

## MONTH 4: APRIL

### You're Not Alone: Why Adult Clergy Sexual Abuse Often Stays Hidden

Word Count: ~750-850 words

*[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse and related topics. Please take care of yourself as you read. You can stop anytime.]*

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April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month. But there's one category of sexual abuse that rarely gets attention: adult clergy sexual abuse. Why? Because most people don't believe it exists. Or if they do, they call it something else: "an affair," "a scandal," "a moral failing." Anything but what it actually is: abuse. Let me explain why adult clergy sexual abuse stays hidden — and why that has to change.

#### REASON 1: THE "BOTH ADULTS" MYTH

The most common response: "But they were both adults. How is that abuse?" This question reveals a fundamental misunderstanding of consent. Consent requires equal power. When clergy hold spiritual authority, access to vulnerabilities, and influence over your community — you are NOT on equal footing. But because survivors are adults, people assume they "should have known better." This victim-blaming keeps survivors silent.

#### REASON 2: RELIGIOUS SHAME & STIGMA

Survivors face unique barriers: "If I report, I'll be seen as attacking God's anointed." "My family will say I'm destroying the church." "People will think I seduced him." "I'll lose my spiritual community." Religious communities often protect clergy because church reputation is prioritized over individual harm. Survivors are told to "forgive and move on" — not to report.

#### REASON 3: THE LANGUAGE HIDES THE ABUSE

When reported, it's called an "affair," "moral failure," or "inappropriate relationship." This language implies mutual fault and minimizes the power dynamic. When we call it an "affair," we erase the abuse.

#### REASON 4: LACK OF LEGAL RECOGNITION

Many survivors don't know that what happened is legally recognized as abuse in many states, that clergy hold fiduciary duty, or that they can report to police. Survivors assume they have no legal recourse — so they don't pursue it.

#### REASON 5: INSTITUTIONAL PROTECTION

Churches protect abusers because it's in their financial and reputational interest. Internal "investigations" can be controlled. NDAs silence survivors. Moving abusive clergy "solves" the problem.

#### THE COST OF SILENCE

When adult clergy sexual abuse stays hidden: • Abusers continue to harm • Survivors suffer in isolation • Laws don't change • The cycle repeats

#### BREAKING THE SILENCE

How we change this: 1. Name it correctly: Clergy sexual abuse, not "affair" 2. Educate about power dynamics 3. Support survivors who report 4. Demand institutional accountability 5. Advocate for legal protections

#### IF YOU'RE A SURVIVOR

Your silence is not weakness. It's survival. But if and when you're ready: — Your story matters — Your experience is valid — You have legal options — You are not alone

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RESOURCES: Crisis support: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741  
Information: | Faith Trust Institute: [faithtrustinstitute.org](http://faithtrustinstitute.org) You are not responsible for what happened to you. You deserve support, whatever you decide. Take care of yourself. ❤️