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# 100 Day – Essay - Instructions

Write a ten (10) page essay that analyzes a topic in ethics relevant to your research interests, professional growth, and as an interdisciplinary faith-learning scholar. The essay must show scholarly work and cover the subject well.

1. Structure (Paper Evaluation includes the following structure below).
	1. Download the “OGS APA Course Assignments Template 7th Ed 2021” template from the General Helps folder in the AA-101 The Gathering Place Course on DIAL. Using the template, create the following pages.
	2. Title Page (not included in page count).
	3. Copy and paste the assignment instructions from the syllabus starting on a new page after the title page, adhering to APA 7th edition style ( APA 7 Workshop, Formatting, and Style Guide, APA 7 Quick Guide).
	4. Start the introduction on a new page after the copied assignment instructions.
2. Be sure to meet the following expectations.
	1. Begin with an introductory paragraph that has a succinct thesis statement.
	2. Address the topic of the paper with critical thought.
	3. End with a conclusion that reaffirms the thesis.
	4. Document all sources in APA style, 7th edition (APA 7 Reference Example, APA 7 Quick Guide)
	5. Include a separate Works Cited page, formatted according to APA style, 7th edition
	6. Use a minimum of twenty scholarly research sources (three to four books and the remaining scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles).
3. Submit the completed paper to DIAL.

# Introduction

When considering significant ethical and social concerns in America, Christians must consider the epidemic of childhood maltreatment. While reports of childhood abuse during COVID appeared to be declining (Itzkowitz and Olson, 2022, p. 87), it is generally understood that COVID reporting wasn’t representative of the problem during the epidemic. Most mandated reports of abuse are received by teachers (Cox et al., 2022, p. 55). Since most students attended school virtually, the reports decreased during COVID lockdowns. Unfortunately, actual abuse has continued to rise over the last decade (Tikka et al., 2020), with an estimated one in seven children experiencing maltreatment (Cox et al., 2022, p.56).

Maltreatment can take many forms: physical, emotional, sexual, and even various forms of neglect (Eckhoff et al., 2017, p.3). Beginning with the “Mary Ellen Case” in the 1870s, child maltreatment laws were established to protect minors from various kinds of abuse. (Itzkowitz and Olson, 2022, p. 79). Regrettably, the Church has had a checkered past regarding protecting children (Winfield, 2018; “Catholic Sex Abuse Scandal Keeps Going,” 2022). Further adding to the tension between the Church and lawmakers is the idea of “confessional confidentiality,” which allowed the Church to ignore state laws that required church leaders to report suspected abuse (Wyatt, 2022). Despite many decades of strong separation between the Church and State, this researcher believes that the Church has legal, ethical, and religious obligations to help solve the problem of childhood maltreatment (Prud’homme, 2022).

# Legal Obligations

The statistics on child maltreatment are staggering. According to some authorities, the most common forms of maltreatment are “neglect (74.9%), physical abuse (17.5%), and sexual abuse (9.3%)” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021, as cited by Cox et al., 2022, p. 56). Child neglect relates to the child not having their needs met for food, clothing, shelter, supervision, medical care or the like (Cox et al., 2022, p. 56). Abuse, while a separate issue, is just as detrimental to the child. Virginia’s state law breaks down abuse as physical, mental, or sexual in nature while defining neglect in a separate category (*§ 22VAC40-705-30. Types of Abuse and Neglect.*, n.d.).

Legally, many are mandated to report signs of maltreatment: teachers, counselors, doctors, nurses, and clergy, to name a few. Carrie et al. (2020) note that all adults are mandated reporters in over one-third of U.S. States (p. 256). Virginia state law indicates that “Any person 18 years of age or older associated with or employed by any public or private organization responsible for the care, custody or control of children” are required to report suspected abuse (*§ 63.2-1509. Requirement That Certain Injuries to Children Be Reported*, n.d.). While this paper specifically addresses the Church and its role, this subject clearly applies to most American citizens.

While the laws are designed to help protect children, they are not without their problems. Itzkowitz and Olson (2022) note, for example, that mandating reporting appears racially disproportionate to the families that get reported (p. 77). Goodman et al. (2020) continue this sentiment by identifying the “enormous power” that the Department of Child and Families (DCF) has over those who are reported (p.225). Reporting alone does not solve any problems. Bekink’s 2021 article regarding reporting child abuse was insightful, noting that mandatory reporting is only as effective as the services it provides when abuse is identified (p. 7). This begs the question, what services does the state, or Church, provide for those children and families affected by abuse and neglect?

Further complicating the legal issues are the damage that can be done by both those reporting the maltreatment and those who are reported. Frequently the problems are generational and sociological in nature, not limited to a single person or family. Family members tend to have multiple run-ins with DCF. As such, there is resistance to report issues because of the fear of children being removed from the home (Carrie et al., 2020, p. 256). Apparently, state services are not always seen as a solution to the problem but are sometimes seen as exacerbating it. Ironically, reporters tend to have similar fears; they might be held responsible for not responding appropriately (Tuttle et al., 2019). Whether it be teachers, counselors, or pastors, people fear what DCF involvement could mean for themselves and those they report. Given the fact that the law puts penalties in place for not reporting expediently or correctly, mandated reporters are also caught in the cross-fire (McTavish et al., 2019; *§ 63.2-1509. Requirement That Certain Injuries to Children Be Reported by Physicians, Nurses, Teachers, Etc.; Penalty for Failure to Report*, n.d.).

The Church is an important social institution with many members legally obligated to report childhood abuse. It, therefore, has a responsibility to respond to these social ills. This researcher understands this is a complicated and multi-faceted problem. Consider Dermott and Fowler’s (2020) article discussing how to define “family.” The definition has changed greatly over recent years. They argue for a contemporary definition that allows the family to be understood as a set of “social practices” that are “dynamic” in their interaction with its members (p. 2). Additionally, they suggest that family should not be bound simply through legal or blood ties (p. 2). As we consider their work, this researcher suggests the Church broaden its perspective, considering itself “God’s family”; a family that cares for each of its members. If the Church takes on this perspective, it only makes sense that she also responds to the childhood maltreatment epidemic.

# Ethical Obligations

Ethics has been a long-discussed philosophical subject that clearly relates to the topic of childhood maltreatment. Before discussing how to respond ethically, we need to define ethics. Mathews (2020) claims philosophical ethics is the “deliberate pursuit and clarification of… our values, actions and decisions” (p. 15). Hutchings (2018) states ethics “in their original meaning refers to codes of behavior or sets of values that set out what is right or wrong… within particular contexts” (p. 5). Relating to what is appropriate in this context, we need to evaluate what is right and wrong morally.

Historically there have been diverse views on moral right and wrong. For example, Hedonism is a philosophy that states successful life is based on the amount of pleasure one has (Dimmock and Fisher, 2017, p. 11). From a Hedonistic perspective, associations like the National Association of Man-Boy Love (NAMBLA) could freely exist as long as both children and adults are happy. Miller and Miller (2021) note that in many cases within the Anglican Church, male-on-male sexuality was overlooked and complaints ignored (pp. 193-194). It seems reasonable to assume that if society has a Hedonistic worldview, much of what is defined as sexual abuse today might be considered normative.

Another common perspective is Utilitarianism: the moral philosophy that there are no moral absolutes and what is best for the majority is best for society (Dimmock and Fisher, 2017, p. 18). Under this perspective, how we treat children depends on what the majority thinks. Again, this leaves room for treating children in less-than age-appropriate ways. Hong et al. (2022) provide an Eastern perspective on morality and responsibility, considering China’s focus on familial responsibility (p.1). In other words, each family member must take personal responsibility for their actions and how they affect the entire family. While this article specifically speaks about drug use and rehabilitation, this researcher believes these ideas also relate to American culture. Culture can change when social pressure is placed on individuals and society to respond in a certain way. Consider the anti-trafficking movement in the last two decades. As awareness was raised about the horrors of this $150 billion business, people began to change their behaviors and even legislation around trafficking and prostitution.

Neither Hedonism nor Utilitarianism sufficiently addresses childhood maltreatment issues. Solzhenitsyn (1983, as cited by Trueman & Dreher, 2020) stated the problem well, “men have forgotten God; that’s why this has happened.” Bahnsen (2021) agrees, “God’s law is the only perfect ethical standard for any society.” As Christians, the only authoritative source of our ethical and moral code is what God has stated in the Bible. As the creator, only God has the authority to unequivocally state how his creation will be run. Unfortunately, all too often, man thinks his ways are higher than God’s, and man writes laws and practices lifestyles less than the standards God has set.

 The Church has an ethical obligation to live by the rules set in its Holy Scriptures. Simply put, we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (NASB, 2020, Matt 22:39). God clearly states what love looks like patient, kind, not envying or boasting, not proud, etc. (NASB, 2020, 1 Cor 13:4-7). We must consider children’s best interests before our own (NASB, 2020, Phil 2:3-5). This includes considering what we know about their physiology and human development. If the Church doesn’t consider their needs based on what we know from all sources of knowledge, then we don’t love them well.

# Religious Obligations

From a faith perspective, the Word of God must be the Church’s gold standard. The Church is accountable to God (NASB, 2020, Romans 3:19, Col 3:23). Therefore, we must examine the scriptures to define our belief system.

1. Matt 22:36-40 notes that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love our neighbor as ourselves (NASB, 2020). The Church needs to prioritize love.
2. 1 Cor 13:4-8 defines what love is. Ultimately, loving someone considers what is in their best interest (NASB, 2020).
3. Matt 5:13-16 identifies that all Church members represent the Kingdom of God to the world; therefore, the Church is obliged to live and speak in such a way as to continue being “salt” and “light” (NASB, 2020).
4. Like loving others, the Bible also teaches that we should lead with a servant mindset (NASB, 2020, Matt 20:28, John 13:13-17).
5. The Bible also teaches that the Church should not be conformed to the world. The world is juxtaposed with God’s ways. (NASB, 2020, Romans 12:1-2, Isaiah 55:8-9, Gal 5).
6. Lastly, the Church is instructed to raise children in the ways of the Lord (NASB, 2020, Prov 22:6, Eph 6:4).

Besides scriptural principles, the Church’s leadership needs to promote Biblical values and beliefs to protect the flock (NASB, 2020, Acts 20:28). Adebayo and Govender (2020) state that marketing plays a vital role in the Church’s ability to fulfill their social responsibility (p. 1). By regularly and concisely communicating its standards, mission, vision, and worldview, a Church can promote Godly mindsets, including those toward healthy families and children. De Villiers (2020) agrees the Church has a critical role in promoting moral guidance to its congregations, denominations, and even Christian NGOs (p. 3). Raimi et al. (2013, as cited by Zigan and Grys, 2018) continue, “religious organisations have made a significant contribution to… social responsibility… raising ethical awareness and emphasizing a shared sense of responsibility” (p. 535). Miller and Miller (2021) concur “the Church and its clergy have a critical role to play in the maintenance of moral norms of society” (p. 194).

# Solutions

Churches have legal, ethical, and religious obligations to address social problems, especially child maltreatment. As such, training is needed for both Church leadership and its members. While every Church’s action plan will look different, the first step is understanding the legal requirements.

Training needs to begin with understanding state and federal laws. Like Tuttle et al.’s (2019) first step in their eight-step framework, Church members must understand child safety and reporting regulations. Uninformed Church goers are unlikely to recognize the severity of the issue or make appropriate reports. While this training doesn’t need to be long, it does need to be specific. Where possible, bringing in a social worker or non-profit that can support the discussion can be invaluable. This researcher identified one such local organization, GRACE (*GRACE: Godly Response to Abuse in the Christian Environment*, 2019). Grace provides training programs like their “Safeguarding Initiative” for abuse prevention training. Additionally, GRACE provides Organizational Assessments to help identify potential pitfalls in your Church’s policies and handling of children and provides solutions that honor victims and ensures ministry integrity.

In addition to legal training, Trauma Informed Care (TIC) must be included. Stylianou et al.’s (2020) program includes skills the Church can use, namely identifying what causes trauma, its effects, and how to treat it. This step might be the most time-consuming as, inevitably, it will cause Church members to consider their own Church and communities and their personal stories. TIC commonly includes components such as: recognizing and responding to trauma, transparency, policy and procedures management, peer support, and establishing safe environments. This essential step in training is advantageous not only for the Church but also for society. The better equipped Church members are to respond to children’s needs, the more effective they become in societal change. Jesus was adamant that we prioritize children (NASB, 2020, Matt 19:14). As Church members, we need to do the same.

However, before diving too deeply into personal traumatic stories, this researcher recommends developing a support team to respond to and minister to Church members’ needs. Considering the high rate of abuse and neglect in our society, it is likely that, as training is conducted to prevent childhood maltreatment, adults will encounter their own unresolved wounds. To combat this, Church leadership must be ready with a healing ministry team. Specifically, an inner-healing prayer team with a pastoral counseling background should be established. Goodman and Fauci (2020), when discussing domestic violence, describe the need for survivors to have systems that provide safety and healing (p. 217).

Similarly, the Church as a whole needs to become a safe place for people to heal, beginning with its members. As a side note, yet highly relevant, historically, the Church had taken on a “spare the rod spoil the child” mentality towards all forms of congregational sin. When problems were identified, Church members could be chastised or excommunicated. This form of response is ineffectual and needs to be replaced. Cox et al. (2022) concur: corporal punishment is not an effective form of discipline for children with trauma. This researcher suggests that corporal punishment is rarely the best solution for Church members as well. While the Church must recognize that discipline begins in the house of the Lord, it must also recognize that our “Abba Father” disciplines us in grace, truth, and love (NASB, 2020, John 1:17, 1 Peter 4:17, Romans 8:15, Hebrews 12:6).

Lastly, besides training regarding legalities and Trauma Informed Care, Church Policies and procedures must be updated. Without appropriate steps to follow, new-found knowledge has no course of action. Leadership must promote a culture of safety from the top down, including adherence to standards that protect children (Adebayo & Govender, 2020). Multiple avenues of communication are likely to be required: Preaching, elder and deacon meetings, training of volunteer staff, etc., all need to include philosophy, policies, and procedures that encourage child safety.

# Conclusion

For too long, the Church has allowed fear of the wickedness of American society to be an excuse to look the other way. In doing so, it has stepped down from its role as the salt and light of society, and America is worse for it (NASB, 2020, Matt 5:13-16; Doré, 2004). Further complicating the situation was COVID 2019, which has created many new layers of trauma on top of old unresolved societal problems (Knoetze & Black, 2023, p. 5). There is a real battle at hand for Believers, and it begins with raising awareness within the Church.

Believers, especially Church leadership, must consider their personal biases and woundedness as they reflect on these societal problems, especially child maltreatment (Stylianou et al., 2020). As it turns out, the problem is inside the Church as much as outside. Miller and Miller (2021) note as the Church publically identifies child maltreatment, child abuse cases within the Church will decrease (p. 197). Conversely, when the Church abdicates its purpose, or even worse, when Church leadership abuses its authority, society suffers (Miller & Miller, 2021, p. 194). The message the Church needs to hear is difficult because it begins with personal ownership, confession, and repentance (NASB, 2020, 2 Matt 3:8, Cor 7:1, Eph 4:1, 1 Thess 4:7). The Church has a moral responsibility to the rest of the world to set a Kingdom example. But how does one motivate change? Hong et al.’s (2022) idea of communal relationships and family seems to be a good start. Beginning with training, especially training focused on TIC (Papa & Robinson, 2023), Churches can begin to change society.

Lastly, the Church needs to become a place to have safe conversations (Stylianou et al., 2020). The Church will continue to export weak-faith Christianity as long as its focus is on external evangelism instead of its members’ internal discipleship and sanctification needs. When a culture of growth and healing is established, all members, including children, will benefit. As the Church heals and matures, so will society. Complacency is not an option. We must enact change.

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