

# Ritual of Reconciliation - Another Way

Mic Hunter Mic Hunter is a practicing psychologist in marriage and family therapy and chemical dependency in St Paul. He is the author of *Abused Boys: The Neglected Victims of Sexual Abuse*, and *Joyous Sexuality: Healing from the Effects of Family Sexual Dysfunction*. (612.649.1408) There are alternatives to legal action that can be just as empowering for the survivor and yet are much less emotionally costly. I have been involved as a psychotherapist in several cases where clients have elected to take part in a ritual of reconciliation rather than file law suits. One such man (who asked to be called CA) came to me because he was having trouble staying sober even though he had completed chemical dependency treatment and attended a weekly support group. When he described his past he disclosed that as an adolescent he had been sexually abused by a minister. At my suggestion CA joined a group for men who continued to see me for individual psychotherapy. After approximately one year he began to discuss the possibility of suing the perpetrating minister's Church for damages related to the abuse. After meeting with several attorneys CA was less enthusiastic about the legal process which would be involved. During the next psychotherapy session he decided to contact representatives of the Church and directly ask for a specific dollar amount which represented the money he had spent on treatment and had lost in wages due to his mental disorders. The church official he contacted by letter asked him to return to the state where the abuse had taken place. CA insisted that any officials who needed to be involved in determining if the Church would make payment meet with him in my office. Several weeks later a minister met with CA and myself. During that session CA told the minister of the sexual abuse which had taken place in his hometown Church those many years ago. The minister listened respectfully and inquired if there was anything else which the Church could do to atone for the sin which had been committed. CA agreed to develop a ritual of reconciliation and re-contact the minister. Although it was a painful process for CA he came away from that session empowered for having asked for what he wanted and for being heard by a representative of the Church. A few weeks later the minister contacted CA to report that his supervisor had authorized him to make financial restitution in the amount requested. He also agreed to take part in the ritual of reconciliation at the very Church where the abuse had taken place. On the allotted day CA and I flew to his hometown. As the Church came into sight he

began to cry. "It's just like I remembered it. I hate this place," he sobbed. For the next few hours CA took his mother, his significant other, the minister and myself on a tour of the Church and described in detail what had taken place. Many tears were shed and more than a few curses made that afternoon. At last we found ourselves in the prayer room where the perpetrating minister had gone after committing the abuse. We gathered there and each person read thoughtfully prepared statements to CA. His mother apologized for allowing the offending minister to take CA from the house the day the abuse took place. His significant other offered her support. As his psychotherapist I read a statement about witnessing the reconciliation. Finally the minister accepted responsibility for the abuse in the name of the Church and offered a blessing. Photographs of those present were made so CA would have physical proof of the event, and then we gathered for a fine meal. Words cannot describe the powerful effect this ritual had on everyone who took part in it. Each person was changed in a positive way. The Church was able to make amends to someone who had been mistreated by one of its clergy. CA was able to stand up for himself and demand justice in the very place where he had been abused. His pain was recognized, and he was comforted. In the weeks that followed CA was able to take action in a number of areas of his life in which he had been procrastinating. Rather than spending years in court being emotionally re-assaulted, he was listened to and treated with respect. He obtained justice. I sincerely hope that others who have been abused will seek this course of action if it is available to them. I think it could revolutionize the relationship that sexual abuse survivors and organized religion have had in the past. MH