stigma surrounding mental health we're just getting people to understand addiction, like to go from addiction to bipolar disorder, and depression, and then suicide, is a lot for some congregations to take in. It requires a level of re-education and retraining on both the pastor's part, or the clergy person's part and the congregation. I think modeling healthy self-care, and healthy relationships and boundaries to our congregation is a great start as well. Because if I take care of myself, the message that I send indirectly to my congregation is that taking care of themselves is important as well, and being transparent about it.<sup>13</sup>

Supporting the idea that there is a stigma surrounding seeking care for mental health,

Overseer Cornell had this to say:

Okay, so with clergy, and in church, we're taught to have a certain posture or stance, and it comes across as self - righteous are perfect. And it makes a person feel like if they don't have this image, or this countenance, that they are less than, and I think because of that we lie to ourselves so much that we forget that we're acting. You get so caught in portraying the character of perfection, you forget that you are a mess, emotionally and spiritually. You know the right things to say. You know the right way to raise your hand, and make your voice rise and fall. You know how to do, what they call in my church, a quickness. You know how to dance, but you come to church bound and worried and stressed, you dancing you slip out, your clothes are wet, all of that stuff and you go home, to deal with the same thing. And not even tap in to what you really need. I'll say this, in the church, having therapy or mental illness, going to see a therapist and so forth those things are like taboo, because we're taught to pray. We're taught that stuff like that is a demon. If you know you're depressed, that's the devil. It's Satan trying to come against you in your mind and you need to pray the devil away. Okay, well I pray and I'm still battling in my mind. And you're battling in your mind because of a number of things. Some of it can be trauma from your past or your childhood, anything that can cause you to be uneasy or lose your focus.

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<sup>13</sup> Minister Charlotte 2022 Anonymous Interview.



We're taught that we're supposed to pray and take it to the altar, and leave it there. And yes, that is true. The Bible says to cast your cares upon him, because he cares for you. However, there comes a time when you need to go and sit down and see a therapist. I am saved, sanctified, filled with the Holy Ghost, and speak in tongues. A lay on hands, all that good stuff...I had issues with my father and it took me a long time to realize that with my saved and sanctified self, I needed to go see the counselor. I needed help.<sup>14</sup>

Overseer Cornell's statement is one that gets to the core of my theses. Members of clergy spend a great deal of time pretending that they are well and that whatever issues that they may have, can be addressed through prayer. While I believe that having a strong spiritual practice, whether that be prayer or meditation is important, I believe that it is equally important to be able to acknowledge the need for professional help. In this instance, the secular and the sacred must operate in tandem towards mental wellness. Unfortunately, there are those that, out of fear of being stigmatized, continue to serve community unwell thereby running the risk of causing harm to others.

#### Am I My Brother/Sister's Keeper? Are They Mine?

The theme of accountability also resonated during the separate interview sessions. As alluded to in the previous chapter, clergy and congregations are encouraged to hold one another accountable for the sake of the well-being of the pastor, the local church, and the longevity of the institution called the Black church. Many of the interviewees agreed that it was important to have accountability checks and balances in place to allow for the best opportunity for success for both clergy and the congregations that they serve. Not having some sort of accountability guidelines in place will be detrimental to both pastor and congregation. Overseer Cornell shared his regret at not taking the time to follow his

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<sup>14</sup> Overseer Cornell 2022 Anonymous Interview.

instincts when he saw a fellow musician and pastor friend while in town for a mutual friend's funeral. He felt like something was off when they greeted one another, but he failed to inquire further. When Overseer Cornell returned home, a few days later, he learned that his pastor friend had died by suicide. This was an opportunity for colleagues to check on one another, a form of accountability. Pastor Lawrence shared his thoughts on the subject of accountability and its importance regarding abuse of power among clergy:

I will say that absolute power corrupts, and any system that affords its leaders the model of absolute power is on a fast - moving track for self-destruction, with all kinds of boundary crossing, to include any number of things malfeasant including lack of integrity around finances, relational dynamics that are unethical. All of those things, I think, stem from the lack of accountability. And I think self-care is just another one of those areas that our African-American clergy, male clergy, has not been accountable to each other, and to our institutions all around.<sup>15</sup>

What I found interesting is that on more than one occasion, the interviewees agreed almost verbatim that counselors need counselors, therapists need therapists, and pastors need pastors. But above anything else, pastors need therapists. And having this professional clinical care should be included in pastoral benefits packages. This is one of the ways in which congregations or senior lay leadership can be a part of having accountability with members of clergy. It was also the opinion, particularly of Dr. Woods, that more African American congregations should embrace the idea of providing paid sabbaticals for clergy every three to five years. Dr. Edwards was able to provide a balance of psychological, medical, and spiritual context to these conversations that further supported my claim of the need for there to be more attention to how care and power are interconnected.

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<sup>15</sup> Pastor Lawrence 2022 Anonymous Interview

This chapter provided, what I believe to be a qualitative sampling that supports the need for more dialogue in which clergy and senior leadership can have safe spaces to be transparent about the things that challenge clergy in ministry as well as the things that would be beneficial in allowing them to serve better. Checking the cape at the door allowed for such dialogue to happen. What I also observed was that the female interviewees and one of the male interviewees were the only ones willing to address their personal challenges with mental health, clergy sexual misconduct, and general clergy abuse of power. There are many more voices and stories waiting to be heard and told. The underlying concern is that there are also other offenses, undiagnosed mental health concerns, new addictions, and other forms of abusive behavior.

#### CHAPTER FOUR: *SURELY GOODNESS AND MERCY SHALL FOLLOW ME?*

Nobody escapes being wounded. We are all wounded people, whether physically, emotionally, mentally, or spiritually. The main question is not, 'How can we hide our wounds?' so we don't have to be embarrassed, but 'How can we put our woundedness in the service of others?' When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we have become wounded healers.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous chapters, we gave a biblical model of a leader who abused his power. We then moved through an overview of Black people and their arrival from the continent of Africa and subsequent enslavement in America. While enslaved, leaders within their communities slowly rose to power and became the voice of the people. As opinions and laws shifted concerning the ownership of human beings, faith leaders gained more power.

The expectation was that these faith leaders would advocate for social, economic, and political reforms, as well as provide spiritual care for their congregants. I opined that the weight of being all things to all people all of the time created an unrealistic ideal much like a superhero that wears a cape. Wearing this figurative cape puts undue pressure on faith leaders causing many of them to neglect their care of self. This manifests itself in them either having burnout, leaving ministry altogether or having a false sense of invincibility which ultimately leads to abuse of power. It was noted that clergy abuse of power is not solely due to lack of sabbath. On the contrary, among African American faith leaders, Shupe et.al have extensively chronicled those who have committed criminal acts for which there has been no remorse.

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<sup>1</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen. *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1972.

We examined pastors, congregations that supported (enabled) their pastors even in the midst of their abuse of power, and questioned the ethical ramifications of there not being accountability markers. Interviewees challenged biblical interpretations and personal theological doctrines that informed their own experiences with power dynamics, patriarchy and misogyny leading to clergy misconduct. Some acts of abuse of power and misconduct are a result of self – care neglect. The lines may be more blurred with regards to being able to identify criminal behavior as being a result of lack of self – care. As Shupe and others have shown, there actually may be those who hold the office of pastor who are just bad pastors who have no remorse or intention of operating in integrity. And there are those who have a superhero complex and find themselves doing far too much at the cost of their own health and wellness. Ultimately, these pastors, given these underlying parameters, are leading their congregations only to discover that they cannot do so effectively. I believe that the combination of text interpretation, ingrained doctrines and practices, public opinion, ego and a desire to have a successful ministry at all costs function as a catalyst for why some leaders lead in ways that have not always been most helpful or healthful to the leader or the congregation.

When the cape is placed to the side, the cameras have stopped rolling, the titles, all of them including familial, have been dropped, the vestments have been hung up and put away and the door has been closed, there staring back in the mirror is one who identifies as male (or, for some, the true embodiment of cape wearing is that one doesn't inherently identify as male at all). Now one is looking at themselves in the mirror, exposed, vulnerable, in need. In Chapter Three, clergy needs were discussed, but what are some of the needs of Black men beyond the collar and the cloth? What is needed for the

Black male to be successful and whole? Nicholas Grier, in his *Hope to Keep Going* model, lists ten guiding principles:

I identify the following 10 tenants of human flourishing which must be nurtured in and among Black men, according to a *Hope to Keep Going* framework for care and counseling: 1)-Knowing and loving oneself deeply including one's own personality, family, and racial ethnic heritage; 2) -Feeling supported by life-affirming community; 3)- Committing to life affirming covenantal relationships with the Divine, other people, and self. This includes cultivating life affirming faith and spirituality that fosters deep connection with self, one's ancestors, the Divine, the global human community, and living creatures throughout the world. Such a faith and spirituality establishes, develops, and maintains local, national, and global cultures of justice and peace; 4)- Relating to others with respect, empathy, and caring concern; 5)- Acknowledging and valuing differences among human beings; 6)- Having fair opportunities to thrive in educational environments that equip one with skills necessary to achieve career success and contribute to the liberation of unjust societies, while having access to material resources needed to live a comfortable life above the poverty line. This includes fair opportunities to attain meaningful work and economic stability; 7)- Consciously participating in society at large at the local, city, state, national, and or global level; 8)- Embodying and maintaining a vision of oneself free from the grips of categorical racism, white racial ideology, sexist ideology, homophobic ideology, classist ideology, and all other forms of xenophobic ideology; 9)- Taking proper care of one's physical [and mental] body; and 10)- Discovering and connecting with a life purpose greater than oneself.<sup>2</sup>

Grier's list is extensive, but in my assessment, he covers a wide range of principles geared toward equipping black men to strive. Admittedly, as a black woman, there is something which rumbles inside of me screaming, "what about me, ain't I a woman?"<sup>3</sup> I am also aware that historically, it has been the woman that has undergirded the black church in every aspect in order to ensure its longevity only to be dismissed in some faith traditions from being able to preach (from the pulpit), be ordained, or be believed when she has been abused.

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<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Grier. *Care for the Mental and Spiritual Health of Black Men: Hope to Keep Going*. Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group Inc., 2020.p.8.

<sup>3</sup> Sojourner Truth. *Ain't I A Woman?* Women's Convention Akron, Ohio, 1851. Later published in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* on June 21, 1851.

As we continue these conversations about fostering new models by which to lead, one that protects against clergy abuse of power and neglect of self – care, women must be interwoven into the discussion. They are the support and the foundation behind/beside many of those who have found themselves on the side of actions deemed inappropriate. Wives of many clergy who have abused their power have had to smile, be silent, and appear as if nothing is wrong, while standing by their men. They have stayed in relationships for the sake of appearances and for the ministries. They themselves have been the victims of abuse behind closed doors. Grier recognizes the damage that has been done by Black men towards Black women in a misguidance of perceived power.

Black men have lived as people without power in the American imagination, except for unhealthy embodiment of power such as sexual prowess and domination over women. A comprehensive approach to care and counseling acknowledges that Black men have also operated out of identities that embody unhealthy constructions of power, which perpetuate cultures of male dominance and privilege detrimental to the mental health and overall well-being of Black women... It is essential for constructions and understandings of Black masculinity to hear the voices of Black women and reduce the inevitable likelihood that the forces of sexism will prevail in our concepts of Black masculinity sexist and machoistic visions of Black masculinity are life - denying and must be intentionally and actively resisted in a framework of care and counseling.<sup>4</sup>

Women are key components towards fostering healing and change. Both Grier and Jones are proponents of bringing in community as part of the accountability and healing process. I would like to suggest that in our focused context, that the community becomes the congregation. I contend that once the congregation has been strengthened, then the local community can be better served. The church is more whole.

Congregations must be diligent in doing all that they can to ensure that clergy are being compliant with boundary awareness and general clergy ethics. In turn,

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<sup>4</sup> Grier., p.9-10.

congregations and lay leaders need to ensure that true love does no harm. If a congregation loves their pastor, they will ensure that their pastor is getting the care that he or she needs in order to be well and whole. This will take being intentional about seeking out and utilizing educational and training resources.

Fortune and Poling, in their extensive work on clergy sexual misconduct offer tangible tools to foster healing both for survivors and abusers. For clergy, Fortune suggests that the process of having accountability and recognizing boundaries starts first with seminary. Prevention is the guiding factor.

Seminarians, as well as ministers already serving, deserve information and clarification of ethical standards for ministry. They also deserve a challenge to their naiveté about the role of pastor. They need to understand the nature of the power and authority of their role and responsibility that goes with it. They need to learn how to maintain boundaries in relationships with parishioners and counseling. They need to learn to care for their own emotional and sexual needs in appropriate ways. They need to be encouraged to seek consultation with professional peers in order to avoid isolation in their pastoral roles. These aspects of preparation for ministry will help caution “wanderers” from wandering and will help the otherwise conscientious pastor avoid mistakes which can destroy his or her ministry.<sup>5</sup>

Fortune continues as she addresses the role of the congregation in being preventative.

Prevention for the church should focus on unequivocal policies and procedural safeguards to help churches avoid hiring an offending pastor. However, since even these preliminary provisions cannot guarantee avoidance, education of the laity and clear policies and procedures can encourage early disclosure and intervention to stop an offender.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fortune., p.106.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



Poling makes his case that there are certain theologies that contribute to clergy sexual abuse and in order for persons not to experience suffering or harm, that advocates and allies must be willing to not be silent.

Church and society must be re-organized so that victims have adequate resources for prevention and healing from sexual violence. Many victims of sexual violence have been silenced and isolated because their suffering is taboo. Victims of sexual abuse must have access to counseling, education, support groups, and other resources for healing. As the issues of sexual violence have been identified in recent years, there has been a dramatic increase in victims seeking help and protection. Yet they do not begin to have affordable counseling and other services that are required. There must be more effective procedures for crises intervention when sexual abuse is disclosed.<sup>7</sup>

Saying, “I’m sorry,” and meaning it, can feel like the most difficult thing to do. However, I contend that those two words serve as an entry way towards restoration and healing through education. It is important that both clergy and congregation are doing all that it can for both pastor and survivors especially since both are part of the community. To dismiss, discourage, or shun either party would not be indicative of God’s inclusive love for all beings. Poling makes this process of healing a theological one through the lens of a form of restorative justice. I see this as a way of burning the cape.

In Chapter One, the prophet Nathan challenged King David through a riddle so that he could recognize how he had abused his power. Nathan could have easily reprimanded King David without the riddle. But I would like to believe, in that moment, grace was shown. In the same sense, I believe that every African American faith leader needs a Nathan, a compass that’s not afraid to challenge or give counsel. The cape easily draws groupies and opportunists who act as enablers all in the name of providing

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<sup>7</sup> James Newton Poling. *The Abuse of Power: A Theological Problem*. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1991.

insulation and protection from the community at large. When someone becomes a public figure, whether locally, nationally, or globally, their access to the best of everything becomes greater. This type of power can be addicting if not checked. Someone has to be in the inner circle that is trusted to say that the cape is a drug and should be destroyed.

In addressing the need for clergy self – care and all the forms that care models, Wimberley writes:

Western notions of care – giving are insufficient. African – American pastors need a culturally sensitive approach to mental health intervention that takes into account the historical trauma of slavocracy, endemic societal oppression, the cultural stigmatization of depression in the African-American community, the internalized / external expectations of the African-American clergy, and the preoccupation with image promotion/ projection.<sup>8</sup>

Wimberley suggests and I agree that the village needs more professionals committed to focusing on the mental health care of African American clergy and the survivors of their abuse in all of its forms. Care of self is modeled in many ways beyond whatever day is chosen as sabbath. Developing ways by which to recreate should be paramount. In addressing the need to cease with overloading oneself to the point of no return, Jones writes:

As ministers and caregivers, we need to face our self - violence. We must name it and own up to it if we are to be healed. Because self -violence is a lifestyle for many of us, confessing and overcoming a long-standing practice of self- brutality is an extended process. We will need to name and face unhealthy and unholy addictions continuously, until we are fully delivered. Even then, complete deliverance will require unceasing vigilance.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wimberley p.,93.

<sup>9</sup> Jones., p.21.

In addressing this “unceasing vigilance,”<sup>10</sup> I ask myself: how does this look in the contexts in which I serve? How can this project be helpful to my fellow colleagues? How can I find healing for myself and the voiceless others who are survivors of clergy abuse of power? What would Jesus do?

This project has forced me to look at my own lack of care of self. I have been on the receiving end of clergy abuse by both male and female leaders. As a leader I feel like it is beyond time to break the cycle and the narrative. As a culture, we have not been accustomed to calling out our spiritual leaders. And certainly, for the times that we have done so, the ways by which offenses have been handled has been more punitive than restorative. Space for healing within community has been limited for the survivor. Professional guidance and mediation for clergy, survivors, and congregations has been minimal. And as we have found and noted, unfortunately for some, the only solution has been death by suicide. Families, congregations, communities, survivors, and clergy all lose when this happens. I believe that in order for there to be advancement, clergy must be willing to check their egos, their arrogance and their fear in order to be willing to admit that they need help in whatever form that may be. Congregations must be willing to be accountable by implementing guidelines that include mandatory boundary training certifications as part of their hiring guidelines and lay leadership appointments. Congregations must also be willing to do background checks as part of their hiring process. Additionally, as some of the interviewees mentioned, I believe that it is important to have built in sabbatical times for clergy to have an opportunity to be fully away from their congregations as part of their compensation hiring packages. Part of their

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

packages should include mental health care. Congregations must also be willing to make space for survivors by providing confidential outside referral services for counseling and reporting. These confidential services should also be readily available for family members of clergy and anyone in lay leadership who feels that a boundary has been crossed. Of course, this also means that congregations should also be prepared to have outside legal teams in place to address those instances where clergy offense has resulted in criminal actions.

Being able to burn a cape that has been damned and finding one's way back to Jesus' redemptive love is not an easy task because it means being vulnerable as well as accountable. For some, this idea of restorative and redemptive theology may not be possible. Sometimes the hurt is just too much. Sometimes humans are not willing to make the effort to change. Living in this tension will be the reality for some. However, I still believe that the importance lies behind at least starting the difficult conversations towards transformation. May we find our way to be able to acknowledge that we have worn capes that are damned, that we have caused hurt, and that we have not addressed our own issues surrounding care of self. It may mean taking time away from our congregations in order to do real self reflection and healing. For some, it may mean considering finding an alternative source of income if one is not already bi-vocational in order to fully address how power has been used and or abused.

In an ideal world, where careers and lives are not made or destroyed by what's trending in social media, I would love to see pastors and those in senior leadership, implement mandatory boundary training sessions and formulate independent private mediator sessions for survivors and their offenders. I would love to see a churchwide

educational campaign that addressed boundaries, abuse, and care. I would love to see changes in pastoral compensation packages that included mental health component alongside mandatory yearly boundary training certifications. For those congregations that are part of larger denominations, issues of clergy abuse and clergy care must be addressed and guidelines implemented that include the protection of survivors as well as clergy and the congregations that they serve. From having served congregations led by older and perhaps more traditional pastors, some of which are not seminary trained, I am aware that this idea of accountability, vulnerability, and transformation may not be successful. There may be the notion by some “seasoned” pastors that there is no need to change after years of leading a certain way or that they have reached a certain age and are not willing to change. For those leaders, I am left with little to no other option but to love them still and respect their choice to lead within a 21<sup>st</sup> century context with a dated and oppressive leadership style still wearing their damned capes. However, for those leaders daring to lead faith communities aiming to be relevant and sustainable in a society saturated with distractions and options beyond the practice of being connected to a church community, they will embrace, even if reluctantly, the need for there to be guidelines in place that address clergy abuse and clergy care. By doing so, hope is on the horizon that African American clergy male and female, may we find the courage to set fire to those capes, hold themselves, ourselves accountable, insist that senior lay leadership be the Nathans to our David by holding us accountable, and move towards serving God’s people healthy and whole. And may those whom we have caused hurt, be fully healed.

## EPILOGUE

They didn't know it but I died inside,  
I was good, didn't show it  
Had my pride inside  
Had all I wanted, yes I flaunted, for the world to see  
Had all the bling, a plane, and cars, my own security  
But I was still unfulfilled, was this God's will for me?  
But then I stopped. Stopped. Stopped, dropped and rolled  
Tears streaming down. I was out of control.  
Got to my knees, I sought God to touch my soul.  
Make me whole, deliver me from my trespasses.  
For I have sinned  
Something was missing, had me wishing,  
Telling lies like hell  
When I said jump, they replied "how high"  
While I talked on my burner cell  
They didn't know it but I died inside  
I was good, didn't show it  
Had my pride inside  
But that was then and this is now  
I begin again  
Boundaries, saying no  
Accountability  
Time off

With pay  
when it needs to be  
I'm not ashamed anymore  
I'm in therapy  
To all of the ones, whose names remain in obscurity  
I was wrong, please accept my apology.  
To the church that I love, please pray for me  
As we journey towards healing and unity  
You may never trust again and that's okay with me  
No Phoenix, just ashes, no bulls or rams  
Just the smell of a burning cape.  
No longer worn for its tattered and damned.  
No more will I come to try to save the day.  
And yes, the rumors are true. Shout out to Florida, Gay, Gay, Gay.  
Can't pray it away. Just me. God loves us all.  
I'm still called  
To preach the word.  
That's me.  
I can live again. Breath again. Exhale again. That's me.  
What's that smell of burning hell of things that I couldn't escape  
Without God's love from up above, yes it was that damned cape.

-Ode to X who had the courage to start again

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

SAMPLING OF AFRICAN – AMERICAN CLERGY  
POWER TO CARE CHART  
Kellie Corbett Turner MAY 2022

| NAME         | WEAKNESS   | POWER USE   | RESULT   | NEGLECT OF CARE   | PREVENTION   | CORRELATION CARE & ABUSE |
|--------------|--|---|--|---|--|--------------------------|
| Zachery Tims | Drugs/sex  | Used power to engage in multiple accounts of adultery and drug abuse. Harmed self, family, congregation | Died of drug overdose  | Neglected to seek treatment for addictions. Example of superman complex; false sense of control and power over addictions and ultimately care of self | Accountability<br>Personal and Congregational guidelines   | Yes                      |
| Eddie Long   | Sex/false sense of entitlement/possible suppressed feelings of homosexuality | Allegedly, used power to have sex with males. Emotional Harm to self, family, congregation, lawsuits    | Sued by 4 young men. Settled out of court. Speculation surrounding real cause of death | Neglected to seek counseling and if claims are true, to deal with his sexual identity   | Boundary training guidelines for leadership and interaction with youth and all congregants. Accountability | Yes                      |



## SAMPLING OF AFRICAN – AMERICAN CLERGY

## POWER TO CARE CHART

Kellie Corbett Turner MAY 2022

|                    |                    |  |   |   |  |     |
|--------------------|--------------------|--|---|---|--|-----|
| Teddy Parker       | Depression/Anxiety | By suffering in silence, Used Power to determine end of life                                       | Died by suicide   | Neglected to seek care either through therapy, medication, education or both to address mental illness. | Mental health packages for clergy. Accountability to check on clergy mental well - being Have more dialogue to dispel the stigma surrounding mental health and African American clergy | Yes |
| KirbyJohn Caldwell | Greed              | Used power to commit fraud by selling bonds that had no value                                      | Sentenced to prison   | Did not recognize his own deviant behavior. ethical compass   | Accountability personal and congregational   | Yes |
| Johnnie McGann     | Superhero Complex  | Used power to advance ministry and build brand at the cost of physical well – being. Overachiever. | Died of massive heart attack. May have had other underlying health problems | Maintained a busy schedule and did not take care of himself. Was obese.                                 | Accountability. Personal and congregational  | Yes |
|                    |                    |  |   |   |  |     |

## Appendix 2

### GLOSSARY

*The following list of terms does not represent an exhaustive one on the subject of abuse of power and self-care, but does offer an entryway into starting conversations.*

Abuse – actions causing physical, emotional, or psychological damage to another person.<sup>1</sup> Causing the same to one's self (i.e. the abuse of drugs or alcohol causes harm to the body. Not caring for the body properly is a form of abusing it.)

Abuse of Power – The misuse of authority often involving someone who has inferior authority with the intention to oppress or take advantage of for personal gain or to commit a wrongful act.

Arousal – a state of sexual excitement either physiologically or mentally.

Boundary Training-Courses designed to help staff in the workplace understand acceptable healthy practices/boundaries/guidelines as it relates to interactions with all persons especially youth, women, and persons who are not able to protect themselves. Courses designed to help prevent sexual misconduct, harassment, bullying, etc. in the workplace.

Clergy Sexual Misconduct/Clergy Sexual Abuse – unwanted or illegal sexual acts performed by a clergy member upon a victim who is under that clergy member's spiritual leadership or guidance. Clergy sexual misconduct and abuse includes the inappropriate use of the clergy member's power or influence over the victims to gain sexual favors, even if the victim agrees to the sexual contact.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ferro 2005 p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.145.

Coercion – the use of authority, bribes, threats (real or implied), or force to make someone do something they do not want to do.<sup>3</sup>

Consent – the agreement to do something without pressure or coercion. The person giving consent must understand what is being agreed to, and have the right to say no or to stop the behavior. Giving permission is not the same as consent. For example, a child who gives permission to engage in a sexual act with an adult is not giving consent, because there is an inequality of age, power, and knowledge, thereby placing the child at a disadvantage in terms of understanding what is being agreed to, or having the power to stop the behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Deviant Behavior – Thoughts or actions outside the normal range of behaviors for most people. For example, the sexual molestation of a child is a deviant act, while the desire to have sex through the use of force or violence is a deviant fantasy.<sup>5</sup>

Forgiveness – An expression of acceptance arising from beliefs that does not deny, excuse, or forget another person's offense, but agrees to set it aside in the interest of emotional and spiritual healing.<sup>6</sup>

Mandated Reporter-typically working professionals who are required by law to report suspected instances of abuse. These professionals can include educators, school personnel, medical professionals, social services workers, law

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.145.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.146.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

enforcement, clergy, human resources professionals, supervisors, and other types of working professionals.<sup>7</sup>

Mental Health-care of one's psychological and emotional well-being.

Self-Care- The practice of being intentional about one's own well-being and health, whether physical, mental, spiritual, psychological or emotional.

Sexual Abuse – Sexual behaviors that are against the law and violate the rights of another person, such as rape or child molestation. Sexual abuse includes the misuse of power and moral authority by a clergy member to gain sexual favors from another.<sup>8</sup>

Sexual Harassment – The use of words, gestures, or power to suggest unwanted sexual contact with another, including a clergy member's use of authority to suggest sexual contact, regardless of whether the sexual contact that is insinuated or suggested actually occurs.<sup>9</sup>

Sexual Misconduct – Any type of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, or sexual abuse.<sup>10</sup>

Superhero/Savior Complex-The feeling that nothing is impossible to achieve, that people, and situations need to be rescued, and that one is in control of everything, can be present for everyone and everything, is needed to take care

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<sup>7</sup> National Association of Mandated Reporters. <https://namr.org>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.155.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

of situations, needs to be needed, and that without your presence, things will not be done correctly.

## Appendix 3

### Interview Questions

1. Some think that the neglect of self-care contributes to abuse of power by AA clergy. Others believe that neglect of self-care is used as an excuse to justify abuse of power by AA clergy. How would you describe the relationship, if any, between self-care and abuse of power?
2. There have been documented and undocumented reports of clergy malfeasance among some notable members of African American clergy. To what degree do you think these occurrences are due to a lack of care (mind, body, soul, or spirit)? What degree is power related? What degree is predator/deviant related?
3. A prominent African American pastor died by suicide as a result of bi-polar disorder and depression, while others battle addictions. There is still a stigma surrounding mental health, and utilizing treatment centers as a form of self care. As a leader, in your opinion, what would be the best support a congregation could offer a faith leader who struggles with their own care of self and burning their capes?
4. How do you think COVID has impacted African American clergy mentally, physically, spiritually and emotionally?

## Appendix 4

### RESOURCES

*\*Please note that the following is a sample list of resources. There are many more available and should be utilized as needed.*

#### Crisis Resources

Crisis Text Line-Text GO to 741741

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1- 800-273-8255

National Domestic Violence Hotline – 1-800-799-7233 or text “START”  
to 88788

#### Boundary Training Resources

<https://convergencecolab.org/p/boundarytraining-clergy>

<https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org>

#### Congregational Resources

<https://www.naccc.org/education-programs/ccl/lay-ministry-training-program/>

<https://faithandleadership.com/excerpt-planning-sabbaticals-guide-congregations-and-their-pastors>

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