When The Church Must Respond: An Examination of One Case in the Pacific District Conference of United States Mennonite Brethren Churches

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July 10, 2021

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As a member of North Fresno Church and, therefore, a member of the Pacific District Conference (PDC) of US Mennonite Brethren Churches (USMB), and as a follower of Christ who declared the church his bride, I love the church which God loves. The church is my family, and I view myself as a member of this body of Christ. It is in this spirit that I write this examination of recent events within the PDC. It is my deep love and concern for the church which compels me to look closely at our culture, our structures, our strengths, and our flaws in the hopes that we may continue to reflect God in the world rather than our own brokenness. It is a sense of familial connection and genuine concern for the former district minister and his family which drives me to ask questions about what happened, how we got here, what we missed, and what the truth really is. There is no way to engage in an honest conversation without addressing wounds and acknowledging brokenness. My ministry calling in the past six years has been to pursue God's justice in the area of human trafficking in Fresno and beyond. The knowledge I have gained in my time with the Central Valley Justice Coalition and the heart that the Spirit has developed in me through this work gives me unique, valuable insight and understanding in this particular case. It is incumbent upon me to seek truth, to advocate for those whose voices have been silenced, to bring their words and experiences to the center and draw attention to them. I did not want to write this paper. I assure you that the work involved in researching this case has been challenging both practically and spiritually. It has now resulted in the reality that we, brothers and sisters, have some realities which we need to face. There will be many things this paper cannot address. It is my aim to point those in leadership, those with power, access, and responsibility for the USMB church, towards areas which require attention. I pray you will be willing to devote the necessary attention to bring healing and wholeness to all of those involved. If we are indeed one body, then we are all involved.

The individual at the center of this case will not be named in this paper, a decision with which I have wrestled. I believe that accountability is required in this situation, and anonymity, the antithesis of transparency, does not aid in accountability. I also recognize that the situation this paper explores impacts many people who had no decision-making power and no control over the outcome. I do not wish to cause further harm to the family or to those connected. Anyone reading this paper could very easily find out the name of the individual at the center, but no one could use his name to get to this paper, meaning should this paper end up in a searchable place, it would not necessarily hinder efforts on his part to work towards reconciliation and restoration.

I have also chosen not to name any other PDC or USMB leaders. My goal is to help us see where our culture, structures, and policies (or lack thereof) failed us. It will become clear that I believe there were mistakes made and opportunities missed in this case and that leadership prioritized the wrong things at the expense of truth, however I believe we bear collective responsibility and that the situation demands a collective response. It is not too late to lament that we have found ourselves in this position. Our lament can allow us to clearly see the opportunity to learn from our experience and birth a willingness to hold ourselves to the highest levels of scrutiny in order to protect those entrusted to our leadership and our care. It is my sincerest prayer that the outcome of all of this is a church which more accurately reflects God as displayed in the person of Christ, the goal we are all striving for daily.

Background Information - Understanding the Case[1]

On January 23, 2019, the Fresno Police Department's Vice Unit carried out a reverse sting in partnership with the FBI at a massage parlor suspected of illicit activity. According to the Fresno Bee,

> The undercover operation was carried out by Fresno police's Vice Unit and FBI agents. It followed an investigation prompted by an anonymous tip made last year. Law enforcement served a search warrant, closed the parlor and collected needed evidence for a pending criminal case against the establishment.
>
> During the closure, law enforcement conducted a "reverse" operation – reopening the business with undercover officers posing as workers involved in the sex trade.[2]

After reopening, several individuals came into the massage parlor, located in a somewhat hidden corner of a strip mall in the center of the city, seeking sexual services rather than basic massages. One of the nineteen men detained in this operation was the district

[1] See Appendix B for a timeline of the events outlined here.
[2] George, C. (2019, January 25). *'Human trafficking will not be tolerated.' Fresno police arrest massage parlor clients*. Fresno Bee. https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/crime/article225053365.html.

minister of the Pacific District Conference of the US Mennonite Brethren Churches, the pastor to the pastors of all 122 USMB churches in six states on the West Coast.

The warrant for the arrest of the district minister (furthermore referred to as DM) was issued in April. In August, he was required to post bond in the amount of $2,000 and report to the court for his arraignment, where he was represented by his lawyer and entered a plea of *nolo contendere*, or "no contest." According to court records, DM was required to complete a first-time offender program entitled Prostitution Abatement/ Rehabilitation (PAR), get tested for HIV/ AIDS, and stay clear of any further criminal activity for 9 months. Fulfilling these requirements allowed for a plea change to "not guilty" and resulted in the clearing of his record. Due to COVID-19, court hearings were delayed, so it was one year before DM's final court appearance, where the court found that he had met the necessary conditions; his case was dismissed in August of 2020, 19 months after the sting operation.

Despite the formal charge in April of "Engaging and Agreeing to Engage in Prostitution," DM remained employed by the denomination until his resignation in July with no comment made or information given to churches or district leaders regarding his arrest or court proceedings. When the announcement of his resignation was made, it was so that he could join the staff of the International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB) with no indication of concern[3]. It was announced in November that DM was withdrawing his availability for the position with ICOMB "for personal reasons."[4] Details of the case were not widely known until an article was published in December of 2019 by a magazine without direct ties to the USMB denomination.[5] The USMB issued their response in an article in their own publication, the Christian Leader, where the subheading was "DM Says He Was Never Arrested."[6] This article echoed the narrative offered by the accused, rather than an investigation or a report of findings and facts. Though the article states, "Pacific District Executive leadership and PDC Board of Faith and Life are working with support from the USMB Board of Faith and Life to resolve the questions surrounding the events," none of the questions they sought to answer were included and no follow-up report was ever given. DM privately claimed he was innocent, in spite of his court plea,

[3] Letter to PDC pastors dated July 18, 2019
[4] Faber, C. (2020, October 15). *Case against Wall dismissed*. Case Against Wall Dismissed. https://christianleadermag.com/case-against-wall-dismissed/.
[5] Huber , T. (2019, December 30). *MB leader charged, withdraws from international role*. Anabaptist World. https://anabaptistworld.org/mb-leader-charged-withdraws-from-international-role/.
[6] U. S. M. B. news story. (2020, January 2). *Former PDC minister faces legal challenges*. Christian Leader. https://christianleadermag.com/former-pdc-minister-faces-legal-challenges/.

yet offered no public statement or explanation. Following his resignation, DM continued to be paid severance by the Pacific District Conference through the end of the 2019 year. In August of 2020, a letter was submitted to the PDC signed by 67 members and regular attenders of PDC churches encouraging transparency around this particular case and communication to churches, as well as systemic changes to ensure that such a case would not happen again[7]. Two months later, in October, a brief article announcing the dismissal of charges was released in the denominational magazine, The Christian Leader,[8] and a short email was sent to pastors signaling a desire to examine roles and responsibilities within leadership structures, to prioritize self-care for leadership, and to take seriously the issue of human trafficking. No further information regarding DM was offered, nor has there been any further clarity to date, including efforts towards accountability, healing, family support, or victim care.

Challenges to Determining Truth - Understanding the Process

This case is specific and particular, yet it is an example of what many of our churches are dealing with as they attempt to navigate accusations of abuse both perpetrated and suffered by those within our communities. Churches are led by pastors and volunteer lay leaders, not lawyers. As churches, we focus on healing brokenness and bringing restoration. We see ourselves as operating in a separate kingdom and worldview than the culture around us, prioritizing God's justice above the justice of human systems, which means we often fail to speak the language of and fully understand the legal system, even as we find ourselves bound by its rules and subject to its authority. Practically, this means that when a member of our community is charged with a crime, we do not understand enough about how to gather information, how to understand the information, and what our options for responding to that information are. When that individual is employed by our churches, we are aware we are bound by laws around employee rights and confidentiality, yet we often fail to understand those laws. As a result, we rely on lawyers to make sense of it, lawyers who are primarily focused on protecting the churches that pay them, not on determining the guilt or innocence of the accused or seeking the same kind of justice the church claims to seek. We find ourselves trapped and paralyzed, unsure how to respond and afraid to do so, and thus open ourselves and our churches up to lawsuits and financial threats. We abdicate our responsibility for truth-seeking to

[7] Appendix C
[8] Faber, C. (2020, October 15). *Case against Wall dismissed*. Case Against Wall Dismissed. https://christianleadermag.com/case-against-wall-dismissed/.

the state, delaying our search for justice in the hopes that the courts will reach the conclusion for us and deferring to their authority. This is not the behavior of a community that considers itself to be members of the one true kingdom, representatives of God on earth. As Boz Tchavidian, founder of the organization Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment (GRACE) says:

> "...when we hear about others who allegedly commit an offense against another person, we all have a responsibility to collect as much information as possible so that our opinions are well informed and our decisions are well-reasoned. Such opinions and decisions should not be constrained by the conclusive (or inconclusive) results of the criminal justice system. Doing so defies our God given common sense and will often result in disastrous consequences."[9]

In this particular case, there were several challenges for those trying to make sense of the situation, the largest of which was that DM continued to maintain his innocence and debate the terms used to describe the proceedings. Christians talk often about offering forgiveness to those who repent. When we use Matthew 18 to lay the groundwork for how we approach a brother or sister in need of correction, the assumption is that the community will be unified in their view of the wrong done and the offender will either repent or be removed from the community. How do we address allegations when the accused claims innocence? What do we do when some members of the community believe the accused is himself a victim? Matthew 18:19-20 tells us "If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them." How do we determine which side God is on if there are three people in agreement on each side? When someone has been connected to a church community for years and decades, it can be very difficult for people who have known him to imagine he could be guilty of something as troubling as soliciting sex from a woman trapped in a situation she cannot escape. Others may seek to understand the factors which led to this behavior, attempting to reconcile the person they know with the behavior they do not know, and in so doing minimize the behavior, using words like "moral failing," "sexual misconduct," "personal issues," or "affair" to describe what is actually the perpetuation of human trafficking and the dehumanizing of an image-bearer of God for one's own gratification. These challenges indicate the importance of

[9] Tchividijian, B. (2019, December 28). *Innocent Until Proven Guilty: What Does This Really Mean?* GRACE. https://www.netgrace.org/resources/innocent-until-proven-guilty.

prioritizing truth over relationship, a challenge which might be even steeper in smaller communities such as the Mennonite Brethren church, where familial connections are strong, even across states and communities.

The accused district minister in this case repeatedly challenged those who reported on his charges and the proceedings, in some cases threatening to sue individuals who spoke out, accusing them of reporting inaccurate information. Often churches and leaders do not have a full grasp of their legal rights and are intimidated by a legal system full of loopholes and jargon. Threats of lawsuits can result in the desired effect of keeping people from speaking truth, afraid that they will open themselves up to litigation. DM took issue with the reporting that he had been arrested, claiming that he had not been arrested, since the warrant was not issued on-site during the sting. This might be confusing to any organization trying to understand terminology and report accurately. For many of us, our understanding of laws and police activity is limited and often deemed unnecessary, perhaps especially in a peace-making community where fewer members are also members of law enforcement. We imagine arrest to be something dramatic with a reading of rights and handcuffs and fingerprints. By contrast, the Legal Information Institute states “An arrest is using legal authority to deprive a person of his or her freedom of movement.”[10] Sometimes officers arrest a person on-site based on probable cause or the reasonable belief that a crime has been committed. At other times, the evidence from the case may be reviewed or properly examined before a warrant is issued, limiting the person’s freedom of movement until bond has been paid or a trial date has occurred. According to a detective on the Vice Unit of the Fresno Police Department, the very same department responsible for trafficking stings, including this one, “The fact that a subject is charged after doesn't mean anything other than the Detective working the case had to get everything lined up before the arrest. This happens a lot in major crimes up to homicide where further investigation or interviews are needed, only because once an arrest is made there are times line we have to meet.”[11] Understanding legal terms may require some effort, and in the case of a church member, this effort falls on pastors who may lack the skill and the connections to gain such understanding, leaving the accused to drive the narrative by creating an information void.

Further challenges to clear understanding stem from the different approaches to criminality between states and counties. In general, the criminal justice system is focused on

[10] Legal Information Institute. (n.d.). *Arrest*. Legal Information Institute. https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/arrest.
[11] Detective unnamed for their protection.

punishment, not on restoration, however, in the case of human trafficking in Fresno County, where this incident occurred, the larger community has been at work to implement restorative justice practices. Law enforcement officers in the Fresno Police Department's Vice Unit have trained officers to recognize and resource victims instead of criminalizing them. Over a dozen agencies work in the Central Valley to prevent and end human trafficking, including equipping and educating churches. The district attorney's office has created a human trafficking court where cases unique to this issue are heard. As a result of all of these efforts, the legal system has begun to change, and one of those changes has been in the ways first-time offenders are treated.

Over a decade ago, Fresno County launched a program entitled Prostitution Abatement and Rehabilitation (PAR), with the goal of "provide[ing] an opportunity for men arrested the first time for prostitution related offences to attend a one day class to learn about the impact of their behavior on the community, the prostitute and themselves."[12] The hope is that the program does not just punish those who are caught trying to purchase sex, but that change is created in individuals and the community. "First offenders are given both an educational experience for self-improvement and a diversionary opportunity which allows them to avoid the Criminal Justice System and potentially remove an arrest from their record."[13] As Christians, we celebrate the invitation to repentance and further education and the extension of mercy towards sinners in need of mercy, because we recognize that we require it as well. Programs like PAR should be in place in more cities, and offenders should be served by the church as they seek rehabilitation. A lack of understanding about these programs, however, creates confusion and challenges for any employer, including a church, to understand how to hold an employee accountable or offer a response as an organization.

To take advantage of the benefits which PAR provides, the opportunity to avoid registering as a sex-offender, to clear one's record and thereby avoid challenges to finding further employment and more, a defendant must agree to plead *nolo contendre*,[14] or "no contest." According to the California Penal Code, "…a plea of nolo contendere shall be considered the same as a plea of guilty and that, upon a plea of nolo contendere, the court shall

[12] Fresno Police Department. (1999). Project PAR: Prostitution Abatement/ Rehabilitation. Fresno, CA. https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/library/awards/goldstein/1999/99-20.pdf, pg.2
[13] Project PAR, pg. 3
[14] California Legislative Information. (n.d.). *Code Section*. Penal Code: Pleas. https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?lawCode=PEN§ionNum=1016.

find the defendant guilty. The legal effect of such a plea, to a crime punishable as a felony, shall be the same as that of a plea of guilty for all purposes." I am aware of arguments being made by DM and others that he was innocent and should be considered as such by the church. Entering the plea which he chose is an admission of guilt in the eyes of the court. It benefits the defendant in that, "…the plea may not be used against the defendant as an admission in any civil suit based upon or growing out of the act upon which the criminal prosecution is based."[15] Given all the opportunities afforded to the defendant once they enter a *nolo contendre* plea, it is easy to see why this is the choice a defendant would make. There is room for an argument that a reasonable person would enter this plea, even if they were not guilty, because the punishment if found guilty by the court would be much worse. Unfortunately, because no outside investigation was done in this case, it is impossible for us to know at this point whether that argument has merit here. What we do know for sure is that it is inaccurate to claim that DM was found innocent by the court.

In the case we are discussing, and in many similar situations, the church is instructed by lawyers and advisors that they should not make a statement until the matter is settled in court, so as not to discuss an ongoing case or create a human resources nightmare. What we must acknowledge is that the court findings do not always represent the truth. By deferring to the legal system, we deny the responsibility of the church in finding the truth and communicating it to the community. By failing to communicate about the case at all in the hopes that they could report the final outcome at the end of the hearings, the denomination and the conference leaders backed themselves into a corner, unable now to issue a statement about someone who no longer has the count against them. Naturally, DM would insist that it be reported that the charges were dropped, which is accurate but is not the full picture. The charges were not dropped because he was found innocent, but because he completed the requirements of persons found guilty.

Addressing Human Trafficking and Abuse - Understanding the Issue

Churches in general are woefully inept at preventing and responding to abuse. We do not need to look long to discover scores of cases of abuse within faith communities of all denominations and religions. Though we have a long way to go before we can say that we are responding well to abuse in most of our communities, the churches that have made strides have

[15] California Legislative Information.

tended to prioritize protecting children from abuse by adults in the congregation. Some churches may address the abuse of a congregant or ministry leader by a pastor, perhaps in a counseling setting or a one-on-one situation. Many churches run background checks on volunteers. These steps, though important beginning efforts are very narrowly focused on only a few potential abuse situations. What do churches do when someone in their congregation is abusing one of their family members, but none of them are in leadership? What do we do when one minor abuses another minor? How should the church respond when its pastor is accused of abusing someone who is not part of the congregation? Most of our church policies do not cover any of these instances.

Compared to other crimes, human trafficking is a fairly new concept for most of our communities to understand and to address. The language around human trafficking is only twenty years old, and most churches have not knowingly encountered cases of trafficking within their own churches. We have not developed the depth of understanding around the issue that is required if we are to be the hands and feet of Jesus in this injustice, and we have in large part believed this is an issue with which the church might help, but not one which directly impacts us. A lack of understanding about human trafficking can lead to false descriptions of an incident such as the one in this case. When it was discovered that DM's arrest took place in a massage parlor, many people in the church questioned, "If it happened to him, could it happen to me?" They wondered whether it was possible that they, too, could have accidentally been in the wrong massage parlor, looking just for an inexpensive treatment, and found themselves facing charges. In this case, the reason this particular massage parlor was targeted is because of a history and evidence of blatant illicit activity and human trafficking. There are websites where individuals rank such massage parlors, indicating which kinds of sex acts can be purchased there, and this massage parlor was listed there. The location of this massage parlor is not the kind of place someone would feel comfortable just walking in, not a place where a doctor would refer you for a massage, not even in a well-lit, easily accessible strip mall. Rather, the massage parlor where the DM was cited was around the corner of a run-down office center in the middle of town, and there was an ATM located at the front of the business so that customers could pay only in cash. Understanding the case more fully should cause interested parties to have more questions about how a person with access to good healthcare, a credit card, and a home and office far from this location would choose this particular location to get their massage in the middle of a workday.

A common misconception surrounding cases involving illicit massage businesses, strip clubs, and pornography is that it is a “victimless crime.” It is assumed that individuals in these businesses have chosen to be there, and while we may have moral objections to our leaders being in such places, there isn’t actually a crime against another person. These incidents may be referred to by church members and leaders as affairs or sexual misconduct rather than exploitation, misrepresentations which diminish the gravity of the situation and deny the reality that there were compounding factors that led to an individual being in that situation, rarely completely by choice. The Polaris Project reports, “The women trafficked in massage businesses are typically immigrants from China or South Korea, usually mothers between the ages of 35-55 who are looking for a way to support their families. They are often lied to or seriously misled about the type of work they’ll be doing, by traffickers who know they have debts they need to pay or are otherwise in no position to say ‘no’ to a source of income.”[16] Blackmail, threats, lies, and coercion are used to keep women and men trapped, unable to reach out for help in a new culture where they don’t speak the language and have a deep mistrust of law enforcement. This is not a choice, and the primary thing keeping these people, predominantly women, trapped in this situation is demand.

In the case of this particular leader, the argument was made by some that there was no victim at all because the person he solicited was an undercover officer, therefore no sexual activity transpired, and no victim of exploitation was present. As Christians, our concern for the wounded should be held to a much higher standard than that. Victims in this case included the undercover officer, who, though not a trafficking survivor herself, was still subjected to 19 men in one day coming in and asking to pay to use her body for their gratification, as well as the officers supporting her in that sting, and certainly should include the women who had been “working” in that massage parlor the morning of the sting before Fresno PD shut it down to take it over. According to my conversations with the Vice Unit, this massage parlor was operated by individuals, most likely connected to organized crime, who have a history of opening illicit massage parlors, and after a bust, getting a new business license through a partner’s name and starting over. Combatting these “businesses” is incredibly difficult, and so they continue to prey on the vulnerable, using the physical bodies of another for their own financial profit. Additionally, we should wonder about all the victims who came before this particular January day, individuals who we will never have names and faces for, but who suffered in ways we can never know. One

[16] "Human Trafficking in Massage Parlors: A Deeply Manipulated Sense of "Choice"." *Polaris*. 1 June 2018. Web. 25 May 2021.

survivor of massage parlor trafficking who was abused by another pastor in Fresno said to me, “There I was in need of Jesus, and there he was with access to him. He withheld Jesus from me.” That survivor still lives in the area and still sees the man who abuses her around town on occasion, a man who has never been held accountable for her exploitation and abuse. Though we may not know the names of these individuals, let us not lose sight of the fact that there are very real victims with names and faces and infinite value bestowed on them by the God who loves them.

According to a study by Demand Abolition, “only about 6% of men who purchase sex illegally have ever been arrested for it.”[17] The likelihood of being arrested is incredibly small. What we know about addictions tells us that it takes increasingly risky behavior for the brain to receive the levels of dopamine required to combat desensitization and habituation as people engage in addictive behaviors.[18][19] Pornography use and purchasing sex have both been considered addictive. If a person has access to a travel budget with limited oversight, spends a large amount of time away from home, stays alone in hotels around the world, and then is arrested in a massage parlor in the city where they work during a work day, we have reason to question whether or not there have been victims prior to this day who deserve our attention.

Gaining basic training in what human trafficking is and what it looks like, as well as how operations such as this sting are run would help church leaders respond more appropriately to cases of trafficking. When we have a fuller understanding of the issue, a more complete picture of the event, then we are forced to ask questions about what causes image-bearers of God to be subjected to this kind of treatment. Our desire to see them elevated to their full humanity requires us to look critically at those whose actions have kept them trapped in situations that diminish it.

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[17] Demand Abolition. (2019, July). *Who Buys Sex? Understanding and Disrupting Illicit Market Demand*. Demand Buyer Report. https://www.demandabolition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Demand-Buyer-Report-July-2019.pdf.
[18] *How Porn Can Become an Escalating Behavior*. Fight the New Drug. (2021, June 9). https://fightthenewdrug.org/how-porn-can-become-an-escalating-behavior/.
[19] Volkow, N. D., Wang, G.-J., Fowler, J. S., Tomasi, D., Telang, F., & Baler, R. (2010, September). *Addiction: decreased reward sensitivity and increased expectation sensitivity conspire to overwhelm the brain's control circuit*. BioEssays : news and reviews in molecular, cellular and developmental biology. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2948245/.

Where Did We Go Wrong? - Understanding the Church

When a leader in a faith community is accused of abuse, no one wants to believe it. As Mennonite Brethren, we choose our leaders through much prayer and discernment, in partnership with the community and the Holy Spirit. We tend to put a great deal of trust in our leaders who are expected to do their best to reflect God in their interactions in the world. Yet we know that leaders fail. Over 5,000 clergy members have been deemed credibly accused by the Catholic Church[20]; more than 200 pastors have been found guilty in the Southern Baptist Convention[21]. An accusation against a leader should be taken seriously and investigated by an outside investigation team, someone removed from the community, who would be able to look at the case without the bias that comes from relationship. The Mennonite Brethren denomination is a close-knit community. Many of the current members of the church have familial ties to the first groups of Mennonites that immigrated to the United States between1874 and 1880. Like many other cultural groups, Mennonites tended to intermarry, so that 140 years later we still see familiar last names across MB communities in the United States, and it is common for someone to hear your last name and begin to inquire about who you are related to in order to make the connections between your families. Denominational colleges, universities, and seminaries result in these same families funneling through an educational system together, deepening the communal bonds. In some larger denominations, it may be possible to feel very disconnected from senior leadership who most members have never seen or met, whereas in the MB church, the chances are high that someone in your local church is related to, went to school with, attended church with any named leader or their family. Two or three degrees of separation is more the norm than the exception. What this means, in cases of any alleged abuse, is that it is a very natural response for fellow leaders to believe the accused because they have known him and his family for so long, are related to him, roomed with him in college, etc., and possible that abuse victims may be related to or socially intertwined with the alleged abuser, making them less likely to speak up for fear of losing their community. The strong bonds which create

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[20] Lauer, C., Press, A., & Hoyer, M. (2019, October 4). *Almost 1,700 priests and clergy accused of sex abuse are unsupervised*. NBCNews.com. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/religion/nearly-1-700-priests-clergy-accused-sex-abuse-are-unsupervised-n1062396.

[21] Siemaszko, C. (2019, February 12). *Southern Baptist Convention: More than 200 ministers, deacons and others have been found guilty of sex abuse, report says*. NBCNews.com. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/over-200-baptist-ministers-deacons-others-have-been-found-guilty-n970276.

systems of support can also breed silence, and each time abuse occurs without response from the community, this culture of silence grows more entrenched.

Christian churches tend to place a heavy emphasis on forgiveness, which unintentionally sets us up to be more offender-focused. We devote our resources and attention to the offender, seek counseling for the offender, show up to court and write statements of support for the offender, help the offender find another job, sometimes even in another church or ministry. In this case, DM received a new ministry position with an adjacent ministry who was not informed about the charges DM was facing. When ICOMB learned of the charges and DM was no longer pursuing that role, he received a job opportunity with a well-known and highly recognized person in both the realtor and church communities, sought help with mediation between family members from within the church community, and received plenty of support from other church members. Not all of that support came from the PDC, and I am not suggesting he should have been left without any access to support. What I am encouraging is that we ask the question, "Did we devote the same amount of effort and focused attention to the restoration and healing of victims in this case?" With a focus on forgiveness, many churches either imply or directly state that if the offender has apologized, even if they have neither admitted the depth of the abuse nor made restitution to the victim, they should be forgiven and restored to leadership. This model creates unsafe settings for victims of abuse, who are given the message that their healing and restoration is less important than that of the offender. Many victims have been told that they should stay quiet or leave the church because the discipline of the abuser would "cause others to stumble" or "damage the flock."

A focus on restoration, not just forgiveness, would create a victim-centered approach, requiring honesty, accountability, and the seeking of truth. If damage is done to a church community by a person tasked with pastoring them, the responsibility lies on the pastor, not on the victim. While we desire restoration for all parties involved, the healing of the victim should be prioritized and the church community should rally around to support them, make them feel safe and protected, and connect them to resources. The abuser should also receive support and services, but those may need to happen away from the church where they were serving and should focus on helping the abuser to accept the responsibility for their actions in order to fully heal. If we desire to promote restoration, we must value truth. We must seek facts and not just the story told by the accused. We must fund and support outside investigations. Once we have reason to believe that allegations are credible, if we truly aim to pursue justice for all parties, we

insist on accountability. We help offenders see the depth of their sin, the harm they have caused, and we walk with them through the process of taking responsibility for their actions. We do all of this away from the church building, always prioritizing the felt safety of the victim who should never be forced to give up his or her community because of something done to them. It is unloving to both victim and offender to bring a person back into the community who has not done the true work of repentance.[22]

When the abuse occurs outside the church family, it is still necessary for the church, as the body of Christ, to move toward the victim(s), perhaps even to consider the family of the abuser as victims of a different sort. Communication to the community is important, as secrecy signals that church leadership has already taken the side of the accused. Church members are often closely connected, word spreads quickly, and the accused leader should not be allowed to drive the narrative. Any attempt to do so, to silence others who speak out with threats of lawsuits, or attempts to get other leaders on his or her side should be quickly dealt with by church leadership.

A struggle arises when the accused maintains their innocence. We know there are instances of false accusations of abuse, as well as situations perceived as abusive by one person and not by another. Although we know these cases are very low, representing only 2-10 percent of all abuse accusations,[23] it still does happen, and we want to be sure we respond to the truth. In all situations, investigations are essential. If the accused is innocent, we as the church want to assure the community that we have done everything to protect them and ensure that this person is innocent. Out of concern for the leader falsely accused, we want to be sure no one can doubt their innocence or question their ability to lead. If the accusation is legitimate, we want to do everything in our power to get to the truth, to care for any and all victims, and to examine anything within our church that didn't work properly or created dangerous situations. We also want to ensure that we can accurately report the findings of the investigation so we do not make the all-too-common mistake of removing a leader from our church and releasing them to go serve and abuse in another ministry. If we truly value those we are commissioned to disciple, it is imperative that we launch an independent investigation in order to arrive at the truth. Even if the accused admits responsibility, it is incumbent on church leadership to

[22] See the Resources page for tools for becoming victim-centered.
[23] "False Reporting." *National Sexual Violence Resource Center*. 2012. Web. 25 May 2021. <https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/Publications_NSVRC_Overview_False-Reporting.pdf>.

investigate and determine whether there have been other victims or other moral failings that should be addressed in order to bring someone back to wholeness.

Another challenge common in churches is a lack of clarity in policies and in roles within leadership. In our case, DM was employed by the Executive Committee of the Pacific District Conference (PDC), and his license and ordination were overseen by the PDC Board of Faith and Life. This is intended to be a sort of checks and balances. DM in this case held the position for 17 years, longer than most if not all of the other individuals on these boards. Members of both the Executive Committee and the Board of Faith and Life volunteer in these positions, are leaders in their home churches, often former or current pastors or in other leadership roles. Because of his longevity and the turnover in these positions, training the boards to fulfill their roles fell by default to DM, creating a situation where he held most of the information and, therefore, the power. Over time, clarity about the roles of these two boards faded and those on the boards were themselves not always sure of proper reporting procedures and responsibilities. While some members of the Executive Committee were aware of the arrest by June of 2019, members of the Board of Faith and Life, a board intended to be a partner in overseeing the conference, were not aware of the situation until the publication of the Mennonite World Review Article, nearly 6 months later. To date, there has been a lack of transparency about what reporting policies were followed, who knew what, and when they knew it. Leadership has refused to disclose this information, citing employee confidentiality. Part of this is owing to the lack of clear policies adopted by the denomination. A document had, in fact, been commissioned by the denomination and developed by a selected team by 2015. This document, “A Resource for Churches Dealing With Misconduct,” though it contained many helpful policies and procedures, including how to establish an investigatory team and communicate to the church, was never adopted by the denomination. Though the document was available, it was not widely encouraged as policy among other churches, and certainly was not followed by district or national leadership in this case. Policies and procedures are important and all of our churches and boards should have them, yet they are only as effective as the understanding of the individuals tasked with implementing them. In the absence of clear policies, the leaders responsible for responding in this situation were left scrambling, attempting to create a path forward after the incident, putting them in a place of playing catch-up from the very beginning. The impact of this on the church is uncertainty about who to trust and whether or not leadership

is working to determine the truth, or only to protect the church. “Where there is a lack of transparency, there will always be some suspicion”[24]

We know the majority of abusers are male, and often they take advantage of a power differential in a relationship which allows them to groom a victim, to recognize vulnerabilities, to set themselves up as the trusted one, and often to use their power to keep their victims from reporting the abuse. It is important to recognize that the theology regarding the role of women in ministry plays a role in how our churches are equipped to respond to abuse. As Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer note, “Because most churches have a male-centric culture - whether it’s because of narcissistic male leadership or simply due to a particular reading of the New Testament - women are often invisible contributors: useful but not central, necessary but not necessarily valued.”[25] In the US Mennonite Brethren church, women have access to all leadership roles except that of lead pastor. Though the 1999 resolution encourages women “to exercise leadership on conference boards, in pastoral staff positions and in our congregations, institutions and agencies…as gifted, called and affirmed,” in practice these spaces are still very heavily male-dominated. Men tend to empathize with other men and are more likely to make excuses for other men, often without recognizing it. Several men in leadership positions in the USMB case expressed sympathy because they could understand the struggle with pornography and sexual temptations. Being surrounded by people with the same struggles we have can normalize our challenges, making us believe that everyone has the same experiences. Bringing in a different perspective can help people recognize that their experience is not, in fact, universal. Male-dominated spaces are not safe places for female victims to report abuse or seek support. As long as women do not have equal representation in positions of leadership, the experiences of women, historically marginalized in the church, will not be heard or valued, however well-intentioned the men in these spaces may be.

Following the arrest of the USMB district minister, conference leaders set up an email address in an attempt to collect information from anyone who might know something about the case, yet they received no emails. This is significant to examine, given that many within the local MB community were talking to each other, sharing information, and some within the local

[24] McKnight, Scot, and Laura Barringer. *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing*. Carol Stream, IL: Momentum, The Tyndale Nonfiction Imprint, 2020. Print. Pg. 78.
[25] McKnight & Barringer, Pg. 106.

community had inside knowledge of this case. What, then, would keep them from sharing that information with leadership? For the reasons already discussed and many others outside the scope of this study, many church members lack trust in their church leaders. This is not unique to the USMB church. Though they may still find value in the teaching they receive and in the community of which they are a part, when it comes to matters of reporting abuse, many individuals do not feel they can trust the church to handle disclosures of information. In the USMB case, the email address was shared in an email to church leaders, but there was not a public push to share the email or encourage people with knowledge who might not be in leadership to come forward. How do we expect people to know that we are seeking information if we don't tell them? If we share with only a small group of insiders, anyone who has experienced abuse, who already feels like an outsider, will not trust the sincerity of those requesting information. The email address set up to receive tips was connected to the Pacific District Conference, the very leaders who had already demonstrated a lack of transparency in handling this case. In order to submit any information to this email, one would either have to send an email from their own email address, easily connected to them, or start a new anonymous email account, an unnecessary hurdle for individuals with information to leap. By the time the email address was shared by the Pacific District Conference, it was already known that members of the executive committee had known about and not shared the charges against DM, thus the impression had already been given that the church was more interested in protecting itself than in finding the truth. Indeed, most churches obtain lawyers whose job is to protect the church, not to help reach the truth or protect victims. Legal advice is most often directed at keeping the church from lawsuits, leading churches to keep information private rather than look for ways to share as openly as possible. This focus on protecting the church organization and its leadership over and above the members who the church is tasked to protect is noticeable to those within the church and the larger community.

As an organization, we at the Central Valley Justice Coalition work with individuals who have survived abuse by pastors while they were being trafficked in massage parlors. Those survivors often stay in the communities where they experienced exploitation, for even though their abuse happened there, all their support is there as well. Individuals who have been abused are incredibly hesitant to report what they know about a pastor or church leader to a church community because the cost to themselves is too great, and they have already suffered so much from which they are trying to heal**. A church, however much it cares and desires truth, cannot run an internal investigation and expect people to share information openly.** An

independent investigation is necessary, and the church should do everything it can to spread the information widely about how people with information can share anonymously without others in the church being able to connect it to them.

Recommendations

Brothers and sisters, the handling of the case involving the Pacific District Conference District Minister was deeply disappointing. Intent is important, motivation matters, but the results are what the final assessment must be graded on, and in this case, regardless of intentions, the result was a lack of transparency, a priority of protecting an organization over people, and paralysis in areas that required action. We now have the gift of opportunity, a chance to look at ourselves honestly and critically examine our structures, our culture, and our response to abuse. It is my prayer that we will welcome this opportunity with humility, ready to be reshaped as the Holy Spirit shows us areas that need attention. Christ spent his ministry moving to the wounded, the outcast, the forgotten, and the unseen and restoring them to community. As his body, we are called to do the same. Being victim-centered will cost us something. It will not prioritize legal protection for our church, it will make us vulnerable to lawsuits, it will require repentance and sometimes reorganizing, it may even require us to release people from ministry, people whom we love. Sacrificial love is the way of Jesus. Let us choose to lay down whatever it is we value in order to follow Jesus towards the vulnerable and hurting among us.

The question which now demands our attention is *What must be done to make things right?* There are many avenues towards *mišpāṭ*, which is God's standard of justice, and several angles to consider. Given all that has been outlined thus far, I strongly encourage you to take the steps below as a starting point.

First, determine the truth. This will require an external investigation. In this and in other cases, we should investigate all accusations with the help of an outside organization, not someone hired as legal counsel and who can claim attorney client privilege. Prioritize transparency. It may be that we decide not to pursue any more information now that DM is no longer an ordained pastor and no longer holds a leadership position. If that is the decision, then leadership should also take active steps to put an end to any discussion about DM being restored to ministry. If there is value in pursuing DM's restoration, whatever that looks like, then truth must be the priority. Some of you are already considering whether or not DM or any

alleged abuser should be counted among those who are hurting. Of course they should, for abuse “is a cancer; a practiced sin with an underlying, often hidden infrastructure. The abuse is the fruit of that substructure. Roots go down deep into practiced deception which becomes metastasized sin. Abuse is the external exposure of that internal, life strangling system.”[26] We should absolutely love the one who causes the wound, and love requires that we stand beside them and help them face the ugly truth of their actions. So often the church has fought for the “restoration” of an abuser. We should ask ourselves, *What does restoration really mean? What are we returning the offender to?* If my child becomes addicted to heroin and is arrested, put in jail where he becomes free of the drug which held him captive, do I plead for my child to be returned to the streets, restored to the place of his captivity? Of course not! Neither do I advocate for a pastor or leader who has viewed another person as an object while tasked with their discipleship to return to the place of leadership where his sin held him captive. This is not love. Prison may not be the future I imagined for my child, and a life outside of ministry may not be the future we envisioned for our friend/ pastor/ mentor, but **our goal is not to restore others to our vision, but to the God who loves them, wherever they find themselves.**

Second, educate yourselves and other leaders in the denomination. Followers of Christ should be marked by our humility. Taking the time to reevaluate this case ought to highlight that there are many areas where our own understanding did not adequately prepare us to respond. Pastors do not go into their work because they hope to deal with cases of abuse. Nonetheless, we know that approximately 30% of men and women have been abused,[27] and those survivors are in our churches, possibly having never talked about it. If 30% of your congregation were unemployed, you would learn all you could about the factors that led to unemployment, about the challenges of being unemployed, you would devote sermons to the topic of work and vocation and how grace shows us what we are worth outside of our work, yet most pastors never preach about abuse and have never taken any training to learn about something that impacts 1 in 3 of the people in their pews every week. There are so many resources available now that there is simply no excuse to not be educated on matters of abuse,

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[26] Langberg, D. "How the Church Should Respond to Abusers." *Diane Langberg*. Dianel Https://www.dianelangberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/dllogo-300x96.png, 06 Jan. 2020. Web. 28 May 2021.

[27] *Schultz, C. (2014, September 5). Approximately a Third of Americans Have Been the Victim of Sexual Violence. Smithsonian.com. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/approximately-third-americans-have-been-victim-sexual-violence-180952626/.*

exploitation, and human trafficking. USMB and PDC leaders should set the example for the denomination by becoming educated themselves on these issues. Encourage the local church to do the same. Provide opportunities for pastors and lay leaders to develop a deeper understanding of abuse, trauma, human trafficking, and abuse prevention. Some of this work has already been done. Education and resources have been made available, and work has been done to restructure the role which DM held. Thank you! Please continue to draw focus to these issues and provide resources that help churches address them in their own contexts.

Use this opportunity to evaluate our culture as MBs and the role it may play. What are the aspects of our particular contexts which are so familiar that we cannot see the challenges they might present? It is important to recognize that there are factors which can lead to stress in pastoral roles, and cultures within many of our churches which can appeal to narcissistic and abusive personalities. We must take a look at our churches and organizations and evaluate whether or not we have what Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer describe as a *tov* church, one whose "reinforcing culture is *redemptive* and *healing* and *good*."[28] DM held the position for 17 years. This role required him to travel away from home for a large part of the year, providing leadership and care for 122 churches in six states, in addition to national meetings, study conferences, and retreats. Though he was technically a member of a church, he was hardly ever there. Whose teaching was he sitting under? To what leadership was he truly submitting? How often were evaluations carried out and by whom? Can we identify any patterns in the PDC DM role which might also occur in other districts? There was neither a budget for nor a written expectation of counseling, spiritual direction, or other soul care. DM had a travel budget with very little oversight, and the freedom to plan his own travel. At times he traveled the same route as others yet chose to leave from separate locations and stay longer than necessary. It is unclear whether there was accountability for those travel decisions. Are there areas in our church where we have simply assumed everyone would follow precedent, would model our values, but where we have left gaps that can be exploited? Have we offered pastoral care for the pastors? Are we funding counselling and encouraging our leaders to care for themselves? Is there any way for someone in leadership to self-disclose if they are struggling with pornography, sexually deviant thoughts, addiction, lust, or thoughts of harming another person to someone who can help them without threatening their career, their families, and their lives? If we could offer help at the earliest stages to people who are struggling, we may find ourselves in much better positions to help them, and with far fewer victims in need of

[28] McKinght & Barringer, pg. 17.

support. Are there aspects of our culture which are toxic and need to be uprooted before they manifest in narcissism or power through fear, as McKnight and Barringer describe? May we desire the wholeness of those in our care so deeply that we are willing to take a hard look at ourselves and invite God to prune away anything that does not produce good fruit.

We cannot examine our culture without acknowledging the role that gender plays in our denomination. There are not enough women at the table in leadership positions. Unless we prioritize equity in leadership, we will not be able to address issues of abuse, sexuality, misconduct, and indeed so much more, with the full experience of the body of Christ. As it stands, women cannot be lead pastors in our churches, which means they also cannot serve equally on our boards. Leadership controls the bylaws which set those standards. We do not have to reach consensus on the larger issue of whether or not women should have access to lead pastor roles to create spaces for them at the tables where decisions are being made. "When the voices of women become customary, common, expected, and accepted, the church becomes more inviting, more inclusive, more empathetic, more compassionate, safer, and more secure - for everyone."[29]

The next step should be to establish and adopt policies around abuse. Although they will not solve everything, policies are important tools in preventing and responding to cases of abuse and misconduct. An accusation is unsettling and often unexpected. It is unwise to make decisions about how to handle such cases when we are overwhelmed. Make the policies before you need them, ensure leadership is properly trained. Keep training up to date and regular, so that when you are called upon to respond, best practices can be followed, and decisions do not need to be made on the fly. USMB commissioned an extensive resource guide for responding to abuse and misconduct. We had all the tools at our fingertips and leadership made the conscious decision to not adopt these as policy. This decision was not made because it seemed best for victims. This document should be revisited and the decision about how best to use it should be based on what those who need the most protection require. Education on these policies should be provided for all of our churches and further resources made available.[30]

We all make mistakes. We all have blind spots, both individually and collectively. Shame keeps us from addressing areas which need attention, and that keeps us from healing and

[29] McKnight & Barringer, pg. 111.
[30] Appendix C

growing and becoming better reflections of the God who loves us. When it is time for an apology, use what Wade Mullen refers to as the SCORE card: surrender, confession, ownership, recognition, and empathy.[31] The process to reach an apology like this, one which truly restores, not only the victim but also the community, is hard. It involves dedicated work and reorienting of priorities. It involves time and money. This is what Christ-like love looks like. Without a name and a face, it can be difficult to remember there are real victims involved here. What if we could picture her? What if you could imagine that I am her? Would that change anything? What message have we communicated to the victims in the case, and the other potential victims not only of DM, but other victims who are currently in our churches, by not looking into any details and so quickly offering him support? Some of those involved in investigating and prosecuting this case are in our MB family. What message do we send them by ignoring their work and prioritizing someone else's word because they had a title? Members of the church community have surrounded DM and provided support, even helping him launch a new non-profit to provide pastoral care and spiritual coaching to current ministry leaders. Has the same level of support been afforded to DM's ex-wife and family as they have navigated their healing? We follow the Shepherd who left the 99 to find the one, who left behind all of the glory of Heaven to enter into our suffering. What are we willing to leave behind in order to find the ones who have been hurt, to bring them close, and help them to heal?

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Appendix A

Recommended Online Resources

USMB's Guidelines for Dealing with Sexual Misconduct

http://usmb.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/A-Resource-for-Churches-Dealing-with-Sexual-Misconduct-revised-9-17.docx

Central Valley Justice Coalition

The Central Valley Justice Coalition has worked in Fresno and the surrounding areas for ten years, partnering with the church and the community to prevent human trafficking. Learn more through their website and the classes they offer both independently and through Fresno Pacific University.

https://justiceco.org/

Faith Based and Sexual Assault Toolkit

Composed by the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence, this booklet helps faith communities develop understanding about sexual violence and includes practical guidelines for how churches can respond to and prevent abuse.

https://www.oaesv.org/site/assets/files/1319/oaesv-faith-based-sexual-assault-toolkit-final-combined-with-rpe-section.pdf

Faith Trust Institute

Faith Trust Institute provides a wide variety of training and resources for churches seeking to prevent and address sexual violence within their churches.

https://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/resources/articles/What-Religious-Leaders-Can-Do.pdf

The MAP List: Mennonite Abuse Prevention

Envisioning such awareness, transparency, and accountability in our institutions and communities that no one sexually abuses, the Mennonite Abuse Prevention (MAP) List aims to make it easier to report and prevent sexual abuse through public documentation. A page on the website is dedicated to resources.

https://www.themaplist.org/

Net Grace

GRACE exists to equip the Church with a vision for authentic community, where responsibility, accountability, and compassion are second nature and caring for children and adult survivors of abuse are non-negotiable.

https://www.netgrace.org/

Our Stories Untold

A network of people who are concerned, specifically, about the spiritual dimensions of sexualized violence and the presence of sexualized violence in communities of faith.
http://www.ourstoriesuntold.com/about/

Pornography: Lies, Truth, and Hope

A booklet from the Mennonite Central Committee that explores the dangers of pornography and helps find ways to prevent and overcome the harm it causes.

https://mcc.org/media/resources/1125

Safe Church Ministry

Safe Church Ministry equips congregations in abuse awareness, prevention, and response. We help build communities where the value of each person is honored; where people are free to worship and grow free from abuse; and where abuse has occurred, the response is compassion and justice that foster healing.

https://www.crcna.org/SafeChurch

We Are Speaking

In 2018, the Reformed Church in America put forward a statement, We Are Speaking, calling the church to end harassment, abuse, and sexual violence against women and girls. They also collected resources for churches interested in taking action.

https://www.rca.org/equipping-congregations/womens-transformation-leadership/we-are-speaking/

We Will Speak Out Against Sexualized Violence

MCC aims to work with churches and church institutions to educate and equip people to prevent and respond to sexualized violence. Free resources are available in English and Spanish.

https://mcc.org/stories/we-will-speak-out-against-sexualized-violence

Victim-Centered Resources

Apology SCORE Card

Wade Mullen is the author of *Something's Not Right: Decoding the hidden tactics of abuse and freeing yourself from its power.* He has collected over 1,000 cases of church abuse for analysis and offers insights and resources through his website and his book. The apology SCORE card is one of those tools.
https://wadetmullen.com/what-ive-observed-when-institutions-try-to-apologize-and-how-they-can-do-better/

How Should the Church Respond to Abusers

A practicing psychologist who has specialized in the impact of trauma on survivors of abuse, Diane Langberg works with survivors, clergy, and caregivers around the world. She is the author of *Redeeming*

Power: Understand Authority and Abuse in the Church. She makes many resources available through her website.
https://www.dianelangberg.com/2020/01/how-should-the-church-respond-to-abusers/

Into Account
Into Account provides support for survivors seeking justice, accountability, and recovery in Christian contexts.
https://intoaccount.org/

Rachel Denhollander
Rachael Denhollander is an attorney, author, advocate, and educator who is recognized as a leading voice on the topic of sexual abuse. Possessing a unique blend of professional skills, personal experiences, and dynamic communication style, she is a sought-after media commentator, speaker, and consultant. Her grasp of legal issues, corporate ethics, effective leadership strategies, and investigative practices are coupled with a trauma-informed, deeply compassionate understanding of the realities facing survivors of sexual abuse and their path toward healing.
https://rachaeldenhollander.com/

Appendix B

Jan 14-16, 2019 Women in Ministry Study Conference in Phoenix, AZ

Jan 23, 2019 - Sting at Angel Massage in Fresno, CA. DM detained.
https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/crime/article225053365.html
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdKB6GbITmg

April 22, 2019 - DM charged with agreeing to engage in prostitution.

May 21, 2019 - Pacific District Conference of Mennonite Brethren announces DM's resignation as district minister to begin new position with International Community of Mennonite Brethren (ICOMB).

May 29 - June 2 - DM was in Gaudalajara, Mexico (stayed longer than the others in the group).
Upon his return to LAX, he learned of the warrant for his arrest. Some in PDC Exec board were made aware at this time.

June 5, 2019 - $2000 bond posted and warrant recalled

July 1, 2019 - DM meets with congregational leaders as district minister

July 9, 2019 - letter from Pat Coyle, PDC Moderator, announcing the decision to "free DM from his PDC responsibilities," though he will be "available to consult as needed."

July 18, 2019 - letter from DM to pastors regarding his transition after 17 years

August 26, 2019 - Arraignment Hearing
Nolo Contendere plea entered
The Court places the following interim conditions upon the Defendant:
Obey all laws
Enroll, participate and complete program(s) PARS
Submit to AIDS testing pursuant to Penal Code 1202.1 (d)
Conditional settlement sentencing set for May 27, 2020 (*later postponed due to COVID-19)*

October, 2019 - Staff at the Christian Leader are made aware of the accusations. They were told it would be addressed at the PDC Convention in November.

November 1-2, 2019 - PDC Convention
No mention of DM's case or situation at all, though some were told this would be addressed.

November, 2019 - USMB and ICOMB announce DM's withdrawal of availability as advocate and resource development partner.
https://christianleadermag.com/gary-wall-no-longer-to-serve-icomb/

December 9, 2019 - Mennonite World Review reports DM's arrest.
https://anabaptistworld.org/mb-leader-charged-withdraws-from-international-role/

January 2, 2020 - letter from PDC Executive Board to pastors with brief statement and email address to submit any information.

Article in CL: https://christianleadermag.com/former-pdc-minister-faces-legal-challenges/

January 22, 2020 - letter from interim District Minister, acknowledging that he also only learned of the issue from the MWR article.

January 23, 2020 - Center for Anabaptist Studies and USBFL host webinar: The Realities and Myths of Human Trafficking

https://usmb.org/portfolio/webinar-the-realities-and-myths-of-human-trafficking-what-is-our-role/

February 16, 2020 - USBFL encourages churches to participate in Freedom Sunday
https://christianleadermag.com/congregations-encouraged-to-learn-about-human-trafficking/

May 20 - Two articles in the Christian Leader address human trafficking:
https://christianleadermag.com/human-trafficking-did-you-know/
https://christianleadermag.com/labels/

July 9, 2020 - LeadPods podcast episode: Fighting Human Trafficking
https://www.buzzsprout.com/972541/4402844-008

August 24, 2020 - Conditional Settlement Hearing
No contest plea withdrawn and not guilty plea re-entered. Conditional dismissal, based on defendant following court orders to participate in first time offender class, be tested for HIV/AIDS, and avoid arrest for 9 months.

August 28, 2020 - Letter addressed to PDC Executive Committee and Board of Faith and Life submitted. Eventually 67 people signed on from a number of PDC churches.

October 15, 2020 - letter to pastors from PDC Executive board

As the PDC Executive, we have done our best to care for all parties involved, but we recognize that our processing of this matter in real time appeared to hide the seriousness of the matter and to ignore the issues related to it. We regret the pain this caused and are committed to making improvements moving forward. We have been reminded through this experience that the PDC is like a large family that truly cares for one another, but also needs better procedures in place when difficulties arise.

With that in mind, we'd like to share several thoughts from a recent meeting we had on this matter:

- We will be seeking resources that will help us clarify the roles and responsibilities of our current leadership structure.
- We will be working closely with our various boards to assure that care for self and family is prioritized.

- We take very seriously the issue of Human Trafficking in our world and would hope that our not addressing this issue sooner has not been perceived otherwise.

October 15, 2020 - Christian Leader reports charges are dismissed
https://christianleadermag.com/case-against-wall-dismissed/

May 11, 2021- email sent to PDC pastors with new recommendations and appendices from the Resource Guide

May 2, 2021 – DM announces the opening of his new non-profit for pastoral and church health. A group of MB members/ leaders/ former pastors sit on the board.

Appendix C

To the Pacific District Conference Executive Board and Board of Faith and Life:

On January 23, 2019, Gary Wall, then the Pacific District Conference Minister, was charged with "Engaging and Agreeing to Engage in Prostitution" at a massage parlor in Fresno, California. A year and a half has passed since that event, and the church has remained largely silent. At a time when we had an opportunity to speak, to grieve the circumstances which led Gary to this situation, to evaluate ourselves and identify blind spots, to denounce the dehumanizing effects of human trafficking and acknowledge that we in the church are sometimes responsible for exploitation, the response has been inadequate.

We understand the difficulties of speaking out about an employee when there are conflicting stories. We recognize the challenge that potential lawsuits might pose if the district is accused of libel or defamation. You are in a difficult position and have been asked to navigate something none of you would have chosen. Even so, the silence from district leadership has left a difficult situation unaddressed and has relegated the church to the sidelines, rather than at the center, bringing reconciliation and restoration. In light of this situation, whether the allegations against Gary are true or not, this raises a question: do you have a policy for both responding to and preventing sexual misconduct and issues of abuse or exploitation by church leaders? The USMB has a document entitled "Resources for Churches Dealing With Sexual Misconduct" which provides guidance for communicating such issues, including the sharing of information about the investigative process. We recognize that this situation is unusual in that the District Minister does not oversee one congregation. It is likely that you as a board needed to make some decisions that differ from the guidelines, and we believe it is important that the church understand the efforts you have taken and are taking, as well as your reasoning for those actions. If the "Resources" guide was not adopted policy, we would like to know what policy you were following instead, and where there are gaps in policy we desire to partner with you in determining more effective ways forward in future situations.

Our goal is not to shame or punish Gary. We desire the health and wholeness of all people impacted by these events. We do not want Gary to be torn down, we want him built up, but we want to ensure we are building on a strong foundation. We desire health and support for the Wall family, including an honest evaluation of how we, the church, could have responded sooner to promote their well-being. As stated in the Resource for Churches Dealing with Sexual Misconduct, "Because healing, restoration and reconciliation are always the goals, pastoral care is to be provided for the Victim(s) and/or Accuser(s), the Offender, family members, and members of the congregation affected by Sexual Misconduct." We care about healing, restoration, and reconciliation for the victims as well. We are concerned about the victims of human trafficking who are connected to this case, women who have names and stories and bear the image of God, and yet have not been valued as image bearers but viewed as a commodity and often ignored. We seek to ensure that their voices are represented at the table as well and that the trauma they endure is taken seriously.

It may be tempting to think that this situation is the result of one "bad apple," but statistics tell us that is untrue. According to a 2016 survey by the Barna Group, 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use pornography on a regular basis and are currently struggling. 43% say they have struggled with pornography in the past. We have experienced other issues of sexual misconduct from leadership within our denomination, some very recently. We know this is a problem, and yet we as the church are turning a blind eye to the root causes. Our current systems and structures keep people trapped with no hope for help and must be evaluated in order to help hurting people heal.

In light of this, we are asking for three things: **transparency, accountability, and an opportunity for self-disclosure.**

Transparency – Eighteen months have passed since Gary was charged and very little has been publicly communicated from PDC leadership. While we believe the attempts to maintain privacy have been motivated by a desire to protect all parties, secrecy has created confusion rather than understanding. Transparency is essential to trust, and a lack of transparency breeds distrust of leadership. While we recognize that there will be things you cannot disclose for legal reasons, we encourage you to issue a public statement which offers as much information as possible about how the conference has investigated the issue, supported the Wall family, accounted for travel expenses, and evaluated your own policies in light of this incident. Moving forward, as we welcome a new pastor into this role, we want to know what policies and procedures are in place to track and approve travel expenses, and a clear outline of the proper reporting procedure for any member of the Board of Faith and Life who hears reports of illegal, immoral, or inappropriate activity by a pastor. We recommend revisiting and adopting the "Resource for Sexual Misconduct" already referenced.

Accountability – The "Resource" guide states, "Since mutual accountability is a value we seek to cultivate within the body of Christ, accountability structures and supportive relationships shall be provided for Offenders to facilitate healing, reconciliation and restoration." We have an opportunity to examine the structures in place for those in the highest levels of leadership in our denomination and to be proactive rather than reactive in the area of accountability. The role of Pacific District Minister is expansive, including a very large area and a number of various responsibilities. We desire to care for those who fill this role in a holistic way, to encourage their growth, set an expectation for exposure to diversity of thought and experience, and to provide a level of pastoral care which can be overlooked for those in high levels of leadership. We request that the Board of Faith and Life establish and implement expectations for accountability and growth. One idea for accomplishing this is establishing an accountability group for the district minister, made of people who the district minister trusts and has relationship with. These individuals may be chosen by the minister, in partnership with the BFL, and need not be monitored by the BFL, but the names of these members should be known and recorded by the BFL. This group should be made up of an equal number of male and female members and should meet regularly with the district minister in order to provide a level of pastoral care and support as the district minister seeks to pastor and support such a large district. Alternatively, you might follow the Guidelines for Sexual Misconduct suggestion for prevention outlined in point 5: "Implement a continuing education program for pastors that would include topics such as ministerial ethics, guidance in establishing personal boundaries in relationships, understand the issues of power and authority in ministry, and developing appropriate sexual conduct in one's life and relationships." We emphasize that such education should be provided by a diverse group of people. Surely there are other options that can provide a level of accountability, training, and exposure to the experiences of others that have not been mentioned. We encourage you to intentionally establish structures which foster these values.

Self-Disclosure Opportunities – To assume that there will never be another time when a pastor is in need of help and counseling but must balance that need with very real fears of losing everything is foolish. We have an opportunity here to learn and adapt, to recognize that our current structures do not allow people to ask for help in the way we hoped they would. We are glad that the board has agreed to provide counseling as part of the healthcare package for the incoming district minister and affirm the need for such services. There are organizations like Link Care who specialize in counseling pastors and ministry leaders. Link Care offers 5 free counseling sessions a year to any pastor in Fresno. We ask that the PDC explore ways to match that, either with Link Care or other counselors, giving PDC lead pastors

an opportunity for 10 sessions a year, and a place to disclose that they are struggling without fear of repercussions and with the goal of moving toward healing.

As the church, we desire God's justice, one that restores, and gives hope. We desire to help the Pacific District Conference move forward in ways that build trust and reconciliation. We the undersigned commit to prayer for you as you seek wisdom, for Gary, and for the victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Where we have expertise or experience, we gladly lend it and desire to be part of the process. We appeal to PDC leadership to openly address the concerns articulated above through timely and clear communication to the PDC churches and members.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Christa Wiens, North Fresno Church / Central Valley Justice Coalition

Aaron Wiens, North Fresno Church

Audrey Hindes, Pastor, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Lynn Jost, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Stephanie (Wall) Voth, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Trent Voth, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church (Former Associate Pastor)

Cheryl Dueck-Smith, North Fresno Church

Peter Smith, North Fresno Church

Al Dueck, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church / North Fresno Church

Anne Dueck, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church/ North Fresno Church

Aaron Bryan, New Life Community, Dinuba

Tracy Bryan, New Life Community, Dinuba

Jamie Mack, Pastor, North Fresno Church

Randy Mack, North Fresno Church

Stacie Winckler, North Fresno Church

Caitlin Friesen, Cornerstone Community Church / Former Pastor at North Fresno Church

Ben Friesen, Cornerstone Community Church / Former Pastor at North Fresno Church

Jill Brooks, North Fresno Church

Jason Brooks, North Fresno Church

Krystal Klaassen, North Fresno Church/ Mennonite Central Committee

Corey Klaassen, North Fresno Church

Rhonda Dueck, Associate Pastor, North Fresno Church

Kevin Dueck, North Fresno Church

Jason Kinzel, North Fresno Church

Kristina Kinzel, North Fresno Church

Jessica Pittman, North Fresno Church/ Founder of Central Valley Justice Coalition

Tim Neufeld, North Fresno Church

Tracy Neufeld, North Fresno Church

Jessica Ice, North Fresno Church

Silvia Lopez, Adonai

Lawrence Smith, Neighborhood Church Fresno

Sue Kliewer, North Fresno Church

Roy Kliewer, North Fresno Church

Mark Wiens, North Fresno Church

Cindy Wiens, North Fresno Church

Connie Nicholson, Pastor, North Fresno Church

Silas Langley, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Carla Bergen, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Clint Bergen, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Hannah Bergen Ziyadinova, Mennonite Brethren Church member since 2003

Jenyce Hiebert Danley, Country Bible Church, Orland, CA

Jason Isaac, North Fresno Church

Jane Isaac, North Fresno Church

Sharon Wiebe, Shafter MB

Larry Martens, North Fresno Church

Kathleen Martens, North Fresno Church

Sybil Kolbert, Bethany Mennonite Brethren

Jenny Akina, North Fresno Church

Emily Barcelos, North Fresno Church

Jared Barcelos, North Fresno Church

James Conder, North Fresno Church

Valerie Kadera, LMFT #93700, North Fresno Church

Lori Kleschold, North Fresno Church

Dave Kleschold, North Fresno Church

Nate Yoder, North Fresno Church/ Mennonite Central Committee

John Wiebe, Shafter MB

Katie Wiebe, Shafter MB

J. Stanley Friesen, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Dolores Friesen, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Mark Baker, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Lynn Baker, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Jennifer Wanless, North Fresno Church

Kevin Schellenberg, Willow Ave Mennonite Church

Suzanne Schellenberg, Willow Ave Mennonite Church

Bill Braun, Retired Pastor, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church

Dustin Maddox, Lead Pastor, North Fresno Church

Kristen Co, North Fresno Church

Larry Dunn, Willow Avenue Mennonite Church/ Professor of Peacemaking and Conflict Studies at FPU

(The signees have indicated their affiliations, but have signed as individuals.)