Dear Hope of Survivors Family,

It's been an eventful quarter and will be even more so in the weeks and months ahead! We are thankful for how the Lord opened doors for The Hope of Survivors to exhibit at various places in Illinois and Nebraska recently, and for the TV interviews on The Harvest Show in Indiana (watch Part 1 & Part 2), as all these events helped to raise awareness of clergy sexual abuse and provided a resource for victims to receive help. Thank you for your prayers and support of this ministry--a ministry that is changing lives by offering hope and healing through the power of Jesus.

This newsletter is jam-packed with heart-wrenching, yet hopeful, testimonies, advice on how to prevent yourself from becoming a victim, what feminism means to Jesus and much more. We hope you will be blessed as you read the testimonies and that you will be impressed to take action within your own sphere of influence to prevent clergy sexual abuse and to offer a safe place for victims to share their pain and seek help.

The Hope of Survivors is stepping out in faith to launch a global campaign August 1--Clergy Sexual Abuse Awareness & Prevention Day(tm). Our goal is to partner with other individuals and organizations around the world to raise awareness, educate on prevention, and offer hope to victims. Already we have several events lined up and we want you to be a part of it! Please let us know if you'd be interested in hosting or conducting an event in your area. For more ideas and information, please visit the website at www.clergysexualabuseawarenessday.com.

Together, we can do much to prevent clergy sexual abuse, educate church leaders and congregations, and provide a safe-haven for victims. Will you join us?

Until next time, may the Lord bless you, keep you, and may His countenance shine upon you.

Samantha Nelson
Vice President & CEO

Are You Covering for an Abusive Pastor?
Founders
Steve & Samantha Nelson are Co-Founders of The Hope of Survivors. They strive to facilitate healing in the lives of those who have been wounded by a spiritual leader.

The ministry is founded on the commission in God's Word, which calls us to "...comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."-2 Corinthians 1:4

About the Ministry
The Hope of Survivors is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization funded by individuals who support the mission and goals of the organization; survivors of pastoral sexual abuse who desire to use their means to help others; and by grants from private foundations whose values are similar to those of The Hope of Survivors. All contributions are fully tax-deductible as allowable by law. Your support is greatly appreciated.

Calendar of Events
August 1, 2011
Clergy Sexual Abuse

By Denah Michelle Moon
Are you providing a constant stream of "narcissistic supply" for your pastor? Is your main role to make him look good? Do you equate making him look good with powerful ministry in your community? You can serve many years believing you are doing good in your church by covering spiritual abuse for your leader, while really doing great harm. Check out the signs of spiritual abuse. If they look familiar, and you feel you may have had a hand in perpetuating it, all is not lost. Read more...

I Will Never Regret Telling the Truth
By Serenity*, 14 years old
My Pastor could have been supportive during what was the most shocking summer of my life. Instead he did the opposite and became a part of the cycle of abuse.

Three years ago this summer I made a stop on the way home from camp and during a visit with my best friend, she abused me. I was shocked, scared and surprised. Read more...

Jesus' Kind of Feminism
By Jennifer Schweitzer, LPC
This week I've feasted my heart on a study of Jesus' relationships with women. Amazing things happened inside of me. Passion rekindled. Apathy disappeared. My desire to follow Him to the ends of the earth revived. Oh, how I love Jesus! Read more...

Predator Pastor
By Chris Keaton
My nightmare began September 2001 when my husband went out of town for a few days. He was the mission pastor at our church and had been on staff for 10 years at that time. Whenever Mel went out of town, the other pastors on staff would tell me to let them know if there was anything I needed while he was gone. This time was no exception, except this time it was the senior pastor who offered his help. Read more...

Testimonials
"May God bless your ministry. I think this is going on in the church all the time, and someone needs to speak out. You have a ministry second to none."--Pastor, South Africa

"Thank you for your kind assistance and prayers. I often visit the website for information and encouragement. It is a true blessing. I pray that you continue this work."--Survivor, MD

"I hope you still remember me [from] way back [in] 2007! Praise God! Now, I can say that now I'm one of the survivors! Thank you for your ministry. Praise God for your ministry. God has used you to make my broken life whole again! Pray for us as we continue to love God with all our hearts and follow Him always! Hope to be able to support your ministry soon! From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much!"--Survivor, Philippines

"My wife is one of the victims associated with this mess in Pella, Iowa. We truly need help over here. If someone does not commit suicide over this whole ordeal I will be very surprised. On a side note...your website has been very helpful. We read it daily. The articles associated with this website have been very helpful and we have forwarded them on to many people within our community. Can someone please respond to this...I don't know how much
longer I can hold it together. Thank you."--Survivor, IA

"I am one of the four victims that was manipulated by this sexual predator. This website has been a true answer to prayer and blessing for myself, husband, family and friends. Thank you for your blog entry...God have mercy on us all! I need to process the info you shared--you shall hear from me again. God bless your work!!--Survivor, IA

Read more testimonials...

Creative Ways to Help!

Contribute with ease by setting up monthly recurring donations to The Hope of Survivors. It's easy! Just go to http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/donate.asp and type in the amount you'd like to contribute. Victims thank you for your contributions, as they help provide the support they need for healing!

Did you know The Hope of Survivors is listed on the social networking site Facebook? Check it out! (http://apps.facebook.com/causes/47537?m=33935&recruiter_id=12747904)

No money? You can still support The Hope of Survivors! We will receive a penny each time you search the Internet using www.GoodSearch.com. Just type The Hope of Survivors in the charity to be supported box.

You can also donate through American Express Giving Express online: http://amex.justgive.org/nonprofits/donate.jsp?ein=65-1211701.

Do you shop online a lot? Then shop through igive.com and earn money for The Hope of Survivors each time you order online!

Thank you for supporting The Hope of Survivors!

Resources

Understanding Sexual Misconduct Among Spiritual Leaders

Ever wonder what is really happening to you or someone you know? Are you trying to decide how to help someone who has been abused by a pastor? Or wanting to know how the church should address the issue? This booklet provides information for victims, spouses, youth, pastors and wives, church leaders and congregants, and an overview of the issue of pastoral sexual misconduct. It is a "must" for those who need answers and help!

(8.5x5.5, 20 pages) Only $2.95 each. Order online!

Call It Anything But Love!--The Steve & Samantha Nelson Story

Call It Anything But Love! is a true story of a couple’s struggles and challenges as they overcome their painful pasts to find themselves in a spider's web of lies, deceit, adultery and abuse—at the hands of their pastor. Their incredible and disturbing story offers context for the all too common, and widely misunderstood, topic of pastoral sexual abuse. This poignant illustration brings answers to the troubling questions we've all asked—Why? How? Who? Order online!

NEWSFLASH!!! Call It Anything But Love! will be aired August 16, 2011, at the International Film Festival of West Wales and the International Film Festival of Mind, Body, Spirit & Ecology in Neath, UK (Wales)! If you're in the area, stop by to watch the film and give your reviews. For more information, please visit this site.

Reviews...
funds collected at Prime 11 Cinemas during the day. If you're in the area, please plan to participate.

Immediate Needs...

* Hope & Healing (victim’s) conference expenses (meeting space rental, meals, travel, materials, etc.).

* Monthly operating expenses (postage, office supplies, utilities, printing, etc.), staff, educational materials and victim assistance.

* Donations to offset the current budget deficit.

* Funds for conferences, exhibits and conventions—one of the best ways to spread the word about this ministry and bring hope and healing to victims!

Donations are the primary source of funds that make it possible for The Hope of Survivors to maintain its ministry. Since The Hope of Survivors receives no denominational subsidies, your gifts are vitally important.

Would you be willing to help? Thank you for considering a tax-deductible donation to further the work of this ministry and bring hope and healing to wounded hearts.

Send HopeSpeak to a friend!

We hope you were blessed by this edition of HopeSpeak. If so, please feel free to forward it to a friend so they, too, can sign up.

To download a PDF file of this newsletter, please click here.

"...one of the most disturbing topics in our culture today... Call It Anything But Love! has an emotional punch yet still manages to challenge our deepest, most profound beliefs."—Martin Doblmeier, filmmaker Journey Films

"The documentary was powerful. I was deeply moved again as I reflected on what you have gone through. But also inspired as the Lord has taken you from being a victim of an evil man to being a victor over all that was planned against you."—Tom Lemon, President, Mid-America Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

"Your DVD came today...what an outstanding piece of work it is...oh my!!! I sat here watching it thinking...who do I send/give this to so it can be shared and persons can learn, or have the story told again, so folks grasp the complexity of the issue? Once again, you have done outstanding work and are to be commended. Thank you again!"—Survivor, ME

"I received your DVD in the post today and have already watched it. I thought it was very moving. You and Steve have been through so much! God bless you that you both started The Hope of Survivors. It is well needed."—Survivor, Germany

"I got the DVD this afternoon and had mixed feelings about watching it--did I want to relive the pain again for no reason--or would it be beneficial to watch in some way. ...I just wanted to write to say I'm glad I watched it, it was very well done, but most of all, it is ANOINTED."—Survivor, OH

"Thanks so much for the DVD. We have watched it and are amazed and thankful for your example of a couple who have gone through such circumstances and come through it stronger than before and have turned it into an opportunity to help others. ...Thanks once again for all the work you are doing. May God bless you."—Survivor, Australia

"I watched the DVD and your story really touched me."—Translator, UK

"5 Stars!...a spectacular force..."—Herb Douglass, Th.D., CA

"I was deeply touched by the video... So many like us will be able to connect and relate. My heart ached deeply with yours in hearing the darkest and most painful periods of your life when you were faced with so much doubt and feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness."—Survivor, Hawaii

"I just got my DVD today and I just watched it. What an awesome job you two have done! It is so hard to explain that feeling of not wanting to disappoint the pastor or make him mad and you did a fine job. I can more than relate. God, thru you my friend, saved my life and my marriage!"—Survivor, NC

"Wow. I can't tell you how much your story moved me. I can relate to most everything, including much of your childhood. ...The production of this documentary is amazing. The lighting, editing, b roll..., and the narration flow so well. The subtitles are so fitting--it's all very good. Steve is extremely compelling, especially his reflections about those red flags that made him feel uneasy, but that he didn't really know what to do with."—Survivor, OR

Make sure to check out the other products available too!
Spam
Not spam
Forget previous vote
August 1 has been designated as Clergy Sexual Abuse Awareness & Prevention Day™, an event to be celebrated with various activities throughout the month of August. Clergy sexual abuse (also known as misconduct and exploitation) is a prevalent problem in every denomination around the globe. Our goal is to raise awareness of the issue of clergy sexual abuse and its devastating and destructive effects on individual lives, congregations and religion as a whole.

This campaign is necessary because the issue of clergy sexual abuse is little understood by most people. Education and awareness are essential in both prevention and healing.

News reports abound about spiritual leaders having an “affair” with a teen or adult, male or female. The term “abuse” is rarely used in the media, though it needs to be understood and labeled as such. Will you join us in telling the world that Enough IS Enough?
Are You Covering for an Abusive Pastor?

by Denah Michelle Moon

(From the July 2011 edition of HopeSpeak)

Signs you may be covering for a pastor who abuses the flock spiritually:

1. You've noticed a pattern of people leaving the fellowship, but you hesitate to ask your pastor about it and don't like to delve into the reasons behind the exits.
2. You've seen your pastor act in retribution for slights or criticism by removing people from ministries, publicly or privately shaming them or refusing to listen to them.
3. You excuse your pastor's wrong behavior: He's young (or he's old), he doesn't understand the people who are unhappy, he has a little trouble relating to people, he'll grow out of it, I'm probably not seeing the whole picture, God will show him his weaknesses and he'll handle things better soon, no pastor is perfect in every way, he's such a good preacher that we can overlook the other parts of his calling.
4. You find yourself blaming victims. You justify harsh behavior by your pastor by focusing on the sins or weaknesses of those who are shamed or shunned or criticized or punished.
5. You feel that to protect the name of Christ in your community you need to keep secret the alarming behavior by your pastor or leaders in the church.
6. You feel it's your duty to think the best of your pastor, no matter what charges are brought against him (but you don't extend the same courtesy to those who feel they've been abused or harmed).
7. You feel it's okay for your pastor to build up your church by criticizing other churches with "inferior" doctrines or practices, but it's not okay for anyone to question decisions by church leaders if it looks like criticism.
8. You enjoy being flattered by your pastor and seek to please him often. You spend a lot of time in church flattering and seeking approval from your pastor.
9. You are frequently in fear of being criticized by your pastor or having your ministry in the church taken away.
10. You've seen your pastor flatter those he can use and then later turn on them or ignore them.
11. You would feel uncomfortable asking to see financial records of the church, and you are willing to just assume that they are being used in a godly manner.
12. You feel constant pressure to help more in church or to give more, or both.
13. Going to church often seems like a burden, but you don't want anyone to know you feel that way.
14. You have criticized other churches or individuals with your pastor.
15. You like the feeling of being in the "inner circle," and you sometimes feel you have the pastor's confidence in a way no one else does.
16. You often feel a little bit superior to Christians who don't witness as much as you, or who don't practice their faith as well as you, or who don't emphasize certain doctrines as much as you do.
17. You feel that no one quite understands the scriptures, delivers sermons or reaches out to the weak and poor like your pastor does.
18. You spend much time defending your pastor, either in your own mind or to others.
19. You don't like to admit it, but you often spend more time thinking about your pastor or leaders than you do about God (whether positively, negatively or both).
20. You are exhausted.

If many of these items speak to you, it might be a good idea to evaluate what your role in your church really is. Are you providing a constant stream of "narcissistic supply" for your pastor? Is your main role to make him look good? Do you equate making him look good with powerful ministry in your community? You can serve many years believing you are doing good in your church by covering spiritual abuse for your leader, while really doing great harm. Check out the signs of spiritual abuse. If they look familiar, and you feel you may have had a hand in perpetuating it, all is not lost.

You can recognize the harm and turn from it, even if it's been a long time coming.

* This article refers not only to clergy sexual abuse, but to abuse of power in other ways, such as financial, spiritual, emotional, etc.

Denah Michelle Moon is a guest contributor to this edition of HopeSpeak. She lives in South Carolina with her husband and four children. This article, originally posted on Facebook, is used with permission.
The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18
I Will Never Regret Telling the Truth  by Serenity*, 14 years old

My Pastor could have been supportive during what was the most shocking summer of my life. Instead he did the opposite and became a part of the cycle of abuse.

Three years ago this summer I made a stop on the way home from camp and during a visit with my best friend, she abused me. I was shocked, scared and surprised. Two days later during a play date at my home she abused me again. My parents had always taught me to communicate to them if someone touched me when they weren't supposed to. I told my parents as I realized she was not going to stop. My parents contacted the authorities to report the abuse. I knew that I never wanted to see her again and that I could never be safe alone with her. I was still very sad and knew it would never be the same. I was also very sad for her as well. I knew she needed help. The friendship I had known since I was little was gone in a second.

My family was very active in our church and my best friend and her family went to the same church. I was really afraid of how things would be. My mom told me she would make sure I was safe and that I would not be alone with my friend who had done this to me. When we found out that our Pastor had been told about my report of abuse from the other family my parents helped me to write up my wishes in a safety plan and gave it to our Pastor. We thought this would help keep me safe at church.

What I did not know then and later learned was that my Pastor was not supportive of my reporting my abuse. He was angry that my parents had done this. For me this was disturbing because he baptized me and I knew him personally and trusted him. For him not to believe me felt so awful. For me to be abused, and him not to support me in going to the authorities, made me very angry. I never asked him to take sides.

My Pastor did not support my requests for safety at church. Instead he did things that made it clear that he supported my abuser and wanted me and my family to apologize to my friend and her family. People in church found out about my abuse. They walked up to my family in stores and told us to apologize. My Pastor wrote my mom a letter demanding she be nice to the abuser and forgive them and their family. I was very confused during this time. My best friend and her family made us very uncomfortable at church. They even approached us after we asked to be left alone. Our Pastor wanted my mom to allow my friend who abused me to stay in a program that I volunteered for every Sabbath. My parents told me it was unsafe for me to go to church anymore. This was all happening while my dad was at home recovering from surgery. Our Pastor knew what he was doing. He told my parents that they had done the wrong thing. Not only did my Pastor hurt me but he hurt my whole family...at times it became too much to bear. I felt like I could not breathe. I knew my life had changed.

This made me angry. Church belongs to God...not the Pastor. He is not supposed to take sides. He should have listened and cared for all of us in this very difficult situation.

We still cannot go back to our church. Church members told my mom that she would be arrested if she returns because of what happened. I had to leave all my friends and my church family. This was the church I was baptized in. The church I had attended church school at.

My family has tried lots of things to ask for help with the church situation but no one will help. My cry for help is not answered.

The one place I have been heard was The Hope of Survivors. They believed me. They supported me. They cared about me and told me that it would be all right. They cared for me and my family the way I think our Pastor should have.

I thought church was for everyone and to worship God. I did not think it was only for certain people or sides. That seems to be the last thing God would want.

My prayer is that kids do not have to be abused and that Pastor's support kids in reporting abuse and dealing with all the emotions. We need healthy boundaries in our churches and with our Pastor's. I was taught at church to tell the truth. My experience was that the other family and our church made it clear that I should not have told the truth.... I don’t agree and I will never regret telling the truth.

*A pseudonym

[END OF STORY]
If you are a survivor of pastoral abuse, we would love to hear your story and possibly make it available on this web site for others to read and renew their hope. You can use a pseudonym if you choose and rest assured that all personal information will be kept private and strictly confidential. Please contact us.

Please note: We do not necessarily agree with or endorse all the information contained in the survivor’s stories. We do, however, feel they have some valuable information that could be useful to you in your recovery. It helps to know you’re not alone, that others have shared your pain and have healed, by the grace of God, in their own time and way.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18
Jesus' Kind of Feminism* by Jennifer Jill Schwirzer

(From the July 2011 edition of HopeSpeak)

This week I’ve feasted my heart on a study of Jesus’ relationships with women. Amazing things happened inside of me. Passion rekindled. Apathy disappeared. My desire to follow Him to the ends of the earth revived. Oh, how I love Jesus!

Here’s what I learned: Jesus respected women. Often we emphasize respect of men. I sometimes get the impression that women don’t really need respect; that they function similarly to small kittens, thriving best when well-cuddled. Yet the thing that grabs me about Jesus’ treatment of women, the thing that ultimately endears me to Him, is not so much His tender affection for women—although that’s plain and precious. It’s the respect factor. And Jesus demonstrated this respect in the midst of mass, general, persistent, pervasive and extreme societal and cultural disrespect. His respect translates to me today into the most exalted and holy kind of love I’ve ever known.

Probably no category of people has, over the eons of time, suffered more disrespect than women. Even today, one in three women walking this earth have been raped, beaten or coerced into sex. Women are the primary victims of sex trafficking, domestic violence, rape and sexual abuse. Women comprise half the population, but they do two-thirds of the world’s work and get one-tenth of the world’s pay. Women are at an educational, political and financial disadvantage globally. I’d call this disrespect, wouldn’t you?

Westerners have a hard time grasping the full impact of these things because our society enjoys more equality. Stepping outside of our safe little world, though, the facts I’ve just cited hit us between the eyes—female genital mutilation in Africa, bride burning in India, sex slavery in Thailand—the list goes on and on. Similarly, Jesus lived at a time when the status of women rested at a low ebb. Even within Israel, pagan attitudes warped the Torah’s protective boundaries into severe limitations on a woman’s freedom and dignity, until “They had become second-class Jews, excluded from the worship and teaching of God, with status scarcely above that of slaves.”[i]

Now, behold Jesus in his brief public career. He works His first miracle at a wedding, essentially at His mother’s request. Soon after He holds a very personal conversation with a foreign woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:7-42). He talks similarly to a Canaanite woman, healing her daughter (Matthew 15:22-28). He speaks against divorce, a practice which harms chiefly women at that time (Mark 10:11-12). He travels with women supporters (Luke 8:1-3) Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and “many others.” He defends Mary Magdalene before His disciples (Luke 7:37-50). He teaches women students (Luke 10:38-42) when the rabbinical sentiment is, “Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity.”[ii] He befriends Lazarus, Mary and Martha. He uses the respectful term, “daughter of Abraham” (Luke 13:16), unheard of at that time. He dies and rises again, appearing first to Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9).

Much of conservative Christianity wrings its hands over the encroachments of feminism upon modern society, upon the home, and upon the church. Yes, secular feminism (comprised of many schools of thought, all fighting with one another like Medusa’s snake heads) carries unibiblical baggage. But something troubles me; all the dire warnings against the evils of feminism have somehow drowned out concern for its evil counterpart—male chauvinism. Yet hasn’t male chauvinism, defined as the belief that “females are inferior to males and thus deserving of less than equal treatment or benefit”[iii] led historically and globally to untold horror, atrocity and violation of basic human rights? Won’t those following the Master follow Him in countering every such violation?

On June 11, the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church celebrated “Women’s Ministries Emphasis Day” (http://adventistwomensministries.org/). It is a good way to reinforce our respect for womankind. I wonder if my conservative Christian brothers and sisters are brave enough to take a stand for the rights, education, salvation and upbuilding of women, even when this might align them, for a brief moment, with those of a more liberal persuassion.

If they do, they’ll remind me of Someone named Jesus.

[ii] "Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches her obscenity. 

Feminism = "The theory of the social, political and economic equality of the sexes."

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18
Predator Pastor by Chris Keaton

My nightmare began September 2001 when my husband went out of town for a few days. He was the mission pastor at our church and had been on staff for 10 years at that time. Whenever Mel went out of town, the other pastors on staff would tell me to let them know if there was anything I needed while he was gone. This time was no exception, except this time it was the senior pastor who offered his help. That night, after I got the kids to bed, he called and wanted to know if everything was ok; did I need anything. I said everything’s fine. At one point in the conversation he said, “If you need anything, even maybe if you need me to make love to you…” Hold on! (The sound of screeching brakes in my head!) I thought, surely I didn’t hear him right! It was weird. I didn’t respond. I don’t remember the whole conversation. I was in shock, in disbelief and really confused! Then he came over!

He just showed up at the house and that really shocked me. He’d never been over to the house before. He told me he’d always felt like there was a special connection or bond between us and he wanted to know if I felt the same. I’m thinking in my head, Holy Cow! NO! I’d always looked to him as a father figure! But I couldn’t say that. Here’s my pastor—and I had respected him and loved him as my pastor since I was 16 years old. He was a spiritual leader, a counselor...he was confusing me really bad. I told him I loved him as my pastor, but not in the way he was talking about. Then I told him I thought he should leave. He reacted like he was taken aback, like he didn’t expect that at all. I think he was shocked I said that he should leave. He continued talking, saying everything again, and I had to tell him to leave again. He did leave finally. I think he was flabbergasted, but he left. As he was walking away (it seemed he’d parked his car on a different street), the whole way he reacted to me telling him no, the whole way he came across, I thought, oh dear God, what have I done? He’s going to fire Mel. He’s going to get me back. He has the power to make my husband’s life miserable or even just fire him. He never said any of those things, but the way he reacted made me feel that way.

After he left, I thought, I’ve got to call Mel! But then he called on the phone again and was apologetic and said how he screwed up; he shouldn’t have said those things. He’d never done anything like this before, but he really thought there was something special between us, and he thought I felt the same way. He wanted to call Mel and tell him everything but I remember thinking, what will happen if I tell him? He messed up, yes, but nothing happened, and I didn’t want to destroy this man’s life when he was sorry. Everyone messes up. Just because you’re a pastor doesn’t mean you don’t mess up or that you’re not human. I didn’t want to be responsible for destroying his life. And if he lost his job as the senior pastor, what would happen to Mel & me with four little kids? What would happen to the church? Besides that, I was thinking, how will anyone believe me? I thought, nobody’s perfect; I’m not going to destroy his life over one mistake that he’s made. So I decided not to say anything.

The next night, I got my kids to bed and was getting ready for bed myself when he called again. He wanted to come over, but I told him no, I was already in bed. Then he said, “If you’re already in bed, then why is your light on?” (The sound of screeching brakes in my head again!) I turned the light off and looked out the window and, sure enough, he was sitting in his car in front of my house! He wanted to come in. I had to keep telling him no. The next night, he showed up at the house again. I felt obligated to be polite and respectful. I couldn’t believe he came over again. I thought I was clear that I didn’t “like” him in that way. I thought he was sorry for what he’d done.

It’s easy to look back now and know exactly what I should have done but back then, in the middle of this all happening, it wasn’t so clear. There was so much confusion in my head about how to process it all. Why was he putting me in this position where I had to keep telling him ‘no’ when I knew that was not the answer he was looking for? He was being so nice and so friendly and so much more personable than he ever had before. Because of who he was in my life, I wouldn’t dare be rude to him, much less get angry or speak my mind bluntly. This was my pastor that I’d always looked up to and saw as being very close to God. The one I trusted to have all the right answers because of his relationship with God, his position as pastor and his knowledge of the Bible. Why was he backing me into a corner with no way out and acting this way toward me? Couldn’t he see how much he was hurting me with his actions and his words? He must have asked me three times that night if he could kiss me and, each time, with all the strength I had, I told him ‘no’. Each time, scared to death that he would get mad at me or end up hating me. Each time, it got harder and harder to tell him ‘no’ because I couldn’t understand why he hadn’t heard me the time before...why was he making me tell him ‘no’ again and again? As weak and soft spoken as my “no’s” were, it was killing me inside to have to ‘stand up’ to him like that. I was left wondering what was wrong with me; something had to be seriously wrong with me because bad things like this kept happening to me.

His phone calls and advances were persistent and continuous. I kept telling him no, but it didn’t matter. He’d push and pressure
until I felt like I had no choice but to give in. He gradually wore down all of my defenses and trapped me into his web of guilt, shame, confusion and silent complacency. My soul went numb, my heart broke to pieces, and mentally and emotionally I disconnected myself from reality so as not to feel anything as I was manipulated into mindless, reluctant obedience. I was always scared he could fire Mel. It absolutely terrified me. Even if he didn't fire him, he had the power to make his life completely miserable. No matter how unwilling I was, he was not taking no for an answer. He would jokingly keep pressuring and pushing me until I would freeze up and give in.

I would tell him. "I can't live like this; it's driving me crazy." There would be a break where he would leave me alone and wouldn't call me for a while. Then he would start calling again and he'd want to meet again and the whole thing would start over. There had been so many times I wanted to tell Mel but he talked me out of it every time, completely convincing me that it would be wrong, and nothing good would come of it, only bad. I was filled with terror, absolute panic-stricken fear.

Depression and anxiety became a huge problem in my life so I started seeing a therapist, thinking maybe I needed to finally deal with my issues from the past. But I never said a word about what was going on with the senior pastor. After seeing this therapist for a year and a half, things were not getting any better. In fact, everything seemed to have gotten worse because I had this dark, suffocating secret sucking the life out of me, and because church had become nothing, when it used to mean everything. I went through a period where I got high to escape from everything because I was so depressed and suicidal.

He had me convinced that if I ever said a word to anyone, I would be responsible for the destruction of everything that would follow. But I was dying on the inside. I'd been slowly fading away from everyone, including my husband and five children. All those years of abuse, I was emotionally and mentally vacant. My children had no nurturing mother concerned for them. My husband saw that I had "checked out" and our marriage suffered because of it. I didn't want to do anything; I just wanted to die. Everything in me was saying I should tell, but I was so scared because he was a very well liked man, very influential, and he had the power to destroy everything. But then I thought, you know, he had already destroyed everything, I trusted him, and he played on that. He used everything he knew about me to get what he wanted. I almost killed myself over this. I didn't want to lose my kids, or for my kids to lose their mother. I'd been feeling like I was losing my mind and I knew it was because I'd been keeping this a secret and I couldn't do it anymore.

October 2008, I told my therapist and I told Mel everything. I then recorded the senior pastor talking to me on the phone for evidence. Mel & I wanted very badly to bring all the other pastors on staff and their wives together to let them know all that was happening and to hear the recordings, but first of all, Mel felt strongly directed by God in prayer that it wouldn't be appropriate to bring such an issue to them when they have no authority to do anything about it. We needed to bring this to the people who have the authority to act in removing the senior pastor from his position, not only in the church as pastor, but also as the 2nd in charge in our state. Secondly, we had no idea who we could trust anymore. The man we trusted the most, and with everything about our lives, turned out to not be at all who we thought he was. How could we know whom we could trust? That was a big reason for using legal means when we brought this to the attention of the leadership in the fellowship.

After 8 weeks of my husband fasting, praying, seeking God, and talking with Christian professionals that were completely unrelated to the church, we decided on the best plan of action. Copies of the evidence, along with a letter from our lawyer went to the heads of the fellowship overall and also locally. The letter from the lawyer stated that this was to be handled correctly, or if they tried to "sweep things under the rug", we were prepared to file a lawsuit against the Fellowship and the church.

Although the ministerial credentials of the senior pastor were taken away from him and he was made to resign from the church, it didn't happen for 10 weeks. During those weeks, the senior pastor lied to everyone, kept the other pastors and the board from hearing the evidence, and had such a controlling grip on them, he had them all believing Mel and I were the ones who were lying. He had me convinced that if I ever said a word to anyone, I would be responsible for the destruction of everything that would have been the case. He had already destroyed everything, I trusted him, and he played on that. He used everything he knew about me to get what he wanted. He almost killed my soul over this. I didn't want to lose my kids, or for my kids to lose their mother. I'd been feeling like I was losing my mind and I knew it was because he'd been keeping this a secret and I couldn't do it anymore.

After 10 weeks had gone by, one board member made the decision, against the pastor, to go to the district office to hear the recordings. After the board and the other pastors got to hear the recordings, that's when they knew it was the senior pastor who was guilty, none of them have ever apologized to me for the lies they believed about me or have even been interested in hearing my side of the story. The fact is most of them have not talked to me at all. I feel abandoned and rejected by their silence toward me, their neglect of me as a victim, a friend, a fellow pastor's wife. It has been more painful to me than the abuse endured by the senior pastor. That church was my home for 26 years, and now I'm left homeless because the leadership chose to ignore me, rather than make things right. I feel like the man left in the ditch to die after having been beaten and robbed. (Luke 10:30)

To make matters worse, although they let the senior pastor resign when he should have been fired, they fired Mel without even talking to him because of the threat we made to sue if things weren't handled properly. His ministerial credentials were also taken away from him for the same reason. We never filed a lawsuit, but all the preachers acted like we committed the unforgivable sin by even threatening it.

Since my coming forward, there have been many many other women who have come forward also. Nonetheless, the former senior pastor continues to deny the truth and to lie to his family and friends. He has since started a new church where he continues to masquerade as a shepherd. I believe he was able to do this because leadership failed to handle things decisively and truthfully before the congregation. So many are still confused as to what really happened. Mel and I have been trying to do whatever we
can to make sure the truth gets told in order for people to be free from his control and for him to not be able to hurt anyone else again.

Had it not been for my therapist and The Hope of Survivors, Mel and I would have been completely lost and alone through all of this. Reading through all the information on The Hope of Survivors website, we couldn't believe how widespread clergy sexual abuse is but, most of all, we had found people who knew what we were going through; we weren't alone. It was such an encouragement to learn and understand how I’d been groomed and manipulated, how this wasn’t an affair, or my fault; I wasn’t just stupid and weak. I believe that, because of the knowledge and understanding we gained about pastoral abuse, it helped to save not only me, but our marriage also. Telling the truth didn't destroy me. My husband and I are closer than ever before. And, although the road will be long and hard, I've been made free and am on the path to healing.

[END OF STORY]

If you are a survivor of pastoral abuse, we would love to hear your story and possibly make it available on this web site for others to read and renew their hope. You can use a pseudonym if you choose and rest assured that all personal information will be kept private and strictly confidential. Please contact us.

Please note: We do not necessarily agree with or endorse all the information contained in the survivor’s stories. We do, however, feel they have some valuable information that could be useful to you in your recovery. It helps to know you’re not alone, that others have shared your pain and have healed, by the grace of God, in their own time and way.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18
Testimonials

By God’s grace and healing power, this site has been used to restore hope and courage to those who have been abused. Below are just a few of the comments we’ve received about how this site and ministry have been helpful to those hurting individuals (in most cases, names have been omitted for privacy reasons.).

“May God bless your ministry. I think this is going on in the church all the time, and someone needs to speak out. You have a ministry second to none.”—Pastor, South Africa

“Thank you for your kind assistance and prayers. I often visit the website for information and encouragement. It is a true blessing. I pray that you continue this work.”—MD

“I hope you still remember me [from] way back [in] 2007! Praise God! Now, I can say that now I’m one of the survivors! Thank you for your ministry. Praise God for your ministry. God has used you to make my broken life whole again! Pray for us as we continue to love God with all our hearts and follow Him always! Hope to be able to support your ministry soon! From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much!”—Survivor, Philippines

“My wife is one of the victims associated with this mess in Pella, Iowa. We truly need help over here. If someone does not commit suicide over this whole ordeal I will be very surprised. On a side note...your website has been very helpful. We read it daily. The articles associated with this website have been very helpful and we have forwarded them on to many people within our community. Can someone please respond to this...I don’t know how much longer I can hold it together. Thank you.”—Survivor, IA

“I am one of the four victims that was manipulated by this sexual predator. This website has been a true answer to prayer and blessing for myself, husband, family and friends. Thank you for your blog entry...God have mercy on us all! I need to process the info you shared—you shall hear from me again. God bless your work!”—Survivor, IA

“Please be encouraged to know, without your help, I fear I would not have made it. Your telephone calls opened my eyes to what had happened with Pastor M. ...Truly, God worked through your ministry to me and I know to so many others. I am so sorry for any hate mail you have received. Look to the Lord for strength and perseverance!”—Survivor, IA

“It has been a long time since we've spoken but you and THOS often run through my mind and are often in my prayers. I'll never stop saying Thank You for doing what you do. Having your hand there always open and extended to me to grab onto whenever I needed to as I pulled myself out of the sludge of the pit I had fallen into with a troubled man in a dangerous position was sometimes the strongest tie I had to truth and healing, though we've never set eyes on each other.”—Survivor, FL

“I am an attorney representing a girl who suffered abuse by her Youth Pastor at the age of 16. We found your site and it has been of great help and comfort to my client. I would like any information you have or could share so that my client(s) can interact with other survivors and get help moving on. The church never apologized to the family, said it had no way of knowing such a thing would occur again, and the congregation and clergy have turned against them. The church did not offer any counseling, support, or legal help with the prosecution. The entire family is broken and suffering. I appreciate all the help you can offer via survivor support. Thank you very much for having this site on the Internet. It has already helped the family greatly, as the church's reaction has stunned them, and they feel lost, at fault, and guilty.”—Attorney, FL

“I just now watched Issues and Answers #148 on THOS website. You are lovely, and I was so deeply touched by everything both you and Steve had to say. Everything from your personal experience, to the empathy you share for others. I'm further touched by how universal the guilt and shame is for those who suffer through these abuse issues; thankful that there is this ministry to reach out and offer this lovely, Christ-centered hope and compassion. I've known about your compassion for some time now, but sometimes is just strikes me in a fresh and powerful way.”—OR

“I love reading the monthly newsletter and keeping abreast of all the growth and lives that are being changed due to The Hope of Survivors.”—MO
"Thank you for your kind and encouraging words. They are apples of gold in settings of silver to me."—FL

"This information will be very useful to me as a pastor and family life educator."—Pastor, TX

"Thank you so much for this wonderful experience. It is nice to know that there are people who don’t just get angry about this particular problem (sexual abuse by pastors), but actually do something about it. I wish the best to The Hope of Survivors."—Olga, Russian Translator, NJ

"You [Arlagene] have been an amazing help and support to us… Thank you for the great work you’re doing. You have been a great blessing to us."—Australia

"Thanks again [Wendy] for all your love and support, and God tells me you ARE in the RIGHT job—you know just what to say when that person needs to hear it!"—Victim, Canada

"My church has been devastated by news of our pastor having an ‘affair’… Your website says that people do recover from this. This website is the only thing that has made sense in the past 3 weeks..."—FL

"I’ve been abused; and have been helped by Shyleene Rosado for about a year. I’m still trying to heal, God has been faithful, and I’m not working this year, due to a depression. I would love to help translating for this ministry that has been used by God to reach me and take me out of the darkest hole ever. I think I would be of help in translating from English to Spanish. It would be my pleasure and my honor."—Maria [Latino Division Testimonial]

"I don’t know what I would have done without your ministry. Through the Internet, you have provided help and healing to me and my family. Thank you!!! ♥"—Victim via THOS on Facebook

"I am so grateful to you [Heather] for "entering into my world" and responding to my email. Thank you. It wasn’t until my husband stumbled upon The Hope of Survivors and we both read everything on the site that I came to see that what happened in this scenario was truly abusive. ...Please know how grateful I am to have someone to dialog with on this. I don’t think any of my friends would understand; in fact, one I confided in called it an ‘emotional affair,’ but it was The Hope of Survivors that confirmed to me it was anything but—it was abuse."—NC

"Words are not enough to express what your ministry has done for me when I was at the lowest point in my life, but I am still going to say thank you. I am also looking forward to being a volunteer with The Hope of Survivors, it is the right thing for me to do."—NJ

**Testimonials about THOS operations:**

"I took some time to look at the documents you sent me earlier today. I must say that I’m impressed that THOS has such internal organization at its core to have thought through so many a delicate issue with such caution and diligence. I have great respect for the intent of each document, without reservation, and would have no problem signing and submitting to any of them."—Prospective Volunteer, OR

"Remarkable appeal letter [Good morning The Hope of Survivors Family, 8/25/10]! One of the best I have ever read! Cheers!"—Herb Douglass, Th.D., CA

**Comments about voting for THOS through Chase Charity Giveaway:**

"The Hope of Survivors has and will continue to do for clergy abuse survivors what MADD did for decreasing deaths due to drunk driving. Vote today and keep our house of worship safe havens for all."—Suzanne Collins-Cyr, ME

"This organization helps many women all over the globe, please vote for them. I can’t thank you enough for what you and THOS do."—Sherry Stockford, MI

**Other Comments:**

"So great to see you guys are going to be in GEORGIA!!! :) I hope all is well w/you and w/the ministry. I still think of you from time to time and am still deeply grateful for your help in time of great need. I’ll never forget staring at my computer screen in almost disbelief of what I was reading as I searched your website...that was when I was still grappling to believe that what I had experienced was truly abuse and NOT my fault. Praise God for His chasing after me and healing my wounded heart (from many things). Thanks again for all you do for the Kingdom in this much avoided issue. Keep pressing on!!"—GA

"Thanks for the support...it makes a difference talking to other victims compared to a mate, family, or friends. I don’t think anyone can understand what we’re experiencing until they’ve walked in our shoes!"—MN [comment made to Heather Brown, Victim Support Services volunteer for The Hope of Survivors]

"I am taking a moment ... to tell you how much I have appreciated your website and the quality of material you have made available. I myself have pastored for over 20 years and see the real need for this information as I have, indeed, everyone has, sadly, seen men fall. There is a great need today for an aggressive training of men to be true men of God by leadership—starting in their theological training. I looked at the compilation you put together from the book Christian Service, chpt. 24 on your website and feel that that is a very good place to start. May God continue to bless and honor your ministry as you honor Him with it."—Dave M.
"I pray for God’s continued blessings for you [Martin] and THOS. You have been God’s blessing to us—the face and heart of our Adventist church. God knew we could not bear this without your ministry.”—FL

"I am, and will always be, grateful to you. If I had not found your website, and if you had not been there for me personally, I would not have known how to put into words what had happened in a way that would have been taken seriously..."—Victim

"Martin, I really thank the Lord for your ministry it is absolutely awesome and God is using it to save our ministry. I actually read out to the whole meeting yesterday the first letter that you replied to me and it spoke volumes to everyone and gave the leadership some clear direction. This is all very new to them and they honestly did not have a clue how to go forward, but your letter explained the process beautifully, whilst at the same time helped them not to fall into sympathizing with the perpetrator.”—UK

"You can’t realize (or maybe you can) how much your writing means to me. To think that somebody took this much time to respond to me, blows me away! I know I need God to be my healer, but I so need someone right now to tell me I’m okay. Your emails do that for me.”—IN

"Samantha, you have given me great wisdom and support throughout this whole ordeal.”—OH

"I do know that you are one busy couple!! But always remember if you are ever so stressed that you are pulling your hair out—if it wasn’t for your support, guidance, encouragement, love, and friendship through my ordeal—I would not be where I am today mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. The appreciation you deserve for the ministry you provide could never be expressed in words.”—IL

"Words cannot express how much it meant to me to see you and be able to feel safe during worship again. I have so often thanked God for His presence through your selfless dedication towards my healing...and so many, many more like me. Thank you so much for your belief; invaluable encouragement and support of this journey which will soon be unfolding through its challenging trial of upholding the TRUTH...”—Western Australia

"Thank you, Steve & Samantha, for all that you do in giving a voice to what is so often a silent crime gone unpunished.”—IL

"Thank you for being a light in darkness for those who have come through this abuse, knowing there is a ministry like this to turn to has truly been a blessing in time of great storm, with time God can turn it all around and heal and raise up the broken.”—SC

"May God bless you and Steve and your ministry. I have never met two people in my whole life that can change my life for the better in one week, thank you so much.”—Australia

"You guys gave us the courage and strength to carry on in the dark and dismal days following disclosure. Today, we thrive in good part to your being the Christ for us, the light when there seemingly was none.”—ME

"This new life is pretty wonderful. Even with all the...medical things going on I am still having the most wonderful life ever. I thank God every day for coming into my life and bringing you and Steve into my life. I believe with my whole heart that He sent you guys to help me not die and learn more about God.”—IL

"Thank you so much for all your help the past few months. When I first emailed you, I had no idea how beneficial it would be. The advice you have given me has always been sound, and your patience, respect and encouragement have been incredibly helpful. At a time when I felt very much alone, it was so important to know you were there. ...I wanted to send you this [donation] as an expression of thanks.”—Canada

"I cannot being to explain the relief I already feel over sharing this with you, someone who understands. I’ve read some of the things on your site, and after reading your own testimony, I knew I had found someone who knew exactly what I was talking about.”—IL

"[The conference contained] a good balance of information, testimony and pointed back to Christ.”—IN

"Thank you for your love and compassion! Please always include the “ministry hour” where couples/individuals ministered to each other—powerful! Thanks for providing the morning and midday ministries that set tone, and gave direction to the afternoon hours. Excellent!”—Gail Coridan, Women’s Ministries, IA-MO Conference

"It was great, thank you so much! I am very grateful for your ministry.”—MO

"After the Q&A session, I feel much better, hopeful and positive among friends.”—OH

"[The conference] encouraged me to hang in there and to keep focused on those who have been abused as I have.”—MO

"Thank you for being vulnerable in sharing such a painful experience in order to help other hurting people. You are to be commended. My prayers will be with your ministry.”—Robert Peck, VP for Admin., IA-MO Conference

"I have followed your website for several years, since 2002 when it had a different look. It helped me through a
time that I thought had signaled the end for me."—Survivor

"I am so thankful to God that your ministry was there for us when we needed it, had it not been for God using you and Steve I don't think the outcome would have been quite too good. Sometimes all it takes is knowing you are not alone. May God continue to bless your ministry and give you strength in all you do for Him."—SC

"I will always be thankful for the day God brought you into my life. You give that special care that I have such a hard time finding. I appreciate your efforts."—WI

"[My friend] just sent me The Hope of Survivors website and it is amazing already and I've only read a couple of pages! I had no idea anything like that existed."—IN

"Sometimes the ugliness of that time hits me and I am momentarily sad, but I know so many have been through so much worse and I know your ministry is a rock to steady them as it was for me after such a confusing experience."—MO

"I really appreciate you and your husband taking time out of your busy lives to be such a wonderful support to us. You have helped me more than you will ever know with your emails and story from the media clips."—IL

"...we are very grateful for THOS, because your ministry serves a very large purpose and one that many victims will benefit from."—MO

"I have said it before and I will say it again. One thing I admire most about people is an ability to speak the truth in love, even when it hurts. ...You hit a homerun with the message I needed to hear. ...I want God to clean house and He has used you, to open up those areas in my life. I can't thank you enough for all that you have exposed to me. Not just in what is happening in my wife's life, but mine as well. You really have been one of the main tools that God has used in my life for change."—OH

"Getting help has been the best thing I have ever done. It was a risk for me to talk to you, ...but I suppose I took it in faith, and so far it's been amazing how beneficial it's been. I find it very helpful to hear your perspectives, especially the reassurance that God can help me heal from this."—US

"I think what you, Steve and God are doing is wonderful and so helpful to people like me. I want to support your ministry however I can!!”—IL

"I would also ask that anyone who is able visit http://www.thehopeofsurvivors.com/ for information on clergy sex abuse and hopefully to make a contribution to this ministry. That is the organization that was instrumental in helping my daughter begin this journey of healing."—Victim’s Father, on a blog posting

"I will be praying that the funds come in. THOS has been for me, and is for so many, a lifeline of support during a very dark time. You offer hope...at a time when all feels hopeless. God knows how you reach the hurting, and we'll just pray that He continues to provide for this ministry..."—WA

"I have learned so much from you. Thank you for all of the knowledge that you have so willingly shared with me. You are a true Godsend."—WI

"I wanted to thank you for being there for my family when it was really hard and also for believing in me, it meant a lot, it's only people like you and my mother that kept me going without doing something really stupid that might have taken my life."—Child Victim

"Hello. I was browsing Facebook to see if there was a Hope of Survivors group on here, or anything like that. The Ministry that you are a part of has helped me so much. I believe my mother spoke with you (via e mail) and you sent us some information a few months ago. I just wanted to thank you. I will be emailing you shortly. Thank you again. God Bless you!"—PA

"Thank you so much for your replies, and for sharing your story with me, and for reassuring me that I'm not crazy and that things like this do happen, and that my perceptions could very well have been accurate. I have read the brochures, and they've been extremely helpful. In fact I don't know what I would have done if you weren't here for me and if those materials weren't available. I would have been completely alone, and as I'm prone to depression, I just don't know what would have happened. Honestly I think some women in this position might grow so despondent they would think of hurting themselves. Thank you so much for the work you do in helping people like me, in helping to educate others about clergy abuse. God always finds a way to take something bad and make something good come from it, and this is what He has done through you. Thank you again for everything, I don't know what I would have done without you."—OH

"First of all, I wish to thank you for the supportive Bible verses—especially for Ps. 37, which I have already read several times. What a blessing you are to those who have been terribly afflicted as I have. Your advice is uplifting and strengthening, and I can't thank you enough. I have faith, that I am being sheltered by Him."—NY

"...just reading your web site and typing up my story has already resulted in a miracle in my heart. I am grateful to have found your web site."—WA
"I enjoyed reading your story as I related to almost every feeling. I am thankful that God put someone like you in my path. I do not think that it was just coincidence. I just want help getting the garbage out from inside my soul. I want to be able to one day have a normal relationship and family. I’ve done a lot of cleaning up—but there is so much more to go."—CA

"I’m sorry to hear that your ministry is so busy, because I know that means there are many people in pain, but I am so grateful for the work you do. I don’t know what I would have done without you, and I’m just glad you are willing to continue the ministry. It’s so needed, as most churches seem to be incapable of providing victims with any form of appropriate support."—AZ

"I just finished reading Steve’s words in HopeSpeak, [January 2008] and I wanted to share with you my overwhelming feelings when I read the last line, "God has used our experience to save more than just ‘one’." I felt an upheaval in my heart and was so touched by the words that I felt I was about to break down and cry uncontrollably. Tears came to my eyes and I was overpowered by the feeling to hold onto you both and have a good cry over what happened to you two. What a way to turn a bad situation into what your ministry is today! … Steve’s words touched me in a way I’ve never been touched before. You two have such a special ministry and I’m thrilled to read how far it has come since C. discovered your web site. That your ministry has expanded worldwide is amazing, and you both were such an integral part of his healing. My wishes for you this new year are that God sees fit to offer your ministry more open doors and for good health. I’m so happy to have met you both... You both hold a special place in my heart."—MA

"Today, when I came back from school, I found your newsletter and believe me that I didn’t eat and I didn’t even hold a special place in my heart."—MA

"I have great admiration and appreciation for the ministry the two of you have undertaken, especially knowing a bit about the background that led to the very positive work you are doing to help so many hurting people around the world. You will be in our prayers. Pray for us, as we resume pastoral ministry in the Peoria-Sun City Adventist Church in northwest Phoenix. Though no longer serving on your board, you retain our love, respect, and high esteem as friends. Call on us if we can assist in any practical way."—Ralph Robertson, (former) Ministerial Director, Northern California Conference

"First off, I would love to thank you for taking the time out of your busy day for me... you don’t even know me, yet you take the time out to read my story and reply even. You assume I am telling the truth and don’t assume I am making this up. I have wanted to tell someone for the longest, but feared no one would believe me. ...You have helped me more than you will ever know..."—NY

"The time spent with you and your husband was very beneficial for the both of us. We had a wonderful time visiting. Being able to tell our story to a couple who was understanding and supportive was an amazing outlet for me. You both were so kind and compassionate to the both of us and it was so uplifting to be able to know that I (we) am not alone in this and that others have dealt with situations like mine successfully. I’ve read through the pamphlets and they are all SO good. I am getting ready to place an order so I can share them. ...Thank you so much for listening to God’s direction in your life and helping people like me. I’ll say it again—you saved my life."—IL

"Wonderful job! The newsletter [October 2007] was the best ever! You are great. Hope it gets out the need for The Hope of Survivors to continue and how much it is needed. Great paper."—WA

"The ministry of THOS is so very important to helping those little sheep that Satan has scattered and it breaks my heart to know that many, many churches do not understand what pastoral abuse is and what it isn’t. I see very well—more than ever—a need for all the seminars and conferences you do."—WV

"The Hope of Survivors web site was literally a ‘God-send’ to me and to my husband. Both of us were betrayed by our ‘pastor-friend’ and found ourselves truly in the wilderness. You are to be commended for the depth and breadth of the ministry you offer. For victim/survivors, there really is no such thing as a local support group you can turn to in order to help minimize the shock and dismay of this particular trauma/abuse. Your web site became my/support group, especially for my husband in hearing Steve’s story and realizing how all-too-common spouses are part of such a web. Often in the evenings, I would find great solace in reading the sad-but-very-similar stories of abuse and feel like I was not alone. Over time, your resources have helped our church understand the complexity of this issue. Your calm demeanor and sense of being ‘ever-present’ were affirming and healing to us. And, naming that this is ‘never an affair’ is extremely helpful, especially early on! Our lives have been ‘saved’ by God’s grace working through you to reach out to others! Thank you for being an authentic and reliable witness to the Gospel."—B., Maine

"I am writing to you to let you know how you have helped my wife and myself get through the trauma of CSA. Early on, your web site and your emails kept us going when all was in turmoil. You helped us to understand what it was that we were going through when we did not understand ourselves. For me, as the husband, just having another husband who had gone through this was a blessing. Steve understood what I was going through and
guided me through the turmoil of CSA. Your web site and educational materials were answers to our prayers in helping not only myself and my wife understand CSA, but also letting us help others in our church family to understand what was happening. Without you there would be no hope for survivors. Thanks for being there.—P., Maine

“I love your words. They are like a soothing oil comforting my soul in this spiritually parched desert in which I find myself.”—A Survivor

“Thank you for sharing with me and being honest. Yes, the more time goes on and the more I learn and the more I speak with you…well, the more I see the truth of all of this. Truly, I don’t think you realize how needed you are and your ministry and how much you are a blessing to me…I can’t even imagine how many people you must have helped.”—A Survivor

“I want you guys to know that the work you do is invaluable. Although I am still immersed in the pain and regret of my actions, I can see how many others have experienced what I am going through and that makes me glad to know that I will be healed and whole one day.”—A Survivor

“Thanks for checking up on me. I don’t know what I’d do without your support. It’s amazing to me what you’re doing. The Church is rich in tradition and devotional aesthetics, and there’s nothing wrong with that. But, what you’re doing is more Christian than anything I’ve seen the Church do for a long time.”—A Survivor

“I am so sorry it’s taken me so long to thank you for your heartfelt and beautiful email. It was just so refreshing to hear from someone who sees the truth, and has had experience in this area...Everyone seems so blind—I want to scream. That is why I can’t tell you how wonderful it was to hear your words of encouragement and wise advice....I have copied your email to the members in my family who are standing on the side of God’s Word in this situation. Your words have been a blessing to us all. Thank you so much for taking time out of your busy schedule to reply to me. I have no way to fully express how much it meant to hear a voice of reason, filled with Godly wisdom. You are a good person. Finally, I want to thank you so very much for taking such a painful experience in your own life, and using it to create a ministry to help others see a bit of light in a very dark place. God bless you and your ministry.”—A Survivor

“Words cannot express how thankful, to God, I am to have you to turn to with all of this.”—A Survivor

“Thank you for your messages of today and yesterday…they have been inspiring and a blessing. I need all the help I can get right now...”—A Survivor

“I really want to thank you for your web site…I wish I had looked for it a long time ago. Your site really hit the nail on the head concerning the fact that an affair happens between equals, NOT between a clergyman and a parishioner, no matter what.... Until I found your site, I felt so very alone in this.... What you’re doing with your web site is truly God’s work. I know that that is what Jesus had in mind for His Church.”—A Survivor

“I look at your web site daily for a bit of encouragement and a reminder that what happened was wrong, regardless of the response of the church authorities. Without your web site and kind words, I’d be lost.”—A Survivor

“I’d love to be a part of your ministry in any way, shape or form. You’ve done so much to save my life, my marriage, my relationship with God... Prior to finding you I had AdvocateWeb, and they do still help with their online messages of hope, but your ministry is *personal* and one-on-one, something a new victim of CSA can’t get enough of as they’re struggling with the shock and wondering if they can even live another day in their newly shattered world.”—A Survivor

“I will never forget my first conversation with you Samantha...you brought me hope.”—A Survivor

“First, I want to thank you for all the information on the site! Thank you for this ministry! You were a blessing to me! I hope more people find you!!!!”—A Survivor

“I wish to thank you very much for your web site on abuse. I am not a Christian; until recently, I had lost all faith in God, but your site really gives me hope. Once again, thank you for the information on your site, as I said, it truly does give me hope.””—A Survivor

“Thank you for providing this help to the victims. I am the full-time pastor of the Cohutta Georgia Seventh-day Adventist Church and Senior Chaplain for the Dalton Georgia Police Department. I commend you for your work and believe that we must do even more to assure that children and adults are safe from predators whether they be pastors or laypersons. We have hidden our heads in the sand way too long.”—Elder Jim Cox, Pastor & Certified Master Law Enforcement Chaplain

“In addition to giving thanks to you for your help and support, I have to always give thanks to my friend. She was the one who got on the Internet and found your web site. If not for her, the guilt I was feeling would have overwhelmed me and led me to suicide. I did not realize anything about clergy abuse or that it was not my fault. Your web site changed everything. I’ll never forget my friend calling and saying to check out the web site because she said when she read it she got chills and thought, “This is it. This is what happened to you.” She happens to have been a good friend of the pastor and his wife, too, so it was hard for her, but she reached out to help me. So
many people were led by God to help me and most of all my fiancée, in his love, was able to stick with me and all the things he would say to me would mirror what you would say, and he hadn't even read your information at the beginning, so it was coming from his heart. God is great and I give him thanks for what you and Steve are doing. I am so blessed!”—Midwest Survivor

“Great email. You read my words carefully and responded with steadfast support. It is refreshing to be heard so clearly.”—L., Illinois

“I am just so very happy to have found you right now. I have to say your responses feel like balm to my soul because I can tell you listen to everything I say and that you understand what I am sharing. I really appreciate the love you have already shown to us. I am very glad that I went to your web site and admire the fact that you have done this and want to make your pain help other people.”—D., Ohio

“Thanks again for your prayers & concern. It actually feels comforting to know someone out there understands about the effects of such pastoral abuse & to have someone show concern! Thank You! It means a lot!”—Survivor, SE U.S.

“I can’t tell you how much it means to me to know that you’re there. I pray for a peaceful existence one day, as you seem to have, and to be at peace with myself with God’s help. I pray for that so much.”—K., Virginia

“You are very sweet and kind. I appreciate your encouragement.”—A., Florida

“I thank God that you’re my messenger. You have no idea how much peace I have about my decision, and how much you have blessed me. You have helped me to see what the Lord’s will was from the beginning, I knew deep in my heart this is what He wanted me to do from the start, but I was letting worldly issues guide me, not the Holy Spirit that lives in me. Thanks so much for being here for me...I know that I’m in for a long haul and a rough road ahead and it is a comfort to know that you will be there for me through it all.”—J., New Mexico

“I am so thankful God put you in my life. You have been a great blessing to me. I can talk to you like you were my sister. I do feel very comfortable sharing my thoughts and feelings with you. I really feel you listen to what I am saying and when I tell you I am in pain you don’t try to brush me off by saying just get over it. I am thankful that when I sent my story to you, you didn’t just delete it. I am also very thankful for when I have talked to you by phone you always end our phone call with a prayer. That has meant a great deal to me. Thank you.”—M., Georgia

“The Hope of Survivors is a ministry that provides good information about CSA, with an added personal touch. Samantha, who corresponds with the women who have been abused, has e-mailed me, sent me books and brochures, and even a birthday card! She has given me hope during the darkest time I have ever known, as only a fellow CSA survivor can. She has also provided me with the names of two other CSA survivors; women I have become close friends with thru e-mails and phone conversations. Her brochures about CSA are the best I’ve seen; a crime that is often shrouded in confusion is brought to light with gentle truth and compassionate mercy.”—T., Ohio

“I found The Hope of Survivors via the International Candlelight Vigil website in October of 2003. Since visiting The Hope of Survivors’ web site initially, I have come to know Samantha Nelson and her and her husband’s story, and I also have experienced the glory of hope through The Hope of Survivors’ mission.

I’m an adult female victim of clergy sexual abuse. It is a very, very painful recovery but The Hope of Survivors has supported me emotionally and in other ways and I know I’m not alone. I can truly say that the ministry of The Hope of Survivors has allowed me to grow spiritually, realizing that the pain and anguish I have experienced at the hands of my former minister was not the will of God, and that God is there to help me heal.

I’m very thankful for their ministry as it offers true hope for healing from the devastating effects of clergy sexual abuse. My hope is that The Hope of Survivors’ ministry continues to grow, educating and offering hope to women, congregations of all denominations, clergy and church officials.”—K., Virginia

“I just thought of something the other day and thought I’d mention it. I have noticed such an incredible release in my life from the past—I remember thinking, okay—it takes about 4 years or so and then you’re completely healed. (That’s still a long time!) And a lot of life has been lost or strained due to a bad choice by the perp. But I’ve really felt different the past couple months, and I think this is key: you told me to get rid of everything in my house that I could—things he gave me, memorabilia... I actually had a photo album devoted entirely to church people and events, and it was under my bed. Well, I got rid of that, the ring he gave me, all the papers for the attorney—I put it out of the house. What a difference it made—and I didn’t even consciously think of it—I just put it together the other day—had an “aha” moment—“so THAT’s why I’ve been feeling so much better!” So keep telling women that, who come to you for help—get rid of everything—every reminder of him... every gift he gave. There’s really something to that.”—T., Ohio

“Thank you so much for your web site. You have no idea what a great help it was for me. It really explains everything so well. I was in an abusive relationship with my pastor for a year and a half. I am so thankful you wrote about the confusion because I felt very confused throughout, because he kept saying this was from God...and I was to be become his next wife, the one God ordained for him. He used scripture continually through this whole ordeal. Scripture is hard for me to read now. Thank God for your ministry. What a blessing to others! You see, I don’t think women see this as abuse, they don’t understand. But thanks to you and your ministry and web site, it is...
so true, and everything makes sense now."—A Survivor

As you can see, God is using this ministry to impact lives in a positive way. Please continue to pray for this ministry and those we serve!

If you are a survivor of pastoral abuse, we would love to hear your story and possibly make it available on this web site for others to read and renew their hope. You can use a pseudonym if you choose and rest assured that all personal information will be kept private and strictly confidential. Please contact us.

Please note: We do not necessarily agree with or endorse all the information contained in the survivor’s stories. We do, however, feel they have some valuable information that could be useful to you in your recovery. It helps to know you’re not alone, that others have shared your pain and have healed, by the grace of God, in their own time and way.

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart... — Psalms 34:18