

Not In My Church

Not In My Congregation



Photos: Roger Schreiber

Study guide for
Christian or
Jewish audiences

Recommendations for the Use of this Video Program

1. Allow adequate time for discussion (at least a two-hour session is suggested).
2. Arrange for a skilled facilitator to conduct the program.
3. Be certain that discussion leaders are thoroughly familiar with the contents of this study guide prior to presentation of the program.
4. Be aware that this program may bring up many strong emotions, and that there may be victims in the audience who may go into crisis. Be sure that you have on hand resources to refer them to, and spend some time thinking about how to create a safe atmosphere.
5. Order sufficient copies of the awareness brochure for viewers. It can be ordered in bulk or camera-ready copy can be purchased from FaithTrust Institute, toll-free (877) 860-2255.

Not In My Church

Not In My Congregation

A docudrama to help people deal with the problem of clergy misconduct involving sexual abuse in the ministerial relationship

Study guide by Ann Downer, M.S.

The study guide and brochure for viewers were developed to accompany the video Not In My Church produced in 1991 by FaithTrust Institute. Additional copies of the video, study guide or brochure may be obtained by calling or writing the publisher:



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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Introduction.....	7
Synopsis	11
Summary of Important Content.....	13
Before Showing the Video	15
Note to discussion leaders: Refer to this section before proceeding	
After Showing the Video.....	16
Discussion Guidelines and Questions	17
Additional Questions for a Jewish Audience.....	23
Resources	26
Order Form.....	28

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Introduction

The goal of this video and study guide program is to raise awareness among viewers of the potential for clergy misconduct through sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship. Central to the philosophy of this program is the belief that people in a congregation must be willing to acknowledge that clergy misconduct sometimes occurs. Only through this acknowledgement can a congregation begin to heal itself if such a violation of trust does occur.

This video program portrays the dilemma of one church when faced with sexual abuse by its minister. A violation of trust by a religious leader can occur in any denomination. While a United Methodist Church was chosen arbitrarily as the setting for this story, it might have been set in any church or synagogue. The denomination is not significant- the pain and hurt resulting from clergy misconduct are.

A study by Richard Allen Blackmon (1984) offers some indication of the scope of the problem of sexual abuse by clergy. He surveyed 300 ministers (286 male, 14 female) from different denominations and found that nearly 39% reported sexual contact, excluding intercourse, with a church member; 12.7% reported having sexual intercourse with a church member; and 76.5% knew of a minister who they believed had sexual intercourse with a church member.

Karen Lebacqz and Ronald G. Barton describe the results of their own survey research on clergy misconduct in *Sex in the Parish* (1991). They found that roughly 10% of clergy interviewed had become involved sexually with a parishioner.

It is appropriate to present this program to both lay audiences and clergy. The goal of the video and study guide is to help members from all levels of a church or synagogue respond with compassion and support when clergy misconduct occurs. Since the story ends with a seemingly expedient solution that does not promote the healing that is needed in this congregation, the presenter should use the discussion period to further examine the elements of a just and compassionate response to sexual abuse.

The video and study guide will help viewers to:

- recognize the misuse of power and authority;
- identify and name sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship;
- understand the value of protecting the integrity of ministerial relationships;
- recognize the consequences of sexual abuse for the church or synagogue and the individual;
- initiate action toward developing or confirming a procedure for responding to sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship.

The study guide includes six sections. These are summarized below.

A Synopsis is included to remind you of the central storyline and names of major characters.

Following the synopsis, a Summary of Important Content will provide a clear presentation of the essential learning for this program. Review the main points with viewers before showing the video and discuss them after the show.

A section of the study guide on Before Showing the Video is included to help you prepare materials and content prior to the discussion period.

A section called After Showing the Video includes suggested discussion questions for triggering discussion on the main points of the program. They may need to be adapted somewhat to increase their relevance to your discussion group.

The study guide also includes a Resource section.

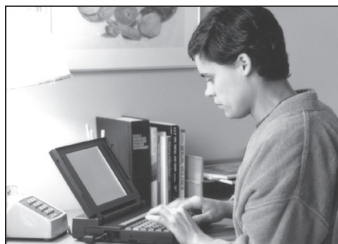
An awareness Brochure for viewers can be ordered in quantity or camera-ready copy can be purchased. It summarizes important content on recognizing and responding to sexual abuse by clergy.

Please Note:

The phrases “clergy and other ministers” and “religious leaders” are used throughout these materials to refer to those who act as representatives of the church or synagogue in any capacity: priest, deacon, minister, pastoral counselor, rabbi, parochial minister, pastoral associate, lay ministers or religious professionals such as those involved with youth and in religious education. Because we are dealing with this in an interfaith context, we will generally be using the term “ministerial” to describe the relationships between religious leaders and congregants.

Synopsis

The video begins with a formal complaint of clergy misconduct made by Reverend Deborah Williams against Reverend Peter Gannett, a charismatic and respected minister to whose church she will soon be appointed as Associate Pastor.



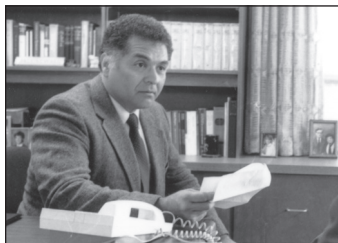
Reverend Deborah Williams



Reverend Peter Gannett

Reverend Williams became sexually involved with Peter Gannett during her first year of seminary. At the time, she was a student intern and Reverend Gannett was her mentor and pastor. She now believes that he violated his position of authority by becoming sexually involved with her, and she has reason to believe his behavior is a pattern.

Reverend Tomás Mendoza, District Superintendent and a friend of Gannett's, is assigned by his Bishop to inquire into the allegations of misconduct.



Reverend Thomás Mendoza,
District Superintendent

Though reluctant to pursue the matter, Rev. Mendoza forms a board of inquiry consisting of Reverend Harold Hawkes, Agnes Jantzen and Reverend Dwayne Thomas.

In response to the complaint, Gannett becomes increasingly arrogant and defiant. This reaction begins to trouble Reverend Mendoza. Unknown to him, Peter Gannett is presently involved with two members of his own congregation – Lilly, a young Filipina, and Esther, a secretary for Reverend Mendoza.



Lilly Devera



Esther Johnson

Both give key testimony against Gannett during the second day of inquiry by the board.

Gannett never wavers in his manipulation of those around him. He extracts a promise of immunity from the board in exchange for voluntary resignation. The records are sealed, despite Lilly and Esther's damaging testimony and the board's uncertainty about the decision. Gannett is allowed to walk away from the hurt and mistrust he has unleashed upon his congregation.

Two years later, Reverend Mendoza has become a Bishop in another Conference. Peter Gannett, in his new congregation, has been the subject of another complaint for clergy misconduct. Bishop Mendoza, regretting his earlier hesitation, vows to change church policy in order to prevent future miscarriages of justice. The story ends with his promise, "There will be no more secret deals. Not in my church."



Reverend Thomás Mendoza

Summary of Important Content

The most important educational messages of this program are summarized below. They are included in order to assist you with the discussion following the video. Review these messages prior to beginning the tape. This will help you to concentrate the discussion period on the most important aspects of the program rather than less relevant material. You may also use this information to summarize the discussion just prior to concluding the discussion period.

Sexual Abuse within the Ministerial Relationship

- Sexual abuse occurs when someone in a position of authority uses his/her power to sexually exploit another person. This is a misuse of power.
- Sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship is a violation of professional ethics in which someone in a ministerial leadership role (clergy, religious, lay) engages in sexual contact or sexualized behavior with a congregant, employee, student or counseling client.

The Violation of Role Boundaries

- There is a difference in power between a person in a ministerial leadership role and a member of his/her congregation.
- To be vulnerable to another is the result of having less power or fewer resources than that person. Congregants, clients, employees, students and staff persons are vulnerable in relation to clergy and other ministers for multiple reasons.
- Meaningful consent to sexual activity requires that no significant discrepancy in power between the two exists and no element of fear, constraint or coercion is present.
- The power that comes with a ministerial role can be misused, intentionally or unintentionally. This power should be used to maintain boundaries in order to preserve the integrity of the ministerial relationship.

A Theological Context for Action: Justice Making

- The elements for achieving justice when exploitation has occurred include:
 - truth-telling for the victim(s)
 - acknowledging the violation
 - compassion for the victim(s)
 - protecting the vulnerable
 - accountability for the ministerial abuser
 - restitution to victim(s)
 - vindication
- Justice is a prerequisite to healing. Justice cannot begin until the reality of sexual abuse is acknowledged.

Basic Components of Policy and Procedures

- The health of the church or synagogue can best be preserved by creating clear and consistent guidelines for hiring leaders and responding to complaints of misconduct.
- The elements of an effective response include:
 - publicizing procedures for making complaints;
 - providing due process for assessing complaints;
 - if invalid, taking steps to restore credibility to minister;
 - if valid, taking disciplinary action, protecting and restoring victims, restoring the integrity of the ministry, restoring the congregation, and restoring the ministerial abuser to professional health, if possible, or removing the abuser from the ministry.
- Establish mechanisms for insuring that appropriate information accompanies assignment of clergy to other churches/synagogues.
- Develop consistent hiring procedures which require the disclosure of previous complaints, including actions taken and the determination of findings.

Before Showing the Video

Before beginning a session and showing the video, use the following checklist to determine whether you are prepared to teach about this topic.

watch the video yourself at least once

if you are showing the video to a large group, have 2 monitors

familiarize yourself with study guide content and adapt questions as needed

research available community resources that offer assistance and support for victims of sexual abuse (Child Protective Services, rape crisis centers, hotlines, support groups, etc.)

distribute information on community resources to members of your study group by creating a handout or writing the information on a board or easel; if you write the information on a chalkboard, request that all participants note down the information at the same time – this will offer anonymity to someone who needs the information, but may be too embarrassed to be seen copying the resource information

gather copies of the existing policies or procedures of your own church or synagogue regarding responding to allegations of misconduct by clergy involving sexual abuse

order adequate copies of the awareness brochure for viewers or purchase camera-ready copy and print sufficient copies

consider how you might respond to different audience reactions such as denial, anger, embarrassment or disclosure (“This is too extreme. It isn’t realistic. He couldn’t have been involved with all of those women at the same time. They are both consenting adults, so what’s the problem? Someone would have noticed. Why didn’t the women just say no? This same thing happened to my sister.”)

be aware that this program may bring up many strong emotions, and that there may be victims in the audience who may go into crisis – be sure that you have on hand resources to refer them to, and spend some time thinking about how to create a safe atmosphere

prepare for obvious challenges or areas that might be controversial for members of your discussion group (the issue of ordained women, the possibility of a false accusation of clergy misconduct, difficulty in relating to the values, traditions or vocabulary of the denomination depicted, etc.)

ask the group to make note of the issues that arise for them in the story, and to remember them for discussion following the video

After Showing the Video

Leave the lights out for the duration of the tape (through the credits). This will allow some members of the audience extra time to compose themselves. For others, it is an important period during which a transition is made from the dramatic story back to the classroom or meeting room.

Do not schedule a break immediately following the video, but rather begin the de-briefing period right away. Start slowly. Allow spontaneous comments to emerge before posing questions of your own. When beginning the discussion, ask general questions about feelings and reactions to the show first. Lead gradually to a deeper analysis of the issues.

Some people may react initially to the difference between your religious traditions and rituals and those depicted in the video. Guide the discussion toward the common issues among all human beings, regardless of denomination or belief system.

Discussion Guidelines and Questions

Several general guidelines for facilitating discussion are listed below. You may wish to add others from your experience working with groups.

- avoid posing questions that must be answered by “yes” or “no”
- whenever possible, allow other members of the group to respond to comments or questions rather than dominating the discussion with your ideas and responses
- recognize that there are many emotionally charged issues that may come up in group discussion, and encourage group members to listen without interrupting each other
- recognize that some people learn much from listening and should not be pressed to express themselves before the entire group
- if you are uncertain about a non-participating member’s desire to speak, gently ask if he or she has anything to add or a desire to speak
- if someone is angry about an issue brought forward in the program, be sure that you understand the point he or she is trying to make; hostility is often intensified when a discussion leader demonstrates incomplete understanding of a question or comment by a member of the group
- if a member discloses a history of sexual abuse during the discussion period, reassure him or her of your support (“I appreciate your willingness to share this experience.”), help protect his or her privacy (“Maybe we can discuss this more during the next break?”), offer resources for support, and assist with reporting as appropriate
- leave adequate time for the discussion period following the video; don’t introduce a subject or an idea without sufficient time to explore it and reach some resolution on the topic

Discussion Questions

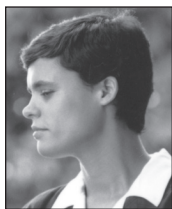
Ask the group to identify specific issues illustrated in the story; write key words (in bold) up on a chalkboard and refer to them during the discussion:

- difference in power between clergy and congregant;
- manipulation of others by the sexual abuser;

- resistance and denial when a complaint of clergy misconduct is voiced;
- the degree of justice achieved by the church board;
- the consequences of the decision for the victims of clergy misconduct and for the church or synagogue.

The following specific questions may help to guide the discussion.

1. What were the differences in beliefs, traditions, and vocabulary between the church depicted in this program and our church or synagogue?
2. What did the denomination and congregation depicted in this video have in common with our church/synagogue and congregation? [respected leader, potential for confusion if such an issue arose, fear and disbelief]
3. If you experienced resistance to the story in any way, could you tell us about that? [explore the issue of denial and the many forms it might take]
4. What elements of this story struck you as possible or realistic?
5. Imagine yourself as a member of the board of inquiry. How would you have felt listening to Rev. Deborah Williams? Rev. Gannett? Lilly? Esther?



Rev. Williams



Rev. Gannett



Lilly Devera



Esther Johnson

6. What were the forces working against Rev. Williams? [fear, uncertainty, disbelief, denial, embarrassment, prejudice against her as a woman, an outsider, an ordained minister]
7. What do you think people might have felt about her following the resignation of Rev. Gannett, even knowing that she had spoken the truth? [continuing resentment]

8. Name some potential sources of a difference in power between two individuals. [age, size, gender, role, comfort in the dominant culture, perceived social status, the ability to reward or punish another, financial security]
9. What power did Reverend Gannett derive from his position as a religious leader in this community? [respect, success, admiration, his advice was sought by others, the desire of others to please him, he was the accepted spiritual leader of the church]
10. How did he take advantage of his power and authority when he became involved with Rev. Williams as a student? Esther as an abused and bereaved spouse? Lilly as a young woman in a new culture? How is this abuse similar to child sexual abuse? [exploiting a difference in power; inability to give meaningful consent]
11. Were any of these women in a position to offer meaningful consent for engaging in a sexual relationship with Rev. Gannett? [meaningful consent implies that there is no element of fear or coercion influencing a person's choice; it requires a context of choice, mutuality and equality; these factors cannot be present when there is an imbalance of power between two people arising out of role difference]
12. Would Peter Gannett's behavior have been unethical if he had been sexually involved with only one woman in his congregation? With only unmarried women in his congregation? With a child or young adult? [it is always unethical because it is a violation of the ministerial relationship]
13. Why is sexual contact between a religious leader and a congregant unethical? [it is a violation of role and a misuse of authority and power; it takes advantage of a vulnerable person and cannot contain meaningful consent]
14. What harm can it cause? [for the victim- shame, guilt, inner conflict and confusion, loss of trust, loss of faith, sense of betrayal, loss of spiritual advisor; for the congregation- embarrassment, legal liability, temptation to blame the victim, loss of confidence in their judgement of leadership, division among members; for the abuser- shame, guilt, loss of reputation and credibility, loss of relationships, betrayal of calling and professional integrity, legal liability]

15. Is sexual contact between a congregant and a religious leader ever okay? [If a religious leader becomes interested in dating or romance with a member of his or her congregation (though this is complicated and not advisable), the clergy person must remove him/herself from a ministerial role in that person's life before ethically pursuing a relationship of this nature. Questions that need to be asked to evaluate if it is possible to pursue this type of romantic relationship include: Was the ministerial relationship minimal in nature (no counseling involved)? Is the minister or rabbi willing to remove him or herself from the ministerial relationship? Is the minister/rabbi willing to be open about the relationship with the congregation?]
16. At what point did Rev. Mendoza realize the seriousness of the situation in his church? How did his friendship with Gannett influence his ability to recognize and respond to the situation?
17. Why did the board of inquiry allow Rev. Gannett to make a deal with them? [to avoid public disclosure, to get him out quickly, a mistaken belief that they were protecting the congregation]
18. What were the consequences of this deal in the long run? [other women were exploited in another congregation, Gannett not held accountable, no consequences for him, loss of self-respect and shame among some of the board members, no policy was developed to address the issue in future, the sexually abused women of this church received neither justice nor support]
19. Why couldn't Deborah Williams forgive Gannett? What needed to happen before forgiveness could be a real possibility? [need for justice-making, for Gannett to truly repent and to change his attitudes and behavior, need for healing before she can let go of her anger]
20. A more just outcome might have included what steps or responses from the board of inquiry? [telling the truth about the sexual abuse, acknowledging the violation, compassion, protecting the vulnerable, calling to account the abuser, making restitution, vindication for the victims]
21. What needs to happen in this congregation after Gannett leaves? [open discussion with the congregation, provide a just response to victims, involvement in policy development]

22. What can a clergyperson do if someone in the congregation wants to initiate or sexualize a relationship? [be clear internally about the limits of the relationship, articulate those limits clearly to the other, talk with a colleague who can assist in defining and setting limits, do not acknowledge mutual attraction, model appropriate boundaries and behavior]
23. What can a member of a congregation do if a clergyperson wants to initiate or sexualize a relationship? [ask for the behavior to stop, seek assistance, determine the policies of the church/synagogue regarding such misconduct, make a complaint, speak out, don't blame self]
24. If it happened to you, who would you tell? Where would you take a complaint?
25. What written policies regarding sexual abuse within the ministerial relationship exist in our denomination/church/synagogue?
26. (If applicable) Are the seven elements of justice-making reflected in our policy and procedures? [See page 14, "A Theological Context for Action," for a list of the 7 elements]
27. (If applicable) Does the policy address screening volunteers who work with youth? Is child sexual abuse prevention education available for children and parents? Do policies include concerns for adult victims? Is leadership of the congregation informed on this issue?
28. If no policy exists, how might we begin to address the need for policy?

Additional Discussion Questions for a Jewish Audience

The following section was prepared by Rabbi Julie R. Spitzer of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

1. How did you react when the rabbi responded to Reverend Mendoza's question about what happens when clergy misconduct occurs in the Jewish faith? (he said that the usual practice in cases of clergy sexual misconduct is to hope that the problem goes away) [Many reactions here will either be those of disbelief (it doesn't happen to rabbis) or of anger towards the attitude of the rabbi — that in so many cases, the Jewish community turns its back on real problems in the hope that they will just go away. Does this make the answer of the rabbi "right"? No.]
2. Is it difficult to think of the events depicted in this video happening in a synagogue with a rabbi or a cantor? Why? [Since denial is a very common reaction to problems within the synagogue or community, few people are aware of these issues as they actually happen. There is a strong tendency to not "air one's dirty laundry in public", especially in minority communities. The most powerful antidotes to this denial are those who speak out.]
3. In Jewish tradition, forgiveness is often considered only in the context of the High Holy Days. We are told to ask for forgiveness from those we have wronged. There is less in the tradition about granting unconditional forgiveness when we have been wronged. There is generally less pressure to forgive and more to ask forgiveness. How does this impact the scene in the conference room when Rev. Harold Hawkes asks, "Doesn't the word forgiveness have any meaning?" [This is a fairly rhetorical question. The question itself makes the point that forgiveness is not necessarily given unconditionally. There should be some indication of acknowledgment of wrongdoing and some sense of a just settlement of the issues before forgiveness is granted.]

4. In a synagogue, the expectation for the rabbi(s) or the cantor is to be accessible, friendly, and warm. How far should a rabbi/cantor go in social relationships with members of the congregation? Are the lines different in the Jewish community than for those depicted in this video? [There should be no difference in the conduct of a Jewish synagogue professional and the conduct of a church professional. The clergy/congregant relationship should not be compromised. In the case of a single rabbi or cantor who desires a social relationship with a congregant, care should be taken to alter the clergy/congregant role. This means that the rabbi may no longer be the “rabbi” for that particular congregant.]
5. If these accusations had been brought against a cantor, should the results have been different than for a rabbi? If the rabbi or cantor had been a woman? [Rabbis, cantors, synagogue educators, youth directors, etc. are also subject to the same standards in this discussion. The question is the inherent power differential in the relationship, and is not limited to any one professional in the congregation.]
6. How might the concept of tikkun olam, repairing that which is broken in the world, compel us to act in cases of clergy misconduct? [Tikkun Olam would dictate that we not stand idly by in the face of any injustice. It might prompt us to come forward with a complaint of misconduct, or support a fair and open process when a complaint is brought forward. It would also help us to understand that only when a wound is cleansed can there be complete healing.]
7. Since the Beit Din, an Orthodox rabbinical court composed of three male rabbis, is the adjudicator of legal and ethical matters within the Jewish community, would this be a suitable case for review by a Beit Din? Why or why not? [In a technical sense, it would seem that such a case might be brought before a Beit Din. The issues of sexual misconduct are certainly within the scope of their jurisdiction. Since, however, there are questions as to the validity of women as witnesses, the all-male composition of the court, and the weight of Jewish tradition in favor of a male-conceived and male-interpreted system, many are doubtful if justice could be achieved in such a setting.]

8. Where, outside the congregation, would you turn in a case like the one in this story? What recourse would someone making such an allegation have? What recourse would the accused have? (there is no figure parallel to the bishop depicted in the video in the Jewish community structure; most synagogues are relatively autonomous unless aligned with a particular movement within Judaism; even in such cases, the avenues one must travel in order to pursue justice in the event of misuse of the clergy/congregant relationship are varied and often unclear) [In the Reform movement within Judaism, there are avenues outside the particular congregation where one might turn for remedy in cases like this one. Each congregation is part of a larger region, and the individual regional directors might be of some assistance. So, too, the organization of Reform rabbis has an ethics committee, and an executive director to whom such complaints might be brought.** However, most inquiries that come before the ethics committee are brought not by laypersons but by other rabbis. There is still much work to be done in this area. Within other movements (Reconstructionist, Conservative, Orthodox), it would be best to make inquiry of the rabbinic or lay leadership structures as to the best course of action.]

**The Rabbinic Code of Ethics adopted in June, 1991 by the Central Conference of American Rabbis stresses that rabbis must not “engage in exploitative practices”; articulates the expectation that all rabbis be “scrupulous in avoiding even the appearance of sexual misconduct” and specifically warns against “taking advantage of our position with those weaker than ourselves or dependent upon us.”

Resources

Organizations

FaithTrust Institute

Orders: (877) 860-2255

Phone: (206) 634-1903, FAX: (206) 634-0115

www.faithtrustinstitute.org

Walk-In Counseling Center

2421 Chicago Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55404

(612) 870-0565

www.walkin.org

Peters Institute

100 S. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19110

(215) 701-1560

www.jjp.org

National Sexual Violence Resource Center

123 North Enola, Enola, PA 17025

(717) 909-0710, toll-free: (877) 739-3895

www.nsvrc.org

American Association of Pastoral Counselors

9504A Lee Highway, Fairfax, VA 22031

(703) 385-6967

www.aapc.org

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