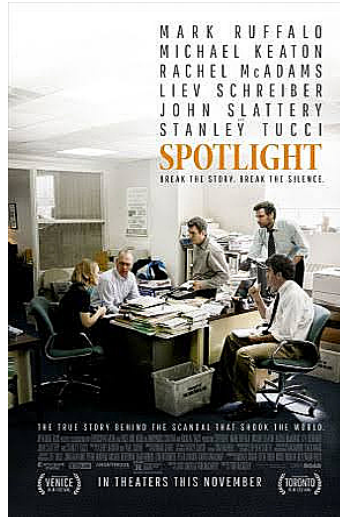


# SPOTLIGHT:

## A Multi-Faith Discussion Guide

### Background:

*SPOTLIGHT*, the Oscar-winning film of 2015, tells the story of a group of investigative reporters from The Boston Globe who uncovered, investigated, and reported the sexual abuse of children by priests in the Archdiocese of Boston. Despite previous articles about abusive priests, prior to the Spotlight investigation, no other news organization had managed to breach the secrecy, or understand the vast number of children who were abused by Catholic clergy and teachers. The movie follows the course of the reporters as they interview survivors, dig for proof, and face



down the power and influence of the Archbishop of Boston, Cardinal Bernard Law. The film shows the months of tireless work, and ends with the release of their first story in 2002. This story broke open the institutional cover-up and revealed a scandal not just in Boston, but worldwide.

Subsequently, other denominations and faith groups have discovered the same problem: sexual abuse of children, youth and adults by “trusted” faith leaders. Universally, the institutional responses to victims and their families have been inadequate. Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists have all had to confront the reality of this horrific crime in their communities. This is truly a multi-faith issue. Sadly, faith communities can offer fertile territory for a leader who is willing to take advantage of vulnerable people and do them harm.

Survivors of abuse have spoken out, organized, and put pressure on the various bodies who oversee faith leaders. This pressure is what has brought about change. But the price has been high for many people who dared question the authority of the hierarchy and their leaders. Healing can be a long, difficult journey. Our hope is that the public recognition of these crimes, and the acknowledgement of the great injustices faced by survivors and their families, will serve as support to those who are working to find healing.

**It is in support of these survivors, their tremendous courage, tenacity, and sacrifices to ensure safety for others, that we offer this SPOTLIGHT DISCUSSION GUIDE.** We urge all faith communities to watch SPOTLIGHT and share a discussion of its implications. If you thought before that this was a “Catholic” problem, think again. **This is everyone’s problem.**

### SPOTLIGHT: Break the Story, Break the Silence

“*SPOTLIGHT*, the film, is indeed a cautionary tale for us all. While non-Catholics might be tempted to walk away from the theater with just a tinge of self-righteousness, assuming that this is a Catholic problem, don’t give into that temptation... The fact is that sexual abuse of children, teens, and adults by those designated as faith leaders is a serious and disturbing reality in every faith community. **No exceptions.**” — Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune

FROM: [www.FaithTrustInstitute.org/blog/marie-fortune/231](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org/blog/marie-fortune/231)

### How to Use This Guide:

BEFORE the conversation, the Moderator should:

- ➔ **GET EDUCATED** about the prevalence of child sexual abuse, the impacts on victims/ survivors, and the grooming strategies used by abusers. (See the Resource section inside for online links to FAQs on these topics.)
- ➔ **GET CONNECTED** to your local victim advocacy organizations so you know how to offer resources.
- ➔ **REVIEW YOUR SAFETY POLICIES** and renew your conversations about them as a community.

This guide offer **FOUR THEMES** for discussion, using the film as an example, to explore the impact of sexual abuse and be better prepared to respond in your faith community.

We recommend using this guide for **MULTIPLE DISCUSSIONS**. Don’t expect you’ll get to every question in one conversation.

On the last page, we include specific **TEXT RESOURCES** for Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities, to discuss and understand how each tradition approaches the question of community and individual responsibility.

### PLEASE NOTE:

This movie raises difficult, traumatic issues. Be prepared for reactions from survivors and others who have been impacted by abuse. *SPOTLIGHT* is R-RATED due to language and subject matter



**THEME:**  
**The Voices of Survivors**

It is only thanks to the courage and tenacity of survivors and their families that the silence about the sexual abuse of children has been broken. In *SPOTLIGHT*, we learn the scope and scale of this story in one community.

- What did you learn from the survivors in the film about the impact of the sexual abuse on them? On their spirituality? On their sense of trust?
- What do you think motivated the survivors to share their stories with the journalists?
- Were you surprised by the way the film depicted the long-term impacts of the abuse on survivors?
- As victims of crime, both physical and spiritual, what kind of justice were survivors seeking?
- Healing from abuse can be a long process. Many people see it as moving from being a "victim" to being a "survivor". What do think is the difference between these terms?

**THEME:**  
**Power & Vulnerability**

Many of the children who were targeted by abusive priests were particularly vulnerable.

- What contributed to the children’s vulnerabilities?
- What contributed to the priests’ power?
- How did the priests gain the trust of the children (and their parents)? What were the grooming methods used?

**Definition of Grooming:**

Grooming is the process used by an abuser to gain the trust and confidence of victims and their families, thereby ensuring access to the child. Grooming is a pattern of behavior that involves breaking down the child's defenses through an escalation of touch and inappropriate behavior, and the use of manipulation (threats or trickery) to keep the abuse secret.

**Spiritual Abuse & Betrayal:  
The Power of Leaders/Teachers**

*"When the priest showed up at my house, it was like God showing up."*

Within a faith community, the faith leader has power, as a spiritual guide, a moral example, and as a representative of God to those they teach and lead. Even in the most relaxed and informal congregation, the faith leader represents the presence of God, through words and deeds. This spiritual power, a potential for guidance and transformation, was instead used to manipulate children and their parents.

- What do you think might be the long-term spiritual impact of this kind of betrayal?
- What are ways that members of the community can recognize and address this inherent power of faith leaders and ensure it is used in healthy, supportive ways?

**3 Ways to Assist Survivors:**

Survivors' needs differ, depending on how recently the abuse took place and where they are in their healing journey. If someone shares their history with you:

**1. BELIEVE THEM**

- I Believe You
- It's Not Your Fault
- You Are Not Alone

**2. LISTEN WITH AN OPEN HEART**

- Don't judge or question their story. Rather, offer support and kindness.
- Ask what kind of support they need.
- Ask how you can help—don't assume you know.

**3. HELP**

- Is this person in immediate danger? If so, discuss with them the appropriate next steps to ensure their safety.
- Offer a referral to a local advocacy group or one of the hotlines we've listed below if they are struggling.

**Resources:**

**HOTLINES & HELP:**

**National Sexual Assault Hotline:**  
**800.656.HOPE (4673)**

**RAINN: Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network:** [www.RAINN.org](http://www.RAINN.org);  
**online chat:** <https://ohl.rainn.org/online/>

**SNAP (Survivors Network of Those Abused by Priests):**  
<http://www.snapnetwork.org>  
**(for clergy abuse survivors)**

**National Child Abuse Hotline:**  
**1-800-4-A-Child**

**National Suicide Prevention Hotline:**  
**1 (800) 273-8255**

**TRAINING & MATERIALS:**

**FaithTrust Institute:**  
[www.FaithTrustInstitute.org](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org)

**FAQ's on Child Sexual Abuse:**  
[www.FaithTrustInstitute.org/Spotlight](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org/Spotlight)

**THEME:**  
**Community & Individual  
 Responsibility**

***"If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one."***

— a line spoken by attorney Mitchell Garabedian

- What did he mean in this statement?
- As a faith community, what prevention or intervention strategies have you implemented to protect those who are vulnerable? What additional strategies should you implement?

**The Ethics of the Bystander**

Jim Sullivan, Robby's friend, worked as a lawyer for the Archdiocese, keeping dozens of perpetrators from facing criminal prosecution.

***"Yeah, I helped defend these scumbags, but that's my job, Robby. I was doing my job!"***

- How do you respond to his assertion that he was just "doing his job"?
- What are the ethical issues that this idea raises?
- What are the spiritual issues that it raises?
- Does the number of victims or perpetrators make a difference in your mind? If it were one child, rather than dozens, would your response be different?

Many people in the community knew something was happening, and yet the truth was undisclosed for decades.

- Do community members have an ethical or spiritual mandate to report abuse of a child or vulnerable adult?
- Is this ethical mandate the same or different for clergy and spiritual leaders than for the general public? If there is a difference, why?
- Many people are designated as "Mandated Reporters" by the laws protecting the vulnerable. In some states, this includes clergy. What is the law in your state?
- What are your faith community's policies on reporting abuse?
- Confidentiality is something we depend on in our relationships with clergy. Does this expectation for confidentiality differ from secrecy?
- In your mind, is the faith community morally culpable or responsible for illegal or immoral acts perpetrated by a faith leader?
- If there were an incident of abuse in your community, what would assist, or hinder, a victim or family member from disclosing the crime?

**THEME:**  
**Justice, Restoration & Healing**

Spotlight demonstrates the extraordinary lengths to which an institution will go to protect itself from responsibility for crimes, as well as protect the "good name" of the organization.

- Do you think this is just a "Catholic problem"?
- What do you know about how sexual abuse is handled in your faith community?

Other institutions are currently facing criticism for their inaction in responding to violence and abuse, such as the National Football League and many colleges and universities addressing campus sexual assault. Every faith denomination has had to face the reality of abuse.

- Are there any aspects of your faith tradition or culture that support the protection of the institution above the needs of the individual?
- If that's the case, what are the conditions that allow one who has been harmed to seek justice?
- What are our roles and responsibilities as community members toward those who bring forward accusations of abuse or misconduct?
- Can you have a safe environment if there is not an avenue for truth-telling?
- Child sexual abuse is a crime. Perpetrators have often not been held accountable, especially if they are respected members or leaders in a faith setting. Are there any doctrines or beliefs in your tradition that allow these crimes to go unreported or treated differently from other crimes?
- Silence about sexual assault in a community can engender shame in the victims, potentially limiting their avenues for help. What are some ways to "break the silence"?

**“There can be no healing without justice. And justice requires courage.”**

—Rev. Dr. Marie Fortune, FaithTrust Institute

FaithTrust Institute is a national, multifaith, multicultural training and education organization with global reach working to end sexual and domestic violence. FaithTrust Institute provides faith communities and advocates with the tools and knowledge they need to address the faith and cultural issues related to abuse. **For more information, visit: [www.FaithTrustInstitute.org](http://www.FaithTrustInstitute.org)**

## CHRISTIAN: The Good Samaritan

Luke 10:29-37:

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus replied, 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, "Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend." Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed him mercy.' Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'

- If you were the Samaritan and someone disclosed to you that they were being abused by a pastor or lay minister, what could you do now?

## JUDAISM: Mitzvah

Text, law, and tradition compel each person to prevent harm and save another who is in peril. Some of the foundational Biblical verses for this belief are:

- "v'ahavta l'rei-a-cha kamocho": "love thy neighbor as thyself." (Leviticus 19:18)
- "lo ta'amod al dam rei'echa,": "Thou shalt not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." (Leviticus 19:16)
- "and thou shalt restore him [a person who is losing his life] to himself." (Deuteronomy 22:2)

Maimonides, the great scholar, says, "If one person is able to save another and does not save him, he transgresses the commandment "neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16). Similarly, if one person sees another drowning in the sea, or being attacked by bandits, or being attacked by wild animals, and, although able to rescue him either alone or by hiring others, does not rescue him; or if one hears heathens or informers plotting evil against another or laying a trap for him and does not call it to the other's attention and let him know; or if one knows that a heathen or a violent person is going to attack another and although able to appease him on behalf of the other and make him change his mind, he does not do so; or if one acts in any similar way - he transgresses in each case the injunction, "neither shalt thou stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor..." (ibid.) Although there is no flogging for these prohibitions, because their breach involves no action, the offense is most serious, for if one destroys the life of a single Israelite, it is regarded as though he destroyed the whole world, and if one preserves the life of a single Israelite, it is regarded as though he preserved the whole world (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Torts, "Murder and Preservation of Life" 1:14, 16).

- How would you respond if you learned that someone was being victimized by a rabbi or leader in your temple?
- Does this mitzvah to act on behalf of those in peril inspire your response?

## ISLAM: The Words of the Prophet

In addition to respecting the Hebrew and Christian texts, the Prophet Mohammed demanded protection for the weakest and most vulnerable members of his community: the orphans, the widows, the poor and the enslaved. There is a sacred obligation to care for those who had no power of their own.

"If you see something wrong, you should correct it with your hand and if you are unable to, then speak out against it and if you cannot do that, then feel that it is wrong in your heart." (Hadith 34: Imam An-Nawawi's 40 Hadith)

"Allah instructed you... concerning the children who are weak and oppressed: that you stand firm for justice to orphans." (Qu'ran 4:127)

"Each of you is a shepherd and each of you is accountable for his or her flock." (Sahih Bukhari 6719, Sahih Muslim 1829)

"Obedience (of authority) is due only in good matters." (Sahih Bukhari 7257, Sahih Muslim 1840)

"All creatures of Allah are His family, therefore, amongst His creations, God likes the person who treats His creatures in a good manner (and takes care of their necessities)." (Mishkat al-Masabih)

"...And what would enable you to comprehend the uphill climb? It is the freeing of a slave. Or feeding on a day of severe hunger the close orphan or the needy person lying in the dust. Then he will become one of those with faith, who urge one another to have patience and urge one another to show compassion and mercy." (Qur'an 90:12-17)

- Does the obligation to care for the weak and show mercy extend to those who are victims of abuse?
- What is your role if you discover someone is being sexually abused?