

Wish I knew

What I wish I knew when I was in my final year of Bible College
by Martin Pakula and the Christian Workers' Support Group

This book is dedicated to the Christian friends who have supported me and so many others through recovery after unfair dismissal and abuse

Introduction

In my final year of Bible College I gained employment at a large church with a well-known senior minister (SM).¹ Greg², the SM, was a godly, quiet, humble man. I look back at some of the things I did wrong in my first few years out of College under his leadership, and I cringe with embarrassment. But Greg took it in his stride, put up with my weaknesses, failures and sins, and guided and helped me. I am so grateful that I had such a wonderful boss – grateful to him and grateful to God. He isn't the only wonderful SM I have worked under. I praise and thank God for all of them.

My hope is that you will have a SM who is a great boss, just like I did. I really hope you do. But... for reasons I will outline, there is a chance that you will have a SM who is not a great boss at all. I'm afraid that this is not a small chance either. And that is why I am writing this booklet for you. I hope everything goes well, but if it doesn't, I hope that this will help to forewarn and forearm you.

After three or four years of Bible College, most of you will be fresh, raring to go and hoping to do great things for God. Awesome! I hope you do! But remember the doctrine of sin. We are all sinful, and that includes SMs. They too are on a journey of sanctification. You may expect that they will be godly, and that you can work out any problems or conflicts with them. Sadly, this is not always the case. In my experience I have now spoken with many assistant ministers (AMs)³ who have been treated shamefully. Some SMs are godly, wonderful ministers of Christ. Some SMs are less than godly and may be narcissists and abusive of their workers. This is a sad, but prevalent reality.

Why write about such a negative topic? Dietrich Bonhoeffer has had these words attributed to him: "Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act...We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."⁴ Therefore, I cannot remain silent. I am sad to say that there have been many victims. Some of you reading this booklet will become new victims of mistreatment or abuse at the hands of your SM. Staying silent about this prevalent problem in the church is not an option. And so, I want to help you to know what to do if you find yourself working for an abusive SM, or if you are unfairly treated or dismissed from your job. We don't want to see more good and godly ministers

¹ Hereafter a senior minister or pastor will be referred to as a 'SM'.

² All names of people referred to have been altered.

³ I will refer to assistant ministers hereafter as 'AM's.

⁴ The quote is often attributed to Bonhoeffer, but does not appear in any of his works. Nevertheless, it is an apt quote in itself.

crushed and out of ministry. We want you to be forewarned and forearmed. The following is what we wish we knew when we were at your stage of ministry.

Chapter 1: Ministry team conflicts

Conflict is an expected part of any human relationship, because we are sinful. I used the “Prepare” course for marriage preparation with couples. One of the key categories we would examine is conflict resolution. Warning bells would go off when a couple said they had no conflict. Why? Because there is no such thing! The question was not whether or not a couple had conflict, but how they *resolved* their conflicts.

An AM will have conflict with his or her SM. But how will the conflict be resolved? There is a great power imbalance in the relationship between a SM and AM.⁵ If the SM refuses to ‘play ball’, so to speak, there is little an AM can do about it. Furthermore, while sometimes the issues at hand are just a conflict between two people, that is not always the case. Just as there is a real thing called domestic abuse, so too there is a real thing called spiritual abuse. A SM may use his power to harass, abuse, victimise or unfairly dismiss an AM. That is no longer just a conflict between two people.⁶ Of course it is not the case that an AM is pure and without sin! Therefore, an AM involved in a conflict with a SM may often feel as if they are at fault. After all, they have done things wrong in the conflict too. But your sins and faults are still no excuse for another person abusing you.

1) Spiritual Abuse

At this point it would be good if I explain some terms, and give some idea of the prevalence of these problems. First, I will deal with the issue of “spiritual abuse”. The Professional Standards Unit of the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney has defined abuse in their 2017 document: *Faithfulness in Service*. They rightly acknowledge the reality of spiritual abuse and define it as: “the mistreatment of a person by actions or threats when justified by appeal to God, faith or religion”.⁷ This is a somewhat loose definition. Better still is the definition in the magisterial work on the topic by Lisa Oakley and Kathryn Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*.⁸ The authors define spiritual abuse (SA) as: “coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context. The target experiences SA as a deeply emotional personal attack”. Such abuse may include: “manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, pressure to conform, misuse of scripture or the pulpit to control behaviour, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a ‘divine’ position and isolation from others, especially those external to the abusive context”.⁹ It is also worth noting that deliberately ignoring or ostracising a worker can be more harmful than bullying.¹⁰

⁵ In the 2018 report on “Recommendations on the “Appointment of Assistant Ministers and Stipendiary Lay Workers” (Book 2 Supplementary Report of the Standing Committee and Other Reports and Papers) it is admitted that there is an enormous power disparity between the SM and AM.

⁶ On this topic, see the excellent blog piece by Matthew Payne on his website “stretchtheology.com”:

“Exploding the Myth that “both parties are always to blame”; November 25, 2018:

<http://stretchtheology.com/exploding-the-myth-that-both-parties-are-always-to-blame/>. Matthew refers in that blog piece to a four-part previous article that describes magnificently the problems of conflict I am addressing here. The articles are called “Churches, watch over your ministry staff” and are recommended reading.

⁷ *Faithfulness in Service*, 2017. Spiritual abuse is also said to include: “using a position of spiritual authority to dominate or manipulate another person”, or “to seek inappropriate deference from others”.

⁸ L. Oakley & K. Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Their book is based on PhD work on the topic.

⁹ Oakley & Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*, 22.

¹⁰ Victoria Woollaston, 31 May, 2014: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2644101/Being-ignored-WORSE-bullied-Ostracism-psychologically-damaging-claim-experts.html>

I realise that, in reading these definitions, you may feel distant to what this is talking about. The whole thing may sound somewhat obscure and alien, or just academic. Praise God! Let me assure you, that for those who have suffered such spiritual abuse, the words here are painfully accurate. Oakley & Kinmond acknowledged that the term “spiritual abuse” is hard to define and nail down. It has only been written about since the 1990s, although of course it has existed throughout church history. For example, they cite Richard Baxter’s great work, *The Reformed Pastor*, which speaks of “pride in ministers, inability to manage challenge and contradictions, maligning of others and inability to recognise self-failings”.¹¹ In essence, it concerns behaviour that is controlling and manipulative of others. This behaviour can be exacerbated by giving too much power to a minister (we all know the dictum that all power corrupts).

I should also note that different books on spiritual abuse place their focus on one of three different aspects in the dynamic of abuse: the abuser, the abused, or the context of abuse. It is the latter, I believe, which is most important. The actual system in which ministry takes place can make abuse more or less easy to perpetrate. It seems to me that SMs in the Roman Catholic or Anglican systems have enormous power, and only great godliness holds one back from abusing it.¹²

Abusive ministers are often insecure and/ or narcissistic. They are often unchallenged and unaccountable. Oakley & Kinmond rightly note that there is not always an intention to abuse. Ministers can be unaware of the effect they are having on others.¹³ SMs often feel under great pressure in their role. In particular, the pressure of evangelism or mission – of growing the church – is great. Abuse may become part of achieving their goals, especially if the AM is seen as harming, or getting in the way of, the mission. Ken Blue says: “They are usually so narcissistic or so focused on some great thing they are doing for God that they don’t notice the wounds they are inflicting on their followers”.¹⁴

Let me be clear: not all SMs are abusers. Far from it. And AMs can be abusers too. But this is a real and widespread problem. Stephen McCalpine correctly notes the parallels between child sexual abuse and spiritual abuse.¹⁵ This is worth keeping in mind throughout your reading of this booklet. I hear many excuses made for SMs when it comes to spiritual abuse. But today, if the same excuses were made in the arena of child sexual abuse, that would certainly not be tolerated. Keep asking yourself: how would this sound if we were talking about child sexual abuse? For example, I have heard so many times that we shouldn’t air our

¹¹ Oakley & Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*, 7-8.

¹² This is especially the case, I believe, in the Sydney Anglican diocese, where bishops have less power over SMs. Ken Blue says that abuse of any type occurs when “someone has power over another and uses that power to hurt”; K. Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse* (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1993), 12.

Note also that the *Faithfulness in Service* speaks about the “need to be able to identify bullying and the cultures and environments which encourage it” (point 6.16). Such cultures and environments can be characterised by poor leadership, competitiveness, poor handling of conflict, rigid structures and excessive demands on time. But the culture and environment of one denomination compared to another is worth considering. In the Sydney Anglican system, compared, say, to the Baptist system, the SM has almost total power.

¹³ Oakley & Kinmond, *Breaking the Silence on Spiritual Abuse*, 18. So also, Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, 12. Also Thom Rainer notes that one of the nine traits of a church bully is that they don’t see themselves as bullies; T. Rainer, “9 Traits of Church Bullies”, posted January 4, 2018: <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/252237-9-traits-church-bullies.html>

¹⁴ Blue, *Healing Spiritual Abuse*, 13.

¹⁵ Stephen McCalpine: <https://stephenmcalpine.com/sshhh-its-our-little-secret/>; posted February 16, 2017; see also Peter Collier: <https://www.facebook.com/themightiestswordcom/> posted April 4, 2017.

dirty laundry in public. This is an attempt to silence the victim and silence criticism of the church. Such warnings may even be coming from good motives. However, ask yourself how that would sound if we were talking about child sexual abuse?

2) Bullying

Part of abuse is bullying. Tim Challies examines Titus chapter 1 and gives us five qualities of an ‘anti-elder’, or ‘anti-minister’.¹⁶ They can be a dictator (arrogant) – wanting their own way, thinking they know best, walking over people and not listening. They can be short-fused (quick-tempered) – giving way to their anger and justifying it. They can be an addict (not being a drunkard) – whether that be an addiction to alcohol or anything else. They can be a bully (not violent) – bullying and abusing others to get their own way (often in the name of a greater God-given goal, such as evangelism or mission). And they can be greedy (not greedy for money) – in it for the financial security and return.

Bullying is a form of emotional and/ or physical abuse. It can be over or covert. Overt bullying is open and direct, and therefore more likely to be obvious to others. Covert bullying will be more subtle and less obvious, involving dominating and controlling a person; manipulation is involved and the target may feel intimidated.

The Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney’s *Faithfulness in Service* speaks not only of spiritual abuse, but of bullying, emotional abuse, harassment, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Bullying is defined as behaviour directed at a victim that is “repeated”, “unreasonable” (“including behaviour that is victimising, humiliating, intimidating or threatening”), and “creates a risk to their health and safety”. It can include “communicating in an abusive manner”, “dismissing or minimising someone’s legitimate concerns or needs”, “inappropriate ignoring, or excluding someone from information or activities” and other behaviours. The Fairwork Ombudsman and the Australian Human Rights Commission define bullying in a similar manner. However, both also include “unreasonable work demands”, and “deliberately changing your work hours or schedule to make it difficult for you”, and “giving you impossible jobs that can’t be done in the given time or with the resources provided”.¹⁷ Micro-managing staff is a sign of an insecure team-leader. Such a leader doesn’t trust their staff to do the job.¹⁸

Bullies may minimize the concerns expressed by their victim, lying or denying the alleged behaviours. They may threaten the victim regarding their employment, or nit-pick at their faults. The latter is defined by the Anglican Church Diocese of Sydney’s *Faithfulness in Service* more as “emotional abuse”. The latter includes “subjecting a person to excessive and repeated personal criticism”, “ridiculing a person” and “threatening or intimidating”. Bullies may come across as the archetypal ‘nice guy’. One needs to observe actions, not just words (Matthew 7:16).

¹⁶ Tim Challies, “5 Ugly Qualities of the Anti-Elder”, posted December 1, 2014: <https://www.challies.com/articles/5-ugly-qualities-of-the-anti-elder/>

¹⁷ <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/bullying-and-harassment;> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/workplace-bullying-violence-harassment-and-bullying-fact-sheet>; “excessive demands on time” is included in point 6.16 of *Faithfulness in Service*.

¹⁸ Jared C. Wilson, “8 Contrasting Signs of an Insecure Leader”, posted June 5, 2018: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/jared-c-wilson/8-contrasting-signs-insecure-leader/>

“Harassment” is similar to bullying, but is a lesser offence. *Faithfulness in Service* defines it as: “unwelcome conduct ... where the person feels ... offended, belittled or threatened”. This can include “unwelcome physical contact” and “making unjustified or unnecessary comments about a person’s capacities or attributes”. “Physical abuse” is also defined, but I assume is obvious.

Finally, we need to remember that we are not God; we are not omniscient. We should not judge unless we have all the facts, and even then, carefully and in love (Matthew 7:1, 1 Corinthians 4:5). But not judging does not mean that we should assume that the one in authority is without sin and right, and that the assistant minister is wrong. That would be judging, with evil thoughts, in favour of the SM (James 2:4). The default position is not to judge in favour of the SM.

3) A problematic system

The *Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017*, deals with complaints of misconduct by a church worker. Complaints are dealt with by the PSU in order to make a determination concerning the fitness of such church workers. Bullying, harassment, emotional abuse, unwelcome conduct, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse are all considered in this document; they are abuses which could call into question the fitness of the minister to hold their office.

However, the Report on the “Appointment of Assistant Ministers and Stipendiary Lay Workers”, referred to in footnote 5 above, says: “There is no one that an Assistant Minister or Lay Minister can appeal to who has any real authority over the rector, except in extreme cases where there is misconduct that can be dealt with under the *Ministry Standards Ordinance 2017*.” So, there is no recourse within the system, except in “extreme cases” of misconduct. This highlights a very real and concerning problem about the system itself in which AMs work. The question to ask is: has a SM ever been disciplined; and if so, how many? Despite some excellent ordinances, one has to question whether the PSU or a bishop actually has the power or will to discipline an abusive SM. The report itself acknowledges that the system itself is the problem when it says: “The Committee does not consider that the existing dispute resolution processes can be significantly improved without making fundamental changes to put rectors under higher levels of external accountability. This issue goes to the heart of tenure and church governance, and is not within the remit of the Committee”. In other words, abuse may well be tolerated, and a SM is basically beyond accountability or discipline, except for “extreme cases”. The report itself states that “to some extent these factors are part of the inherent cost of parish ministry and mission generally”. Clearly that is not true: picture saying that about child sexual abuse. One abused AM responded: “Christians cannot (and must not) accept that misconduct, immorality, and callous behaviour are part of the cost of doing business”. Accountability is vitally important, and here it is largely missing (see more on this below). The report clearly shows that there is a problem with misuse of power by SMs and a lack of accountability, and that it is unlikely that this situation will change. That amounts indeed to a problematic system within which to work.

4) How widespread is the problem?

Perhaps at this point you may be thinking that surely this is a rarely encountered problem. After all, like you, SMs are people who gave up their lives to serve God, and seek to be godly

leaders within the church. This all sounds incredibly negative. We would be naïve to think so. The problem is widespread and prevalent.

First, a SM, like the rest of us, is a sinful person. The ninth Article of the 39 Articles aptly summarises the Bible's teaching on the issue, when it states that: "concupiscence remains in the regenerate". We need an acute awareness of the doctrine of sin, and often our awareness or doctrine, or both, are lacking. An excellent book that helps us enormously in this regard is Paul Tripp's *Dangerous Calling*. His book examines our sinful hearts as pastors in great depth and for our good. For example, in chapter 2 of his book, he speaks of the signs of a minister losing their way. These signs include ignoring the clear evidence of problems, by rationalising and explaining them away. He speaks of the deceitfulness of sin, which blinds us. He concludes that the problems are prevalent ("I've heard the stories again and again"), and that "for all the pastors who know they are in trouble, there are many, many who are and don't yet know it".¹⁹ Later he speaks of how we are well-educated theologically and well-trained in ministry, and can "mistake ministry knowledge, busyness, and skill with personal spiritual maturity"²⁰; the latter including especially humility.

I will speak specifically about the important topic of narcissism in church leaders later. Dr Darrell Puls of the American Association of Christian Counselors wrote a book, published in 2017 by Cascade Books: "Let Us Prey: The Plague of Narcissist Pastors and what we can do about it". He and Dr Glenn Ball, a colleague in Canada, embedded a validated test instrument for Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) in a wider survey of pastors in Canada. 31.2% scored in the range of NPD.²¹ Let that sink in! Almost one in three ministers are narcissists!

In the same report by Dr Puls, he said that in 2012, in the USA, 65% of churches reported serious internal conflict within the last five years. The statistics speak of a worrying reality.

Paul Beasley-Murray wrote about power and abuse in the church in: *Power for God's Sake* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 1998). His book is based on a survey of ministers. Almost 60% of those under 45 years of age had thought of leaving ministry because of power struggles of one kind or another at church; namely, conflicts and church politics.²² Half the ministers surveyed had experienced "major conflict" in a church setting. One in three or one in four of these conflicts were unresolved.²³ One in six ministers left a church unhappily, but another figure given, which seems more accurate, was actually 43%.²⁴ One in five churches are racked by power politics.²⁵

The author also notes that people at all levels within our churches are sinful. Ministers themselves realised that they are sinful: 10% admitted to manipulating meetings fairly often; 42% admitted to playing on the guilt of church members; 27% admitted to intimidating

¹⁹ P. D. Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway: 2012), 29-39.

²⁰ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 64.

²¹ Dr Darrell Puls speaks about his book and these statistics in his study: "Let Us Prey: The Frequency of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Pastors", December 11, 2017.

²² Paul Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster, 2013 PDF version), 33.

²³ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake* (2013 PDF version), 75-76. The differing figures depended on who was asked: the ministers themselves or their church leaders.

²⁴ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake* (2013 PDF version), 77.

²⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God's Sake* (2013 PDF version), 80. Secular statistics show that almost half of Australian workers experience bullying at work during their careers. Beyond Blue and the University of Wollongong did a study showing these results: *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Devils you know" by Ginger Gorman – a special report on workplace bullying.

weaker people.²⁶ He notes that: “The true number of ministers involved in major abuse is likely to be considerably higher”.²⁷ Beasley-Murray mentions the problem of accountability (referred to above): “Generally speaking, accountability appears to be a myth. Ministers by and large have few restrictions put upon them.”²⁸

Accountability for SMs is a huge issue. Power and responsibility require accountability. To quote Albert Mohler: “A leader without accountability is an accident waiting to happen”; “the... Bible... reveals God’s steadfast and unyielding concern for the abused, the threatened, the suffering, and the fearful. There is no excuse whatsoever for abuse of any form, verbal, emotional, physical, spiritual or sexual. The Bible warns so clearly of those who would abuse power and weaponize authority. Every Christian church and every pastor and every church member must be ready to protect any of God’s children threatened by abuse and must hold every abuser accountable.”²⁹ Is this the case in the Sydney diocese?

Tim Challies says that: “It is tragic but undeniable: There are many, many people in positions of church leadership who should not be in positions of church leadership.”³⁰ If the figures given above are accurate, then there is a serious problem, of which many exiting Bible College students may be unaware. You are entering a work system that actually does not have the checks and balances of a secular work place (as I will explain below). You have a one in three chance of your boss being a narcissist, and perhaps a one in two chance of serious conflict. Accountability for SMs is very low. Certainly, I have seen these problems borne out anecdotally in the dozens of AMs I have spoken with who have endured such suffering. You need to go into your work place with your eyes wide open. This is a widespread and prevalent problem.

5) Unfair dismissal

Finally, I want to finish this chapter on ministry team conflicts by speaking about an all-too-common end point of such conflicts: unfair dismissal.³¹ I have spoken to so many AMs, and others, who have been unfairly dismissed after conflict with their SM. Basically, that is how the conflict was ‘resolved’. This is something which often cannot happen in the secular workplace, but which is tolerated in our churches. Often, the unfair dismissal may not even come from an abusive SM, but this final play in the conflict is, I believe, an abuse in itself.³²

²⁶ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* (2013 PDF version), 67.

²⁷ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* (2013 PDF version), 67.

of accountability in the #MeToo era”; churchlawandtax.com; may 2018; by Ruth Moon.

²⁸ Beasley-Murray, *Power for God’s Sake* (2013 PDF version), 48. Only just over a third of ministers underwent any sort of regular appraisal of their ministry.

²⁹ Albert Mohler; May 24, 2018; “The Wrath of God Poured Out – The Humiliation of the Southern Baptist Convention”; <https://albertmohler.com/2018/05/23/wrath-god-poured-humiliation-southern-baptist-convention/> Note that there are many Scriptures that speak of power and its abuse. For example 1 Samuel 8:9-18 contains a warning of what a king will do with his power (as became the case). Even David himself, the most godly of kings, abused his power in committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering her husband to cover it up (2 Samuel 11).

³⁰ Tim Challies, “5 Ugly Qualities of the Anti-Elder”.

³¹ If you want some light relief at this point, here’s a two-minute video on the topic – “20 church phrases for getting fired”:

<https://www.facebook.com/johnbcrist/videos/vb.730672763734472/2181865172051891/?type=2&theater>

³² Note that SMs can be unfairly dismissed in other dioceses by a bishop. And gospel workers in parachurch ministries can be unfairly dismissed by their superior.

Also in some instances incompetence is the chief problem in the conflict, not abuse, but that would still not justify unfair dismissal (and the latter becomes an abuse in itself).

Phillip Jensen highlights the enormous damage done to an AM when they are dismissed from their job in his article: “You should think twice before firing incompetent staff”.³³ Not only does the AM lose their job, which is bad enough, but they have to move house, move from their church, move away from their friends at church, and move their kids from school and their own friends there. Emotional and psychological damage is often great; it is a traumatic and major upheaval. He also notes that AMs are not “units of production”, but “people made in God’s image”. You are not a dispensable resource. Jensen also writes: “The gospel, rather than the world, must set the standards of life for Christians in every aspect of life, including the workplace. Holiness involves being different from the world, but this does not mean we have lower standards than the world or can ignore industrial legislation”. Sacking an AM is a “failure of care, love, and justice”.³⁴

What can you do if your job is threatened or you are unfairly dismissed? I will address what you can do later in this booklet. I want to mention just two things here. First, ministers often don’t realise what a huge impact unfair dismissal will have on them. Those who have been unfairly dismissed will often fall into inactivity and depression. Some have suicidal thoughts. It can be a very dark time. Before you get to this point, be determined to reach out for help. Don’t isolate yourself. You can contact us (Christian Workers’ Support Group): ministrymistreatment@gmail.com. If you are feeling suicidal, you can contact Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636.

Second, there is a particular problem in that some AMs who have put all their eggs in the one basket. Some Christians, keen to serve God, go into full time gospel work with no other qualifications or major work experience. When they find themselves out of ministry later, they have nothing to fall back on. I strongly urge you to have something else to fall back on. It is worth thinking hard about this. All the AMs I know who have left ministry after unfair dismissal did not, of course, think that this would happen to them.

³³ https://phillipjensen.com/firing-staff/?fbclid=IwAR0_S2i7ILb6JRyVQyFQtJzUS6nlhDox5hLPEZGvskfnglybASsn1WolhxA

³⁴ Note also that *The Assistants Minister Ordinance 2017* says that AMs are to be given at least three months’ notice (it can be up to nine months), unless another length of time was agreed to at the time of employment.

John's Ministry Experience

I arrived at my new church after finishing Moore College as the new Assistant Minister. I had a number of meetings with the previous Assistant Minister in which he described the history and state of the youth ministry and the evening church. He had changed the Friday night youth group from an attractional model to a discipleship model. So under the old program the 2-hour program on Friday night involved 1 and ½ hours of games, a 10-minute youth talk and 20 minutes of food. The new program involved 1-hour of games, a 45-minute Bible study and 15-minutes of food. Under the old program there were around 80 kids coming. When the program was changed the first week dropped to 3 kids. By the time I arrived the youth group had built backup to around 50 kids.

These changes were never fully accepted by the Senior Minister and there was a Bible Study group that remained strongly opposed to the changes. In the Bible Study group were 2 of the wardens, the children's minister and the student minister. In addition to the Friday night youth group there were 3 other youth groups being run on different nights with each having a smaller target age range. 2 of these were being run by the children's minister and the student minister from this Bible Study group and were attractional in their nature.

The Senior Minister made it clear that I was to look after youth and young adults however he said that I had no authority or responsibility for 2 of the 3 other youth groups that were being run. What became clear in that conversation is that he had very different ideas about their future so I resolved to leave them alone.

As I attended subsequent staff meetings it became clear that there was a division across the staff team and it centred upon ministry philosophy – attractional focused vs discipleship focused. The student minister and the children's minister wanted to develop ministry that was more attractional in nature by focusing upon games and entertainment. The previous assistant minister and myself wanted to develop ministry that was more focused upon discipleship with clear Bible teaching at the centre. This difference showed itself in the way each of the two groups wanted to run the youth ministry. Initially the Senior Minister tried to remain neutral but I felt that over time he was more and more supportive of the attractional focused ministry.

Two of the wardens from the Bible study group that I mentioned before wrote a complaint about me to the Senior Minister. Their areas of concern included that I had taught kids about hell; I had read a controversial Bible passage at the morning church which was Luke 14:25-27; and that I had promoted the Friday night youth group in the morning church. I had a meeting with the Senior Minister where he read out the complaint to me. I was completely surprised and unprepared. I didn't have much time to respond. I chose not to debate the points and offered to resign because it became clear we were operating under a very different ministry philosophy and I felt that I wasn't being supported. He chose not to accept my resignation and asked me to stay.

By this stage it had become very clear that there was a distinct group in the morning congregation that were opposed to the previous Assistant Minister and now to myself. I believe that they didn't like what the previous Assistant Minister had done with the youth and young adults ministry and they saw my arrival as an opportunity for change. I resisted changing the ministry back to the way it was because I had originally agreed to come to the

church because I knew the youth ministry was run with a discipleship focused model. So they ramped up their advocacy and opposition to what I was trying to do.

The Senior Minister decided that we would meet to read the Bible together as a way of trying to work through these issues. Unfortunately, we only read 2 chapters together before our time together descended into discussion solely around the youth ministry.

I wanted to introduce a week long youth camp as part of the youth program. The youth leaders and the youth kids were very supportive of the idea. However, the Senior Minister was very sceptical and he received negative feedback from the group in the morning congregation. I decided to persevere in running the camp.

I turned up for one of my regular meetings with the Senior Minister. I was surprised to find that he had asked one of the wardens along who had made a complaint about me. He then proceeded to outline 3 criticisms he had about me and my ministry: 1. An unwillingness to change, 2. A disengagement from church activities, and 3. A lack of discussion with the leaders of the other youth groups. I tried to answer each of his concerns but I was in a state of shock and felt overwhelmed by the situation. I was given an alternative youth ministry structure and asked to implement it which I knew would take the ministry back to the attractional model.

The Senior Minister continued to receive complaints from this group in the morning congregation. These complaints included the accusations that we were running no games, we were running 2-hour Bible studies, we forced the kids to sit still and say nothing during Bible studies. These complaints were completely false. I invited the Senior Minister to attend the Friday night youth group so that he could see what happened for himself but he never took up my invitation. I suggested that we have a parish wide meeting to discuss the youth ministry where everyone could voice their thoughts and concerns but he refused. He wrote me an email saying that we were running university level Bible studies that were dry and unsuited to kids. The Bible studies were written by the youth leaders who had been trained at the Katoomba youth leaders convention. Unfortunately, all of these complaints were made by people who had never been to the Friday night youth group even though I had made numerous invitations for those people to come along.

I put together a list of letters and comments that I had received from numerous people within the parish about the Friday night youth group. These letters and comments were very supportive of the ministry that was happening. They came from every part of the parish and included most of the youth leaders and some of the families from the morning congregation. These letters and comments were largely ignored by the Senior Minister in our discussions. In my second last meeting with the Senior Minister he said that because people were continuing to complain he thought I should leave.

At our final meeting he thanked me for my ministry but said that I needed to go because he thought I displayed a lack of gentleness and humility. I expressed my concern that his ministry was characterised by a desire to win people's approval. Unfortunately, I did this harshly. He asked me to resign twice but I refused so he gave me a letter of dismissal. He then asked me to sign a joint statement which said that I was not leaving because of theology and ministry differences but because of a personality clash. I felt like I couldn't sign the document in good conscience so I refused.

Shortly after my meeting with the Senior Minister I explained to the youth leaders that I would be leaving. I told the Senior Minister that it would be too difficult for myself, my wife and my family to continue at the church. He agreed. I tried to arrange the final details with the wardens. However, they refused to pay me for another 3 months as outlined in the Assistant Minister's ordinance. They also wanted me to take responsibility for the rental property that we were living in. This put my family and I under incredible stress. We were already losing our church friends and family, the community that we had adjusted to, the house that we were living in, and even our reputation. We spoke to other ministers outside the church but not many really understood what had happened to us. Some made us feel like it was primarily our fault. We felt shattered and were not sure what would come next. Fortunately, in God's grace, I was able to find a job as a Project Manager in the business world.

The bishop wanted to help us in the final transition but he was away at the time and so unable to deal with the situation directly. When he returned he spoke with the wardens and directed them to pay our final 3 months' package and to take responsibility for the rental property. This was a great relief for us. Yet we still felt quite isolated and we felt like we were the bad guys.

After I had left I sent an email to the Senior Minister apologising for speaking harshly to him in our last meeting. He responded and I was disappointed that he didn't express any concern or offer any apology for what had happened to us. My wife and I have been deeply scarred by what happened. We still trust in the power and love of God and we learnt a lot from the experience but we would never choose to go through something like this again.

Chapter 2: Mind-sets

I have described the sort of conflicts that can occur between a gospel worker and their boss (an AM and their SM). In this chapter I want to deal with the mind-sets of both. The AM needs to have realistic expectations. They also need to understand a particular mind-set of some SMs, namely narcissism.

1) Realistic expectations

In the past, AMs graduating from College would sign up to serve at a church for two, three or four years. There was a clear understanding that this was the length of their stay in the job. At the end of the agreed term, when they left, their exit was obviously not a matter of unfair dismissal; there were clear expectations. Some say that AMs these days have a wrong sense of entitlements, which they think they are owed. A clear understanding at the start might avoid some of these problems of unrealistic expectations.

Furthermore, there is a danger of attaching our identity to our job.³⁵ Losing our job can then become tantamount to losing our identity. This is avoidable and should be avoided. As explained above, losing a job for an AM ends up being far more than just losing the job itself; but it should not be about losing one's identity.

Another common unrealistic expectation is that your SM will be a godly boss. Many are, many are not. We are told in John 2:24 that "Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people". We are often quite naïve. We expect other Christians to be godly, especially ministers. But we are underestimating our sinfulness. Jesus did not entrust himself to man. Do we think we know better than Jesus?! There is no need for suspicion or paranoia, but blind trust is naïve.

In this respect we should listen more to Scripture. Passages on slaves and masters are important to our discussion. Nuance, however, is needed. We often apply these passages to the modern situation of employees and employers. This is correct, but not entirely so. An employee is not a slave. If your boss is abusive, you can leave your job. However, many of the principles do apply. The passages in question, in particular, are Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1. AMs should be hard and sincere workers, working first and foremost to please the Lord, not their boss primarily (Col 3:23). You should obey your SM, but not in everything, like a slave (Col 3:22), for you are not a slave! But you will work with all your heart in the job.

Note too that bosses are to be fair, to do what is right, and not to threaten their workers (Col 4:1, Eph 6:9). Think about that! These commands are written to Christian bosses. Paul knows that Christian bosses are sinful, and may be prone to threaten or be unfair. They may be harsh and abuse their authority. They may exploit their workers. It is naïve to think otherwise. Trust the Scriptures, the Word of God. Be wise! Some SMs will be unfair or will threaten their workers. Why else would those verses be in our Bible? But be encouraged: they will answer to God for their actions (Col 4:1, Eph 6:9).

Similarly, 1 Peter 5:3 calls on pastors to lead by example, not by coercion: not to be "domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock". Again, the clear

³⁵ Tripp, *Dangerous Calling*, 21-25, 104-05, 205.

implication is that pastors can be domineering, abusing their God-given authority. Sam Allberry has written an excellent article about this: “How do churches end up with domineering bullies for pastors?”.³⁶ Domineering, lording it over others, is worldly (Mark 10:42). On the one hand, the Bible is against anticlericalism (Hebrews 13:17); we are to obey our leaders. On the other hand, the Bible is against authoritarianism in those same leaders.

Beware of abusers who use the Scriptures to back up their abuse. This in itself is spiritual abuse.³⁷ The husband who insists that his wife submit to him is doing the wrong thing. Ephesians 5 calls on him to love his wife: that is God’s word to him. The same passage calls on his wife to submit to him, but that is God’s word to *her*. Similarly 1 Peter 2:18-25 is used to call on Christian workers to submit to their boss. Generally, this is true and right. But again, you are not a slave. And neither wives nor employees should be urged with Scripture to submit to an abusive husband and/ or boss.³⁸

Finally, I should note that there are many useful things I could say about protecting yourself by having a day off, having clear boundaries, looking after your health, your marriage, your godliness and relationship with God (spending time in the Word and in prayer), etc. These are all very important, but others have written far better than I ever could about them. I highly recommend two books in particular: Paul Tripp’s *Dangerous Calling*, and Peter Brain’s *Going the Distance* (Kingsford: MatthiasMedia, 2004).

2) Rights

One unhelpful ‘expectation’ that many AMs & SMs may have, is that the AM has no rights. ‘Rights’ are a complicated topic, so I need to spend some time explaining this. Rights are not wrong! Gospel workers, AMs, *do* have rights. You can choose not to stand on your rights. But you do have them, and this is Biblical.

In terms of definition, rights refer to something you are entitled to legally or morally.³⁹ A broader definition, given in Wikipedia is: “Legal, social, or ethical principles of freedom or entitlement; that is, rights are the fundamental normative rules about what is allowed of people or owed to people, according to some legal system, social convention, or ethical theory.”⁴⁰ The Bible clearly recognises that people have rights. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul argues at great length about the right of a pastor to be paid for his work. Sometimes Paul stood on his rights: for example, as a Roman citizen, when he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-11; see also Acts 16:37).

In 1 Corinthians 9, after giving seven reasons why a gospel worker has every right to be paid, Paul’s point is that he did *not* stand on his rights (1 Corinthians 9:12, 15). The reason, it seems, was that doing so would have hindered the work of the gospel. Thus, not standing on your rights, for the sake of the gospel, is a godly, Christ-like thing to do. Note though, that no

³⁶ Posted January 21, 2019 on the Gospel Coalition USA website. He also notes the prevalence of the problem, saying that there is a trend which has developed in recent years of pastors having to leave the ministry because of their bullying. He adds that, while this is not a new problem, it seems to be “more and more evident in the Western church today” and is often “unrecognized or unchallenged”. I would also add that it is often denied.

³⁷ *Faithfulness in Service 2017* notes that spiritual abuse includes: “using biblical or religious terminology to justify abuse”.

³⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:1-8 is another passage frequently used by abusers. I will say more about this below.

³⁹ *The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary* (4th ed.; Oxford: OUP, 2004), 1217.

⁴⁰ Wikipedia; cited from the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy;
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rights#cite_note-tws21decgghg-1

one else can tell you to give up your rights, especially your abuser! In fact, when an employer withholds the rights of an employee, they are doing the precise opposite of this passage. For they are denying the rights for which Paul argues and bringing the gospel into disrepute. You should indeed take your entitlements and rights, unless somehow doing so would bring damage to the cause of the gospel.

3) Employment status of Assistant Ministers in the Anglican church diocese of Sydney

When it comes to the employment entitlements of AMs, the Anglican church diocese of Sydney may be denying their rights through a legal loophole. At the time of writing this, my understanding is that the Sydney diocese is claiming that AMs are not legally employees, and therefore do not have the rights that employees in the rest of the workforce in Australia enjoy.⁴¹ I have already mentioned the article by Phillip Jensen (“You should think twice before firing incompetent staff”), where he rightly asserts that we should treat church employees (AMs) according to the standards of the Bible and the gospel.

First of all, I should note that I am not a lawyer. My reading, however, leads me to think that the Sydney diocese is, legally, correct in asserting that AMs are not employees. This may sound very strange at first. In the UK Anglican clergy are seen as “office-holders”, not employees. They are employed, basically, by God, not man! These laws go back to the 11th century.⁴² The situation is similar in Australia. Two eminent legal minds, Keith Mason and Neil Foster, it seems to me, clearly view pastors as not being employees.⁴³ Though debatable, I take it that this does include AMs. Keith Mason states that: “Clergy status is thoroughly embedded in canon law” and that “The system of canon law operating in... the... Anglican Churches in Australia does not of itself constitute a contract. ... Licensing to a particular position... does not establish a contract of employment or otherwise engage the wrongful dismissal jurisdiction of an industrial commission.”⁴⁴ That is, Australian law upholds church law; church law says that clergy do not have a contract. Therefore, legally, clergy are not employees. Furthermore, this means that normal legal avenues available to contest a dismissal as unfair are not available to clergy.

Neil Foster notes that even though the church defines clergy as being “office-holders”, “that would not prevent the minister from being employed under a contract”. There may therefore be cases where clergy *are* considered to be employees. However, this is generally not the case. To quote Neil Foster at length: “Acknowledging that it seems likely that an Australian court would find today that a minister of religion was engaged under *some sort* of contract where there were formal arrangements in place for salary, tax, accommodation, etc, does this

⁴¹ “Judges and regulators continue to encounter the often institutionalised lack of access for many faith workers to statutory employment rights enjoyed by most Australian workers”, page 93 of the *Macquarie Law Journal* (2009) Vol 9; “Towards a Responsive Law Paradigm for Faith Work” by Ilija Vickovich, pages 93-114.

⁴² See “Clergy are office-holders, not employees, appeal court rules”, by Gavin Drake; posted April 30, 2015: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/1-may/news/uk/clergy-are-office-holders-not-employees-appeal-court-rules>

⁴³ “Clergy status in the age of the Royal Commission”; lecture given by Keith Mason in March 2018 in Melbourne and April 2018 in Sydney; Trinity College, The University of Melbourne: <https://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/getattachment/about/news-media/news/Trinity-host-Robin-Sharwood-Lecture-series/CLERGY-STATUS-IN-THE-AGE-OF-THE-ROYAL-COMMISSION.pdf.aspx?lang=en-AU>;

“Employment status of clergy” by Neil Foster; Law and Religion Australia blog, posted May 3, 2015; <https://lawandreligionaustralia.blog/2015/05/03/employment-status-of-clergy/>

⁴⁴ K. Mason, “Clergy status in the age of the Royal Commission”, 7, 12.

mean that all ministers are employees? In my view this is by no means the case. The fundamental “indicia” of employment still start with consideration of the notion of “control”. It may seem unlikely that a congregation that a minister was meant to be leading could be said to exercise “control”. Even denominational officers in general do not exercise a great deal of supervision over their ministers. So it seems to me unlikely that most ministers of religion would be regarded as employees.”⁴⁵

It seems clear to me, therefore, that AMs should endeavour to obtain an employment contract upon starting their work. The saying: “If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck...” applies here. Clearly an AM is an employee on the basis of reasonable common sense, let alone Biblical godliness. However, legally, it seems that this is only the case if they have an employment contract. The vexed question is: who is the employer? However, for an AM it may well be argued that the notion of “control” applies: they are employed by the SM and/ or by the wardens/ parish council. Otherwise, AMs have no legal recourse with a case of unfair dismissal.

The employment status of AMs in particular is debated and by no means clear cut (as is the case for SMs). This may be tested in court in the future, and perhaps AMs will be found legally to be employees. For example, Frank Cranmer writes: “Recent cases suggest that courts are taking a more nuanced approach to the employment status of clergy.”; “we appear to have moved away from a position where the courts simply take it as a given that no employment relationship can exist between a religious community and an individual minister and have become much more inclined to analyse the factual situation in the individual case”; and that Lady Smith in a court case (2010) “held that there was no general rule of law either that all ministers of religion *were* employees or that they *were not* employees”.⁴⁶ Ilija Vickovich writes that: “in recent decades a number of courts in Britain, Australia and elsewhere have granted relief to faith workers in actions brought on the basis of breach of contract or infringement of statutory employment rights”; also, therefore: “This has led to the supposition in some cases that the relationship between a faith worker and a religious organisation may be seen as contractual if the factual matrix is supportive.”⁴⁷

An interesting case in this regard concerns the Church of Scotland. In a 2005 case involving an “associate minister”, the House of Lords stated that the distinction between office and employment was a “false apposition”. The Church of Scotland “subsequently decided to give formal contracts of employment to all associate and assistant ministers”.⁴⁸ Would this not be the right way forward for the Sydney diocese?

Currently, what may happen in a conflict between a SM and their AM, is that the SM may ask the AM to leave. Yet Australian legislation for employees states that an employee can only be dismissed from their position for a valid reason or after a period of performance management. An employer can only summarily dismiss an employee, without undertaking performance management, for serious misconduct. Employees can be terminated for poor work performance, but only after steps have been taken to provide the employee with a reasonable opportunity to improve their performance. The employer needs to clearly

⁴⁵ N. Foster, “Employment status of clergy”.

⁴⁶ “Employment status of clergy: goodbye to the ‘Servant of God?’”, by Frank Cranmer, Law & Religion UK blog, posted 9 May 2016: <http://www.lawandreligionuk.com/2016/05/09/employment-status-of-clergy-goodbye-to-the-servant-of-god/>

⁴⁷ I. Vickovich, “Towards a Responsive Law Paradigm for Faith Work”, 93, 95.

⁴⁸ F. Cranmer, “Employment status of clergy: goodbye to the ‘Servant of God?’”.

document the area of underperformance. When a SM gives no stated reason for dismissing an AM, or dismissal is the result of breakdown of relationship, this is unfair dismissal and, if unchecked, is indicative of a system operating below minimum pagan standards.

4) Narcissism in clergy

Why would a SM unfairly dismiss an AM? Given the great damage caused and the lack of justice involved, why would this happen? The answer may reside in the prevalence among pastors of narcissism.

What are the characteristics of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD)? The following quotes are from a Powerpoint presentation by Jeni Mawter.⁴⁹ “People with NPD have an inflated sense of self-importance, see themselves as perfect and will attack anyone who tries to put a chink in that “flawless” image”; “They require constant attention and admiration”; “When criticized, they react with blaming, insults and put downs, causing the subjects of their rage to feel rejected, hurt, humiliated and powerless”; “They also distort reality, often contradicting themselves, lying or denying events of the past to make themselves look better. They make us doubt what we know and wonder whether we’re the crazy ones.” This latter phenomenon is known as gas-lighting.⁵⁰

People with NPD don’t think that they are the problem (everyone else is!). They shift blame to you. They want power and control over others. They hoard past insults and injuries, which can be used against you later. They may nit-pick at your every fault and engage in personal attacks. They are happy to devalue and then discard you. They won’t apologise or take responsibility for their actions. They avoid accountability. They don’t want their position or feeling of superiority being challenged. They make unreasonable demands and punish you for not meeting them.⁵¹ Narcissists can also be passive-aggressive; they may give the silent treatment.⁵²

Their narcissistic supply comes from private attention (such as admiration or flattery) or public attention (such as a pulpit!). They want you to think that they are wonderful! They wear a ‘godly’ mask in public, but that is not their real self.⁵³

Note that NPD doesn’t only occur in people who grandstand (many would think here of certain politicians or celebrities); it can be more subtle than that. The former are overt narcissists; there are also covert ones. In the survey mentioned previously by Drs Puls and Ball, of the 31.2% of clergy with NPD, 26% were in the overt category and 5.2% in the covert one.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Jeni Mawter, “Narcissistic Victim Syndrome – the Fallout of Narcissistic Personality Disorder. A Powerpoint by Jeni Mawter”, August 6, 2013; published in “Health & Medicine”.

⁵⁰ The term comes from a 1944 movie of that title. The victim notices that the gaslights keep dimming, but her abuser keeps telling her that she is imagining it.

⁵¹ See: Shahida Arabi, “20 Diversion Tactics Highly Manipulative Narcissists, Sociopaths and Psychopaths Use To Silence You”, posted December 2, 2018: <https://thoughtcatalog.com/shahida-arabi/2016/06/20-diversion-tactics-highly-manipulative-narcissists-sociopaths-and-psychopaths-use-to-silence-you/>

⁵² Gail Meyers, “A Narcissist’s Silent Treatment”, January 21, 2014.

⁵³ Beware of ministers who do not share about themselves.

⁵⁴ D. Puls, “Let Us Prey: The Frequency of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Pastors”, December 11, 2017. Overt and covert narcissists are also called dominant and vulnerable narcissists; see the excellent summary video:

What should you do if you suspect that your boss is a narcissist? Almost everything I read says: walk away. Run! You can't win. You can try and put boundaries in place in the short term; and don't listen so much to their words, but rather observe their tactics. But, basically, run!

If you are curious about NPD, or worried about it, you could try taking this online test: <https://psychcentral.com/quizzes/narcissistic-personality-quiz/>.⁵⁵ Note also that the Church of England is now worried that too many narcissists are attracted to ordained ministry! Therefore they are considering such tests for ordinands.⁵⁶

<https://www.facebook.com/BeConstantlyCurious/videos/184398018892915/UzpfSTU4ODk3NjEzNDYyOTkwMjo5MDI2NDYwMTMyNjI5MTE/>

⁵⁵ Try to avoid giving the answers you think should be 'right'. Be honest!

⁵⁶ Olivia Rudgard, "Church considers psychometric tests as experts raise fears about clergy narcissism", The Telegraph, UK; posted 13 July, 2018: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/07/13/church-considers-psychometric-tests-experts-raise-fears-clergy/>

David's Ministry Experience

I arrived at my new church as the Assistant Minister. It wasn't my first role in full time ministry; I had previous roles before. So I had some experience. My areas of responsibility in my new church were the young adults evening congregation and the senior youth ministry (years 10 to 12). It was a big church with multiple congregations. The evening congregation had around 120 people and the senior youth ministry had around 50 people.

The church and ministries were discipleship focused and they had a good culture. The leadership teams were strong and there was a good history of training. I enjoyed working on the staff team and the Senior Minister was very supportive. He gave me lots of freedom to plan and run the ministries that I was responsible for. However, I knew before arriving that the Senior Minister was about to retire.

My wife and I formed some great relationships and we began to really enjoy the ministries that we were running. We had managed to start up some new ministries that were running well. People were appreciative of what we were trying to do. We felt like there was a lot of opportunity to do some great gospel work.

A new Youth Minister was hired and he took over all the youth ministry. I focused upon the evening congregation and I started to form a vision for what the next few years would hold. I started to get people on board and formulate a plan of how things would take shape. But in the midst of this the Senior Minister told me that he would be retiring at the end of the year. I was sad to hear this but not surprised. I wasn't sure what would come of my plans.

The new Senior Minister who was chosen had similar theological convictions to the previous one. However, his style was very different and I came to realise later that in some theological areas he was more radically conservative than was originally thought. Very quickly he began to put his stamp on the parish. One area that he focused a lot upon was the evening congregation. He believed that the evening congregation was central to the health and growth of the parish and he wanted much more direct control and involvement in the evening congregation.

I encouraged this and we worked out the preaching calendar so that the new Senior Minister would be doing the bulk of the preaching including the congregational weekend away. Yet he wanted more control over the week to week running of the evening congregation. I noticed that he really wanted to be the central figure in the congregation that people would look to.

The Senior Minister started to meet with his staff a number of times throughout the week. He instituted a staff Bible study that went for an hour. However, it was less of a Bible study and more of a monologue from the Senior Minister about a passage from the Bible. There was little discussion. I felt like most of the staff was afraid of saying something that would disagree with the Senior Minister. There was another staff meeting that went for two hours to talk general business. Then each of the staff was to meet with the Senior Minister fortnightly one on one for an hour to discuss their area of ministry. In my meetings with the Senior Minister he would often instruct me on what he thought I should be doing with the evening congregation.

I noticed that the leadership style of the new Senior Minister was very different to the previous Senior Minister. I believed that the new Senior Ministers leadership style was to

exercise a strong level of authority and he sought to make the majority of decisions across the parish and in each of the congregations. He had a particular way of doing things that as a staff we were generally expected to follow and there was very little room for difference or disagreement.

My leadership style was different. I sought to train up lay people and form leadership teams allowing for discussion so that we could work together. The Senior Minister did not believe that this was a very effective model. During a car trip we took together one day he said to me that he thought the best leadership model was authoritarian and the other alternatives were not as effective. This is the model he established by trying to use the staff as the conduits through which his authority would be exercised. This I believe was one of the main reasons he instituted one on one meetings with the individual staff members.

This leadership style was also evident in his theology. He had very radically conservative theology which at times was quite black and white. He gave lots of time to teaching us. However, if we disagreed with his conclusions and tried to discuss the matter with him it would often devolve into an argument.

For example, during a staff meeting the senior minister had a disagreement with the senior assistant minister over focusing on local mission compared to overseas mission. The senior minister thought the senior assistant minister was too focused upon overseas mission. The senior minister was on the verge of yelling at the senior assistant minister in the disagreement. It was a very uncomfortable moment.

This pattern would repeat itself in my own theological discussions with the Senior Minister. He would teach on a certain topic and for a few of them I disagreed with him. Some examples of things that he taught which I disagreed with were that children baptised as infants are automatically saved if they were to die, the Lord's Supper in Scripture is not commanded, the Bible teaches limited atonement, and remarriage for a divorced Christian is not possible. When I tried to discuss these disagreements with him he would often become aggressive and would start arguing. I became very uncomfortable and backed right down.

The problem I found was not so much that we disagreed but what that meant in our relationship. I felt that it was not possible to disagree harmoniously. So I decided fairly quickly that either I change my convictions and agree with him or I don't say anything at all. I chose the latter. He noticed this and began to resent it. I believe that he thought I should just agree with him and he didn't like that I wouldn't. There was significant tension in our relationship and he noticed I was more withdrawn.

We had a staff retreat where I presented my plans for the evening congregation. The Senior Minister largely passed over what I had presented. I had a feeling from that experienced that he had a very different idea as to where he wanted the evening congregation to go. I decided to shelve my plans and let him make the decisions about where he wanted to take the evening congregation.

Another area of tension was around the number of hours' staff were expected to work. The senior minister had very high expectations in this area. He would often work on his day off and before coming to the parish in his previous role he had never taken leave to go on holidays. His wife made it a condition of him coming to this church that he would take

holidays. As a staff member I felt constant pressure that I needed to be working longer hours and I constantly felt that I was never quite matching up.

During one of our staff meetings there was tension over a particular issue. Afterwards he called me into his office and asked me to leave the church. He said to me that he wanted me to leave at the end of the year because he felt I was withdrawn from the church and that I wasn't a very good leader because I only influenced a few people rather than the whole congregation. I was shocked by this even though I knew our relationship was not in good shape. I was immediately concerned for my family because my wife was due to give birth to our third child in a couple of months. He went on to explain that he wasn't very happy with the whole staff team. He thought it was a dysfunctional team and he confided in me that he was planning on asking another staff member to leave.

I was sent into an emotional tailspin because of what happened. I found it incredibly difficult to be at meetings where we were planning for the future when I knew that I was not wanted as a part of that future. At this stage I had no plans for my future and was trying to come to terms with what we were going to do with our family and our new baby longer term. I didn't really know who I could turn to.

As time progressed it became clear that he wanted me to hide that he had asked me to leave. He wanted me to find another job so that he could suggest to everyone that the reason I was leaving was because I had gotten another job. I told him that I wanted people to know that he had asked me to leave primarily because when I originally came I gave the lay leaders of the evening congregation a commitment that I would be there for at least four years. I was only coming up to the end of my second year. When he discovered that I wanted to tell people this he became very angry and accused me of being unloving and uncaring towards him and the people of the church.

I wanted him to give me a written letter that said he had asked me to leave. I told him that my 3-month notice period would begin at this point, which is a requirement under the Assistant Ministers Ordinance. He refused to do it on the first two occasions. On the third occasion I had to point out that doing this is a requirement under the National Employment Standards. He then sent me a very brief letter which still didn't make clear that he had asked me to leave but implied that it was a decision we agreed to together.

I offered to have a farewell on a Sunday so that we could say goodbye to everyone in the church. I didn't hear back from him for a number of weeks. On a Saturday he held a vision meeting for the parish where he spelled out how wonderful the future of the church would be and announced the appointment of a new staff member. This new staff member was to be my replacement but this was not how it was announced. He then sent me an email saying that he was willing to hold my farewell the next Sunday. I felt manipulated by this because it looked like to us he was trying to present the image of a wonderful future despite us leaving. I felt like he didn't consider how this would make us feel. My wife was also deeply hurt at this point and was struggling to be at church. So I refused to have a farewell on the following Sunday and I said that I would hold a number of small informal farewells with those that we were close to.

In God's grace I managed to find another ministry role and a new home for my family to move into. I emailed the Senior Minister to ask for my MEA account to be paid out which had \$4000 in it. I didn't receive a response for a week. So I sent another email which I

received no response to. A number of weeks later I emailed a third time for my MEA account to be paid out. Again I received no response. I decided to call the bishop who agreed to contact that parish. A couple of days later I was paid the \$4000.

When we were forced to leave it left us in a lot of pain because we loved the people that we were ministering to and the ministry that we were doing. I didn't end up just losing my job. We ended up losing our church family, our ministry, our home, our local community, our kid's school and we didn't know what was next.

About a year later I received a call from the youth minister who was deeply distressed because he had been asked to leave by the senior minister in very similar circumstances. He confessed that if he stayed any longer he felt that it would've put his marriage in jeopardy because of the expectations that were being placed upon him for the number of hours that he needed to work. But he believed the circumstance in which he was asked to leave was completely unwarranted and unfair. He said that he wanted some sense of justice. I explained to him that unfortunately this isn't what usually happens. In the following years four more staff members left because they were either asked to leave or they left of their own accord.

Chapter 3: What can you do?

What can you do as an AM? Are you indeed helpless and powerless in situations of abuse and unfair dismissal? In fact, there are a range of things you can do if you are having conflict with your SM, or if your SM is threatening to dismiss you. I can't emphasise enough that, as an AM, you have far more power than you realise. Your SM has as much power over you as you are willing to give them.

1) Employment interviews

The first matter to address is what you can do to set things up better for yourself in the first place when applying for a job. It is important to remember that you are interviewing to find out if this is a suitable team for you to join as much as they are interviewing you to find out if you are a good fit for the team. There are lots of theological questions on our minds that we ask to ensure we are aligned theologically, but we also need to ask questions that get to the heart of the power imbalance and abuses that we have discussed so far (and wish to avoid). Sometimes we don't ask questions because we don't know what to ask. Obviously, you can't just come out and ask if the SM is a narcissist! So, here are some suggestions of the sort of questions you might ask.⁵⁷

Is the Senior Pastor a details person or a big-picture person? (Which are you and how will you work together?) How long have the members of this team been together? Have the team engaged in any team building exercises or analyses (eg Myers-Briggs, Gallup Strengths Finder, DISC, etc)? What did these reveal about the current team? Does the Senior Minister have any plans to move anytime in the next three to five years? Does this church have a grievance policy? Has the grievance policy been used in the past three years? Have any members of the staff team taken stress leave in the last three years? How does this team deal with conflict? How often will you get to meet with the SM? Has someone else held the position you are applying for in the last two years? Can you speak to that person?

Women might ask further questions, such as... Does the parish council include women? If not, how does this governing body get a female perspective on issues affecting the church or issues relating to the women's pastor? Does the SM have a sister? If so, how did he and his sister deal with conflict? If not, did he go to a co-ed or an all-boys school? How will the SM deal with women coming to him to complain about something you have said or done? (Or about the wife of a married male AM.) How are the various pastors' wives involved in ministry? Is there any potential for you to be accidentally stepping on their toes?

I'm sure there are many other questions you might ask. And, no doubt, you will ask them carefully, tactfully and with humility! Make sure you do your homework properly. Make sure you speak to previous employees.

Finally, I should remind you that obtaining an employment contract may prove very valuable further down the track. Again, all of this is said with a desire to obtain minimum pagan standards in employment.

⁵⁷ This material is gratefully reproduced from an experienced ministry friend.

2) Dealing with conflict

Once in the job, if conflict arises, or you have a grievance, how should you handle it? What should you do if you think you are being abused by your SM? We should act according to Scripture. Take for example the least of all offences: a grievance you might have with another person. *Faithfulness in Service* does not use the term “grievance”, but there is a separate “Grievance Policy”. This too is important and can be defined as something separate to and lesser than harassment, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse, bullying and the like. A grievance occurs when a person feels a sense of wrong, hurt or injustice because of the actions or words of another person. A grievance should first be dealt with according to Matthew 18. If aggrieved by another, we should speak to the person about our grievance, seeking to resolve the issue. If that doesn’t work, we should involve another person who might help to resolve the issue. If still unsuccessful, we might then bring the matter to a higher authority (such as the PSU or bishop). So, with any grievance or conflict, we should first seek to speak to the person whom we believe has offended us.⁵⁸

What if that doesn’t work? You could try mediation. A third person, hopefully objective and skilled at mediation, might be able to help you sort out your differences.⁵⁹ Note that mediation is not recommended in the case of abuse. The Peacewise organisation rightly states that “it is not wise for a victim to seek to speak directly to his or her abuser, as a result of the power imbalance and the potential for further abuse to take place”.⁶⁰ Shuttle mediation, used in Family court situations may be more apt, or advocacy.

You should understand your rights. You have the right to a safe working environment. It may be that the wardens in particular (and parish council) are responsible for providing you with a safe working environment. Speak to the wardens about your situation and urge them to act. Speak to the PSU and the bishop.

You should keep accurate records as well as you possibly can. These can be very important later. Write down everything you can about what happened, when, what was said, etc. You may even want to obtain advice about the legality of recording your meetings. Unfortunately, when in the midst of conflict, you will find it hard to think straight and will not feel like taking action. But accurate record-taking is imperative.

When conflict takes place, a Christian with a sensitive conscience will often blame themselves. Your SM may be a narcissist who gas-lights you, blames you, or personally attacks you. Remember, if the figures are right, one in three SMs may be a narcissist! You may feel like you are at fault. Even if that were true, it does not justify unfair dismissal or abuse. A desire to reconcile, or to ‘fix the problem’, may cause you to stay in your situation. A desire not to go through the gut-wrenching upheaval of moving house, job, schools,

⁵⁸ In some instances incompetence is the chief problem, not abuse. That would still not justify unfair dismissal.

⁵⁹ Many Christians advocate Peacewise for mediation. I have heard much that is positive about their material; it is recommended reading for dealing with conflict. However, regarding mediation, I have heard reports from several AMs that the mediation seemed to be heavily weighted in favour of the SM. Perhaps it is worth considering a non-Christian professional mediation service; they may be more impartial and balanced.

⁶⁰ <https://peacewise.org.au/the-special-case-of-abuse/>; see also “There is a time and place for mediation but a bullying allegation in the workplace is not one”, by Carmelene Greco, posted by Associate Professor Becky Batagol of The Australian Dispute Resolution Research Network, 20/2/2017: <https://adrresearch.net/2017/02/20/there-is-a-time-and-place-for-mediation-but-a-bullying-allegation-in-the-workplace-is-not-one/>

leaving church and friends, etc, may lead you to want to stay. All the literature says that if your boss is abusing you or is a narcissist – run. It is time to leave.

In an ideal world the SM would not be above accountability or discipline. 1 Timothy 5:19-21 speaks about the need to discipline a SM. Verse 19 protects a SM against the real danger of false accusations. There should be a proper and thorough, careful investigation. But verse 20 also needs to be taken seriously. It refers to public or unrepentant sin. The purpose of this verse is for others to take warning. In such cases a SM should be publicly disciplined (private sins can be dealt with privately). Verse 21 is a solemn charge to take this command seriously and do it. Taking no action of this sort encourages SMs to act with impunity. Obeying the Bible here would result in the prevalence of abuse being diminished. When was the last time you heard of a SM being disciplined as this Scripture commands?

Also, in an ideal world your friends and others at church would believe you and support you. Sadly this is often not the case. You need to be prepared for that eventuality. It happened with child sexual abuse, and it happens with all other sorts of abuse. People will not want to believe that the SM could do such things. This is another reason to take accurate notes and records.

3) Dealing with unfair dismissal

As I have already said, many AMs find themselves being dismissed as the outcome of a conflict with a SM. And, if the Sydney diocese is correct – that an AM is not an employee, then the AM has no legal recourse. I, and many others, believe that this is not the case. If you are dismissed with no stated reason, or because of a breakdown in relationship with your SM, that is unfair dismissal.

You can go to Fairwork Australia and lodge a claim for unfair dismissal. You have only 21 days from the time of dismissal in which to lodge a complaint with them. If you have obtained an employment contract, you can prove that you are an employee and enjoy the same rights as other Australians in the workplace. As always, we are seeking to obtain minimum pagan standards – both for you, and the workers who will follow you.

You may feel that going outside of your church organisation is not right. Let me quote once more from Al Mohler: “A church, denomination, or Christian ministry must look outside of itself when confronted with a pattern of mishandling such responsibilities, or merely of being charged with such a pattern. We cannot vindicate ourselves. That is the advice I have given consistently for many years.”⁶¹

If bullying has taken place, you can take legal action against the employer for negligence. You would need to show that the bullying was caused by the employer and that it also caused

⁶¹ Albert Mohler, “The Wrath of God Poured Out”. Ruth Moon also writes: “Former gymnast Rachael Denhollander – whose testimony against USA Gymnastics team doctor Larry Nassar drew widespread media attention – told *Christianity Today* that “church is one of the least safe place to acknowledge abuse” ... “churches are as susceptible to ... abuses of power as secular institutions”. She suggests four lessons: Churches need to protect the victim, not the abuser; churches need to talk about abuse, even if you don’t think it is happening; don’t handle things in house - authorities outside the church should be involved (as with child sexual abuse); don’t underestimate the prevalence of abuse in the church. Ruth Moon, “How to create a church culture of accountability in the #MeToo era”, posted May 2018 in churchlawandtax.com.

ongoing physical or mental harm. You need to advise your employer of your claim; they have a legal obligation to advise their insurer.⁶²

Also a Workers' Compensation Claim can be made against the employer for harm, but this also has a time limit attached (six months). The Work Health and Safety Act (NSW) can hold a bullying employer criminally liable. If you can demonstrate a long-term bullying pattern by your SM, you could make a formal complaint to Work Cover on the basis that the SM has breached his primary duty of care towards you as the employee. Wardens and even Parish Council may be liable if they failed to prevent his conduct, since they are like directors of a company. They may be liable if they turn a blind eye to the SM's conduct or fail to take adequate steps to prevent it. If they took steps to cover up the abuse, increased penalties would apply. Again, I note that we are seeking to obtain minimum pagan standards both for you and the workers who will follow you in that church and denomination.

4) Legal action

Why would an AM take the sorts of action outlined above? Why would you seek legal advice or even take legal action? There are many reasons. You have rights. Don't listen to those who tell you to remain silent and not damage the church. The damage was done by the abuser, not you. Think of how these things sound in the case of child sexual abuse. But the greatest reason for you to take action is so that the next AM does not suffer what you have just gone through. Dr Darrell Puls speaks of one case in which "a toxic narcissist pastor recruited, groomed, and then attacked and drove out 21 associates. Only two are still in ministry in some form."⁶³ I have personally spoken to several AMs from one Sydney Anglican church where it is claimed that more than half a dozen AMs received such treatment by the same SM. Think of what might otherwise have happened in these cases if an AM took action.

That brings us then to 1 Corinthians 6:1-8. This passage is strongly used by abusers and their enablers to call on AMs not to take legal action. Are they right?

First, we should note that Paul upholds the courts of the land (Romans 13:1-7). Second, this passage speaks about what we call civil cases, not criminal cases. Criminal cases, such as child sexual abuse, are to be taken to the secular authorities and courts. Third, note verse 8 in particular. This is a situation in which Christians are doing wrong to other Christians. It's not just a situation in which they have been wronged. Commentaries note that the passage is dealing with civil litigation arising out of greed, on the part of wealthy church-goers.⁶⁴ These are civil cases involving money or property, not employment law (such as unfair dismissal). The concerns raised are about the injustice of civil courts in the Roman world, which were open to bribes and could be corrupt, and the reputation of the church in the non-Christian world. So, indeed, the ideal would be not to take legal action. Note though that this has nothing to do with gaining legal *advice*. The latter is a different matter altogether, and is a very good idea in cases of unfair dismissal or abuse. We use lawyers for conveyancing. Using

⁶² If the claim is refused, you can approach the Workers Compensation Independent Review Office (WIRO), who can consider the insurer's decision.

In considering legal action, we recommend large legal firms such as Maurice Blackburn or Slater & Gordon, who have dealt with religious workers and such issues.

⁶³ D. Puls, "Let Us Prey: The Frequency of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Pastors", December 11, 2017.

⁶⁴ See the excellent commentaries: R. Ciampa & B. S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2010) and A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000).

lawyers and seeking legal advice is not in itself wrong. Denominations certainly use lawyers! And just as we uphold the laws of the land regarding child sexual abuse, so also should we regarding bullying, harassment, and unfair dismissal.

Furthermore, we are also speaking about the *ideal* when we suggest not taking legal action. For example, the ideal in the Bible is that Christian couples should never divorce. That is clear. Yet there are reasons why it may be necessary. Sometime a situation is so twisted and wrong, that every option is less than ideal. Wives should submit to their husbands. But what if the husband is abusing his wife? Conflict should not occur between an AM and a SM, but what happens if it does and can't be resolved? If the AM has followed the process of Matthew 18, and tried everything possible to solve the problem within the church family, and has gone to the bishop and the PSU, spoken to the wardens, and nothing has been done, then this is a great failure on the part of the church, not the AM. The AM might then need to gain minimum pagan standards by recourse to the law. This should never be done for vengeance or in anger, but for the sake of the church and to safeguard future AMs.

As is often the case, John Calvin is considered and nuanced in his commentary on this passage. I will now quote him at length. He notes that the passage speaks of “an excessive eagerness for litigation, and this arose out of greed”.⁶⁵ He notes that it is fine to get legal advice. And, while he acknowledges that generally Christians should not initiate court action against other Christians, he does not view all law-suits as wrong.⁶⁶ He notes that we should allow ourselves to be wronged, and that we should not do something out of greed or revenge. Yet, “since he has just given permission to have judges, he has thereby given enough indication that it is not out of order for Christians to pursue their rights with moderation, so long as no damage is done to love”. And, “it would not be wrong to take legal proceedings in every case, but... generally speaking”. Clearly then, one cannot use 1 Corinthians 6 to say that all such legal action is wrong.

Calvin also says: “Let us therefore remember that Paul does not disapprove of law-suits on the ground that it is wrong in itself to uphold a good case by having recourse to a magistrate, but because they are nearly always bound up with improper attitudes of mind, such as lack of self-control, desire for revenge, hostility, obstinacy and so on.” “If a Christian therefore wants to prosecute his rights in a court of law, without going against God, he must take special care not to come into court with any desire for revenge, any bad feeling, any anger, or in a word any poisonous thing. In all this love will be the best guide.” “Indeed for many reasons it is worthwhile showing that the thing is not evil in itself but is spoiled by abuse. ... the boldness of the wicked may be checked by an unspoiled and genuine zeal; and this could only be done if we were allowed to subject them to legal punishments.”⁶⁷

5) Confidentiality agreements

A great irony, indeed hypocrisy, is involved when SMs or bishops tell AMs not to take legal action, for they themselves often use lawyers and legal action to protect themselves. So, on the one hand they use lawyers for their own protection, but on the other hand want to deny it to you. And at this point I want to say that the rights of SMs are, of course, just as important as the rights of AMs. We really do want to help SMs too. This is good for the health of the

⁶⁵ J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians* (translated by J. W. Fraser; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1960), 117.

⁶⁶ Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 122.

⁶⁷ J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 122-123.

church! But the denomination is already in place to help SMs in particular. So, we leave that task to them. And they often prosecute it with zeal. It is, therefore, AMs we want to help.

One of the legal avenues pursued by SMs, denominations and parachurch ministries is that of the confidentiality agreement. Such an agreement may be used to silence the AM and cover up conflict or even abuse. Our strongest advice is not to sign one. Sometimes the desire for money offered upon signing can be very strong, but most regret doing so.

David Murray notes the shocking prevalence of covering up sin in churches and parachurch ministries.⁶⁸ You would be aware that this was done in the past with child sexual abuse. Now that this matter has been *brought into the open*, the churches, it seems, are no longer covering up such abuses. However, that may not yet be the case when it comes to other types of abuses, such as the ones we are discussing in this booklet. Again, ironically, the reason given for covering up the situation or abuse is that the church's reputation or the reputation of the gospel is being protected. And, yet, the precise opposite is the case. The reputation of the gospel and the church is damaged *further*, not only by the abuse, but also by the cover up. Think of the royal commission into child sexual abuse and the resultant damage to the reputation of the church. Not only was there abuse, but the cover up shows that people at church *knew* about it and sought to silence the victim. Luke 8:17 assures us though that there is nothing hidden that will not be disclosed, if not in this life, then certainly in the next. You are not protecting the church by remaining silent; you are protecting the abuser. It is in fact for the sake of the *health* of the church that one should not remain silent.⁶⁹ Erica Hamence notes that spiritual abuse includes: exploiting the doctrine of sin by the SM to excuse their behaviour; exploiting the doctrine of forgiveness and reconciliation by demanding the abused AM just forgive them and 'move on'.⁷⁰

The great irony, tragedy and disgrace, of confidentiality agreements is that the church is using their legal 'rights' to harm others and bring the gospel into disrepute. Surely that is the sort of thing that 1 Corinthians 6 is speaking *against*! Furthermore, such agreements stop reconciliation, resolution and are opposed to repentance. Gareth Littler notes how people are often coerced or threatened into signing such agreements, and that: "Rather than sorting issues out biblically... [they agree to] a swift exit for money and silence. Paying people for silence opposes repentance."⁷¹ Christians are not secretive. One might also question why a confidentiality agreement is even being used if nothing has been done wrong?

Once more, the advice is to flee before getting yourself into this situation. It is better to leave early, and on your own terms, than coming to the point where you have little option financially except to sign a confidentiality agreement.

6) The aftermath

It seems to me that many AMs, abused or mistreated, keep silence because they are worried that speaking out would bring a black mark against their name, and/or hinder future employment. If the latter were coming from a superior (and I'm not suggesting that it is), that

⁶⁸ David Murray, "Why do churches cover up sin?"; posted February 20, 2018: <https://corechristianity.com/resource-library/articles/why-do-churches-cover-up-sin>

⁶⁹ Stephen McCalpine, <https://stephenmcalpine.com/sshhh-its-our-little-secret/>

⁷⁰ Erica Hamence, "Part 2: The characteristics of spiritual abuse", https://www.commongrace.org.au/the_characteristics_of_spiritual_abuse

⁷¹ Gareth Littler, *Scandalous Christianity* (Reformation, 2012), ebook.

would be an abuse in itself. Think again how that would sound in the case of child sexual abuse. Would you advise the child to keep silent? Furthermore, our silence leaves the door open for future AMs to suffer the same abuse or mistreatment. We need to trust in God and not fear man, and to do what is right.

Finally, many abused or unfairly dismissed gospel workers (and there are many), have to spend years afterwards dealing with anger and struggling with forgiveness. Books by such organisations as CCEF (Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation) are very helpful. I also recommend *Spiritual Depression* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones.

If you are angry with your former boss, you should ask yourself *why* you are angry. For example, were you seeking approval from him that you never received? Were your expectations unrealistic or wrong? Did you have goals that he obstructed you from achieving? Furthermore, we must never take vengeance into our own hands, but leave it to God (Romans 12:17-21). There are good books to help you work through these issues, such as: *Uprooting Anger* by Robert D. Jones and *Good & Angry* by David Powlison.

We often find forgiveness difficult. We are told that we must forgive others, as the Lord has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32, Colossians 3:13). We must forgive others from the heart. However, we can only forgive others and be reconciled to them *when they repent*. Think about it. God doesn't just forgive everyone. He forgives those who repent. Are we claiming to be more forgiving than God?! Biblical forgiveness is formed first in the heart, and is offered freely, but only consummated when the other person apologises and repents. We forgive as God forgives. An excellent book on this is *Unpacking Forgiveness* by Chris Brauns.

You may well need to seek out counselling as well. A good counsellor can help you work through your hurt and emotions. A good church can help you heal. Christians who have been through what you are going through can help. In that regard, you can contact the Christian Workers' Support Group: ministrymistreatment@gmail.com.

Conclusion

I pray that you will never need the sort of advice given in this booklet. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed. If you find yourself in the position of being harassed, abused, mistreated or unfairly dismissed by your team leader, then I hope that the advice of this book can help you. If you have a great boss, praise God! If you don't, the Christian Workers' Support Group is here to help.

Most SMs are godly, wonderful pastors. This booklet does not seek to denigrate SMs. During my own suffering in this area, I was so encouraged by a SM who contacted me to ask what I thought he should do to look after his team and not fall into any of these traps. I praise God for men like him. We want all churches to be godly places where you enjoy a healthy workplace as an AM. We hope to attain minimum pagan standards in the workplace for AMs. Godly standards would be even better!

You've worked hard to get where you are. Many of you have spent six years training in a ministry apprenticeship and at Bible College. Don't throw that training and hard work away because of someone else's ungodliness. Justice is important – both for you and for your abuser.

Finally, remember that God is control. He is in control of abuse. He has judged it at the cross and condemned it. SMs (and AMs) will be held accountable by him – we will all be judged for what we do as Christians (2 Corinthians 5:10). The story of Joseph shows how God is in control of abuse. Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers, although he was innocent. Yet God uses him to bring salvation to others, through his suffering. He was mistreated by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused and imprisoned, and forgotten by the cupbearer so that he stayed two more years in jail. All up he was in slavery and prison for about thirteen years! It would have been very easy for him to be bitter about his situation. But God was keeping his promises despite all this. And Joseph knew in the end that God did all this to him for the good of others (Genesis 50:20).