

MONTH 10: OCTOBER

Gentle Documentation: Building Your Case With Care

[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse. Please take care of yourself. You can stop anytime.]

"It happened years ago. I didn't save anything. Is it too late?" No. It's not too late. Even if you don't have texts or emails, you can still build a strong case. Let me show you how to document abuse — gently, at your own pace.

WHY DOCUMENTATION MATTERS

Strong documentation: • Strengthens reports • Supports lawsuits • Helps therapists understand context • Provides clarity for YOU • Creates a timeline Even if you never report, documentation helps you process.

WHAT TO DOCUMENT

Timeline: When did things start? When did they escalate? When did they end?
Locations: Where did abuse occur? Addresses if you remember. **Communications:** Texts, emails, voicemails, DMs. Screenshot everything. **Witnesses:** Who might have seen inappropriate interactions? **Patterns:** How often he contacted you, gifts, special privileges. **Impact:** When did anxiety/PTSD symptoms start? Medical records? Therapy notes?

HOW TO ORGANIZE

Create a master document: • Timeline section • Communications section • Witnesses section • Impact section • Institutional response section Back up everything: Cloud storage, external drive, email to yourself.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE NO PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

Your testimony IS evidence. **Memory work:** Write what you remember about grooming, conversations, how you felt. **Circumstantial evidence:** Church bulletins, social media posts,

emails about unrelated matters (proves contact). ****Pattern evidence:**** If he abused others, this establishes modus operandi. ****Expert testimony:**** A therapist can testify your symptoms are consistent with abuse.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

• Don't alter evidence • Don't confront the abuser (alerts him) • Don't post on social media yet • Don't give originals to the church Keep originals. Give copies only.

WHEN TO SHARE YOUR DOCUMENTATION

Share with: • Your attorney • Police (if reporting) • Therapist Do NOT share with church leadership until advised by attorney.

YOU CAN DO THIS

Start with what you remember. Write it down. Build from there. You have more evidence than you think. One detail at a time.

RESOURCES: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | You deserve support. Take care. 