**Case Study**

John Evans has been the pastor of Battlecreek Church for the past two years. As a young pastor of a struggling church of approximately 400 members, Pastor Evans has constantly had power struggles with certain elders. Though he believes God has called him to this church, Pastor Evans does not believe that he has developed the full support of his church leadership.

Late last night, Pastor Evans received a call from Mr. Long who was extremely emotional and shaken up. The Longs have been members of Battlecreek Church for approximately one year. They have three sons, ages 3, 8, and 13. The 13 year olds name is Benjamin and he has a reputation within the church for being disrespectful and hanging out with the “wrong crowd.” In fact, on a few occasions, Mr. & Mrs. Long have sought counsel from Pastor Evans regarding their son’s seemingly unruly and rebellious behavior.

To the great shock of Pastor Evans, Mr. Long informs him that Benjamin had just disclosed that he has been repeatedly sexually abused by ruling elder, Tom Watts. This abuse began after Mr. Watts started to volunteer with the church youth group approximately 7 months earlier. The abuse has allegedly gone on without the knowledge of any other person.

Mr. Watts is a 52 year old partner in the City’s oldest and most prestigious law firm. He has been a member of Battlecreek Church for the past 25 years and has been a ruling elder for the past 10 years. Mr. Watts has an impeccable reputation amongst both the community and the congregation. He has been married to Nancy for the past 30 years and they have four grown children. Mr. Watts has always volunteered to assist with any part of the church ministry where there was a need. Seven months ago, he volunteered to assist with the youth group when the youth director was abruptly terminated for inappropriate behavior with one of the kids. Pastor Evans has heard nothing but praises from both the youth and their parents regarding the work of Mr. Watts. However, it is widely known that Benjamin Long was extremely close to the last youth director and was extremely upset when he was terminated. Benjamin has repeatedly told a number of people that “Mr. Watts just isn’t like David (the previous director)” and that he wishes “David could come back.”

Mr. Watts has provided Pastor Evans with much encouragement and support in his dealings with some of the more difficult session members. Pastor Evans considers Tom Watts a close personal friend and mentor.

As Mr. Long is telling Pastor Evans about this disclosure, Pastor Evans suddenly recalls a conversation he had with Tom Watts shortly after he had become the pastor at Battlecreek Church. Mr. Watts had confided in Pastor Evans that when he was nineteen years old, he had been falsely accused of sexually molesting a 12 year old boy. He told Pastor Evans that the charges were eventually dropped after the families had reached an out of court settlement. At the time of the conversation, Tom Watts told Pastor Evans that the incident had scarred him emotionally for life. He also told Pastor Evans that nobody else at Battlecreek was aware of this incident.

Mr. Long has not told anyone else about Benjamin’s disclosure, and does not believe that Mr. Watts had any knowledge that Benjamin has told anyone. He tells you that during his disclosure, Benjamin had numerous spiritual questions such as, *Why did God let this happen to me? Where was God when Mr. Watts was touching me?* Benjamin also commented “I didn’t tell anyone because I was sinning with Mr. Watts.”Mr. Long admits that he could not answer Benjamin’s questions and is afraid that his son is going to hate God for the rest of his life. He asks you for suggestions as to what types of services and resources may be available for Benjamin and the family as they confront this difficult matter. Before hanging up, Mr. Long indicates that you are the only person outside of the family that Benjamin is willing to meet with concerning the abuse. He also tells Pastor Evans that the family wants to fully support Benjamin and has decided to seek pastoral counsel as to what steps they should take next as a result of this disclosure.

After some thought, Pastor Evans requests an emergency meeting with his church leadership for the purpose of discussing and deciding how Battlecreek Church should respond to this crisis.

**Some Questions to Consider:**

Who attends emergency leadership meeting?

What issues need to be addressed at emergency meeting?

How can the Church best serve Benjamin Long and his family during this crisis?

How can the Church best serve Tom Watts and his family during this crisis?

How can the Church best serve its congregation during this crisis?

How can the Church best serve the watching community during this crisis?